

ANGLICA

An International Journal of English Studies

Special Issue: The Great War

27/3 2018

EDITOR

Grażyna Bystydzieńska [g.bystydzienska@uw.edu.pl]

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Martin Löschnigg [martin.loeschnigg@uni-graz.at]

Jerzy Nykiel [jerzy.nykiel@uib.no]

Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż [m.a.sokolowska-paryz@uw.edu.pl]

Anna Wojtyś [a.wojtys@uw.edu.pl]

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Magdalena Kizeweter [m.kizeweter@uw.edu.pl]

Katarzyna Kociołek [kkociolek@uw.edu.pl]

Przemysław Uściński [przemek.u@hotmail.com]

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITOR

Barry Keane [bkeane@uw.edu.pl]

ADVISORY BOARD

Michael Bilynsky, University of Lviv

Andrzej Bogusławski, University of Warsaw

Mirosława Buchholtz, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

Edwin Duncan, Towson University

Jacek Fabiszak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Jacek Fisiak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Elżbieta Foeller-Pituch, Northwestern University, Evanston-Chicago

Piotr Gąsiorowski, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Keith Hanley, Lancaster University

Andrea Herrera, University of Colorado

Christopher Knight, University of Montana

Marcin Krygier, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney, University of Łódź

Brian Lowrey, Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens

Zbigniew Mazur, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin

Rafał Molencki, University of Silesia, Sosnowiec

John G. Newman, University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Michał Jan Rozbicki, St. Louis University

Jerzy Rubach, University of Iowa

Piotr Ruskiewicz, Pedagogical University, Cracow

Hans Sauer, University of Munich

Krystyna Stamirowska, Jagiellonian University, Cracow

Merja Stenroos, University of Stavanger

Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester

Peter de Voogd, University of Utrecht

Anna Walczuk, Jagiellonian University, Cracow

Jean Ward, University of Gdańsk

Jerzy Wełna, University of Warsaw

GUEST REVIEWERS

Stephen Badsey, University of Wolverhampton

Jason Crouthamel, Grand Valley State University, Allendale

Dagmara Drewniak, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

Brigitte Glaser, University of Göttingen

Sherrill Grace, University of British Columbia

Rob Johnson, Pembroke College, Oxford

Bożena Kucala, Jagiellonian University, Cracow

Peter Leese, University of Copenhagen

David Malcolm, University of Gdańsk

Marek Paryż, University of Warsaw

Jane Potter, Oxford Brookes University

Daniel Reynaud, Avondale College of Higher Education

Ralf Schneider, Bielefeld University

Christina Spittel, University of New South Wales, Canberra

Jonathan Vance, Western University, London, Ontario



UNIVERSITY
OF WARSAW

Anna Branach-Kallas

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5754-1906>

Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń

World Travellers: Colonial Loyalties, Border Crossing and Cosmopolitanism in Recent Postcolonial First World War Novels

Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of the representation of travelling men and women in *The Sojourn* (2003) by Canadian writer Alan Cumyn, *The Daughters of Mars* (2012) by Australian novelist Thomas Kenneally and *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel* (2014) by North American indigenous author Gerald Vizenor. These three novels explore the cliché of colonial loyalties, illustrating the diverse motivations that led individuals from North America and Australia to volunteer for the war. Cumyn, Kenneally and Vizenor undermine the stereotypical location of the colonial traveller in an uncultured space; in their fiction the war provides a pretext to expose imperial ideologies, to redefine collective identities, as well as to rethink the relationship between the local and the cosmopolitan. As a result, the First World War is reconfigured in terms of border crossing, contact and/or transcultural exchange, which result in radical shifts in consciousness, a critique of imperialism, as well as aspirations for cultural/political autonomy.

The Great War was the first conflict in which peoples from all over the globe fought and worked together, “rarely in equality other than equality of suffering” (Olusoga 15). The British promoted an image of the war as a common imperial effort, emphasising at the same time that it was a privilege for colonial men to fight for the same goal with British soldiers. While many white men in the colonies and dominions eagerly volunteered for service, motivated by the desire to defend European culture, coloured men saw the war as an opportunity to prove themselves alongside white troops or were simply coerced to fight in the imperial armies. Notwithstanding their true motivation, the war involved an unprecedented scale of international movements, with nearly 70 million men in uniform during the conflict (Winter 46). 1.3 million were recruited in the dominions – Canada, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Later in the war, the United States contributed approximately two million men, including ten thousand Native Americans. In total, over four million non-white men served in the European

and American armies during the 1914–1918 conflict (Das 4). The intense travelling of men of various nations, ethnicities and races all over the globe resulted in unexpected, deeply transformative cross-cultural encounters. For non-European soldiers, the war was an opportunity to discover the culture of the metropolis and to revise their ideals about the colonial centre. Paradoxically, although fought in defence of European empires, the war was also a powerful catalyst of nationalist, anti-colonial sentiments.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the representation of travelling men and women in recent American, Canadian and Australian First World War fiction. I use an imagological approach to demonstrate how, inspired by historical sources, three contemporary writers explore the cliché of colonial loyalties and illustrate the diverse motivations that led individuals from North America and Australia to volunteer for the war. Interestingly, *The Sojourn* (2003) by Canadian writer Alan Cumyn, *The Daughters of Mars* (2012) by Australian novelist Thomas Kenneally and *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel* (2014) by North American indigenous author Gerald Vizenor all undermine the stereotypical location of the colonial traveller in a colonized, uncultured space. The novels under consideration question the stereotype of the First World War colonial as a simpleton, eager to give his life as a blood tax to the metropole. Consequently, in this fiction the war provides a pretext to expose imperial ideologies, to redefine collective identities, and to reconfigure the relationships between travellers and “travelees,” between the local and the global, and between the national and the cosmopolitan.

Rooted in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which defined cosmopolitanism in terms of travels and universalism, at the turn of the twenty first century the term acquired several new meanings. As Rebecca L. Walkowitz contends, our contemporary understanding of cosmopolitanism refers to three different intellectual traditions: a tradition of *detachment* from the polis, or the local, in favour of a transnational identity; a philosophy of shifting *attachments* to several communities, beyond one nation; a more popular definition based on consumerism and urban mobility (9). Amanda Anderson’s definition of cosmopolitanism as “a term that can describe various aesthetics, ethics, and intellectual programs” (92) has also proved illuminating for the analysis that follows.

1. Canadian Colonizers: *The Sojourn* by Alan Cumyn

The protagonist of *The Sojourn* by Alan Cumyn, Ramsay Crome, is a Canadian artist, the son of an English immigrant to Canada and a South American mother. At the outbreak of the war, he believes in war propaganda and wants to defend European civilization and the Mother Country against the hordes of barbaric Huns. Fighting to survive at the front, however, he soon loses his illusions about “this blasted, necessary war” (Cumyn 36). The first part of the novel, as noted by Neta

Gordon (94–95), reproduces the features of the “paradigmatic British war novel,” conceptualising front-life in terms of traumatic disenchantment, “an education in disgust” (Trotter 40), or dramatic conflict with irresponsible officers (Fussell 82–86). However, central in *The Sojourn* is the second part, depicting Ramsay’s ten-day leave in London, during which he meets his English family and falls in love with his eldest cousin Margaret. Ramsay’s stay in the refined capital of the Empire is constantly disrupted by flashbacks to the sombre realities of the front-line. Cumyn explores in-depth the contrast between the experience of traumatized soldiers and the comfortable existence of civilians, whose ideas about front life are naïve and superficial. They complain about the Zeppelins, inflation and coal rationing, a perspective which Ramsay finds ridiculous and unfair. The sense of estrangement the soldier protagonist experiences at the home front, according to Paul Fussell (86), is characteristic of the Great War literary imagination.

More important in the novel, however, is the tension caused by the encounter between the Old and the New Worlds.¹ Such family reunions with relatives they had never met were common among the soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, many of whom travelled to the land of their ancestors for the first time in their lives during the war (Vance 2012, 79). Although Ramsay, like many of the Canadian-born volunteers, “was raised and educated in an environment that valued the British connection,” he comes to Britain as a tourist and his leave in London is an entirely new experience (Vance 2012, 79). Suffering from a mild form of culture shock, Ramsay is particularly sensitive to the British class structure, which forced his father, as a younger son unentitled to inheritance, to emigrate to Canada. Raised in an eclectic, multicultural environment, he imagines the English Cromes as “half-grown mutants,” weakened by generations of inbreeding (Cumyn 161). Unexpectedly, his female cousins prove charming and his upper-class English family most kind. His appearance causes epistemological, emotional and psychological disarray among his relatives. At the same time, the male protagonist also experiences conflicting emotions, when he is abruptly displaced from the war zone into the world of civilians; from a universe of dying men into the world of attractive women; from Canada into a simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar, deeply stratified, Old World culture. Consequently, Ramsay’s trip to London involves several – literal and metaphorical – border crossings.

In Cumyn’s novel, loyalty to the Empire operates in conjunction with such notions as class, ethnicity and “race.” For Ramsay’s uncle Manfred, it is a shock to discover that his nephew has volunteered as a private, and not as a junior officer. He is unable to understand the young man’s doubts about his ability to take a leadership role, to which, in the Englishman’s opinion, people of his class are predisposed. Consequently, the Cromes assume that Canada is “a more classless sort of place,” and the Canadian army more egalitarian than the British one (Cumyn 106). However, their conviction that the English are a superior nation is made clear when Manfred comments on the Easter Rising in Ireland which,

according to him, results from “a profound cowardice in much of Irish blood” (Cumyn 107). Englishness is defined in the novel as dominance over inferiors at home (the working class), close to home (the Irish) and far from home (the colonials). What is more, admiring the political cartoons of the Dutch painter, Louis Raemaeker, at a London gallery, Ramsay comes to the conclusion that his portrait of crucified Europe tied to a wheel is reminiscent of the particularly cruel Field Punishment Number One, which was practised by the British army, not the German one. Interestingly, the oppressive, “uncivilized” character, attributed in the drawings to the Germans, is thus disturbingly conflated in the soldier’s imagination with British military culture. However, it is important to note that Ramsay himself shares some of the dominant views about the inferiority of the German “race” (Cumyn 122). In this way, Cumyn illustrates the “intra-European” racism which, together with skin colour, functioned as the source of “racial” classifications among the multi-ethnic and multi-racial troops of the First World War (see Das 11–12).

The Sojourn also highlights British misconceptions about Canada in general and Canadian soldiers in particular. The figure of Ramsay is contrasted in the novel with that of Henry Boulton, Margaret’s fiancé, a delicate middle-class English young man who works at the Ministry of Munitions. In Margaret’s view, Henry is a vulnerable and talented individual, whose gifts would be wasted at the front; she seems strangely unaware of Ramsay’s artistic talent, perceiving him as a dangerously attractive, “natural” warrior:

“But you’ve lived in the wilds of Canada,” Margaret says. “You haven’t grown up breathing the filth of London air. You’re strong and fit and you probably already knew how to shoot a rifle before you joined up. Poor Mr. Boulton has been of precarious health since he was a youth. And besides, he has been educated [...]” She stops herself. “Not that you haven’t been educated,” she says. “Of course you have schools in Canada.” (160)

In this passage, Cumyn critiques the stereotypical contrast between England as the centre of culture and intellectual activity and Canada as nature and bodily endurance. Raised at the margins of the Empire, Canadians cannot aspire to share the intellectual sophistication of Englishmen; at the same time, due to the difference in environment, the men from the colonial centre are naturally weaker than their Canadian counterparts. Cumyn also relies here on the image of Canadians, popularised by war propaganda, as a nation of healthy, strong individuals, accustomed to the daily struggle with nature in a demanding climate (Keshen 4). In reality, most Canadian volunteers were industrial workers and clerks who lived in cities (Vance 1997, 161).

Unable to see beyond colonial stereotypes and embarrassed by her erotic desire for him, Margaret feels uneasy about her cousin’s manly endurance, fierce independence and bodily appetites. When she encounters Ramsey inebriated, the female protagonist classifies him as a colonial “savage” and admonishes him about

his uncivilized comportment (Cumyn 237). The young woman's disapproval of her cousin echoes the British perception of Canadians during the First World War: they might be gallant warriors "toughened by the frontier, but they had become uncivilized, uncouth" and needed to be re-civilized by the British (Vance 2012, 57). Ironically, Ramsay is a particularly mature and insightful young man, who, in spite of his traumatic experience, is willing to go back to the front, because he cannot abandon his comrades-in-arms, a conception of duty his English relatives are unable to grasp. Cumyn thus undermines several colonial stereotypes, depicting the Canadian protagonist as a disillusioned individual, misunderstood by his English family, yet also playing havoc with their well-ordered lives.²

From the point of view of the English Cromes, Canada's imperial allegiance to Mother Britain is unproblematic – they consider participation in the war a privilege for the inhabitants of the dominions (Cumyn 197). Manfred and his wife cannot understand Ramsay's parents' reactions, his mother's fury and his father's cold restraint about the war, for, in their view, their Canadian relatives should be proud that their sons are willing to fight for England and the Empire. In the English Cromes' view, Ramsay's arrival only confirms that "Young men from around the Empire have answered the call" (Cumyn 160). In reality, the Canadians' motivations were much more complex: while the war "fostered feelings of imperial connectedness," it also "enhanced Canadian nationalism" (Vance 2012, 99). Close relations with the British during the war, as well as the achievements of the Canadian Corps, made Canadians more aware of their distinctiveness and encouraged them to envision a new, invigorated Empire, in which Canada would play a central role (Vance 2012, 99; 110). Their belief in the British liberal ideals was quite separate from their critique of Englishness, which Ramsay shares in *The Sojourn*. Cumyn's male protagonist is clearly conscious of the difference between Tommies and Canucks. Moreover, the groups of Canadian soldiers that Ramsay and his English relatives encounter constantly in London suggest that Canadianness is not an insignificant, peripheral identity, subordinated to a dominant Englishness. As Vance contends, the transfer of over 600 thousand Canadians to Britain during the war represented a sort of reverse colonialism, a form of Canadianization (2012, 4).³ It is an interesting notion in the context of *The Sojourn*, in which the multiple border crossings – territorial, cultural and psychological – might be perhaps conceptualised as metaphorical creolization (see Brah 209–210), decentering and re-inscribing received notions of Englishness/Britishness and situating Britishness as "a Canadian hybrid" (Vance 2012, 4).

2. Imperial Travellers: *The Daughters of Mars* by Thomas Keneally

In *The Daughters of Mars*, Thomas Keneally explores the story of two Australian sisters, Naomi and Sally Durance, born on a dairy farm in New South Wales,

who volunteer as military nurses in 1915. The novel celebrates their courage and endurance, depicting several traumatic incidents, based on historical documentation and Australian nurses' memoirs, such as medical assistance during the Gallipoli campaign, the sinking of a hospital ship, as well as the sisters' heroic work on the island of Lemnos and on the Western front.⁴ It is not so much loyalty to the Empire that pushes the Durance sisters to enlist in the Australian Army Nursing Service as the prospect of freedom and adventure, and, particularly in Sally's case, escape from the limited destiny of an unmarried daughter on an isolated Australian farm. In this sense, for both the protagonists, the war "would alter earthly geography. It altered the geography of duty and it enhanced all escape routes" (Keneally 12). *The Daughters of Mars* can be approached as a fictional travel book: while documenting the itinerary of Australian nurses during the First World War, from Australia through Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Egypt, the Dardanelles and Greece to France and back, the novel also explores the theme of horizon-expanding travel and its impact on the traveller's identity. It is worth emphasising that the tropes of tourism and adventure are characteristic of Australian Great War fiction, marking the Australian war experience as both unique and worthwhile (Rhoden 276).

Before Gallipoli, the war is indeed an adventure for the female protagonists: "We're on a wonderful journey and we see marvelous things" (Keneally 48). Sailing on board *The Archimedes* they acquire much geographical and mythological knowledge about the locations they pass. The ocean crossing is also a delightful time of entertainment, games and dances.⁵ When they cross the equator, a masquerade is organized, for which the nurses prepare their own costumes. During the "initiation into equator hopping," men and women are splashed with water and gracefully submit to other rituals (Keneally 31). Sally, who, because of her more serious disposition and her mother's recent death, prefers not to participate in these "geographical hijinks," reflects on the change in their lives:

most medical officers and orderlies and nurses had been born in Australia and had thought – as Sally had – that the train between Melbourne and Sydney or the coastal steamer from Brisbane might be the greatest journey the world would ever offer them. Yet now here was *the* equator – the burning and unconsumed filament that divided the world of southern innocence from the world of northern gravity of intent, and the hemisphere of colonists from the hemisphere of the owners. (Keneally 31)

Such comments, subtly emphasising the unequal global distribution of wealth and power are, however, rare in the novel. By depicting the two sisters sightseeing in British imperial locations and recording their impression in letters sent back home from Asia and Africa, Keneally's fictional travel book does not question the imperial order or European presence in the colonies. The Australian writer applies here what Mary Louise Pratt refers to in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* as the strategy of *anti-conquest*, whereby "bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert [imperial]

hegemony” (3). In contrast to the rhetoric of conquest, which exposes the politics and praxis of invasion, anti-conquest stages a seeing (wo)man, “whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess” (Pratt 9). In Colombo, escorted by middle-aged British gentlemen, with whom they discuss the changing ownership of the colony, the Durance sisters admire local temples and Buddhas, as well as, though they never approach them, the beautiful inhabitants of the island. The protection of British officials reveals a hidden anxiety about the presence of white women and the fantasy of the colonies as sites of sexual impropriety and excess (Fell 158). The peaceful Port Said contrasts with the crowded, tumultuous Cairo, where for the first time the nurses tend some wounded soldiers and the Syphilis-stricken casualties of the city’s entertainment district, the Wazzir bazaar.⁶ The sisters watch the local population from a safe distance, exchanging impressions about their exotic customs, habits, indolence and appalling poverty. Anti-conquest “construes seeing as inherently passive and curiosity as innocent” (Pratt 65), while in reality it reaffirms domination. Creating a semblance of self-effacement, these female travellers in fact belong to a world where their racial privilege is taken for granted. The Durance sisters never really wonder about the war’s impact on the local population of the British colonies. As a result, the indigenous habitants are constructed as “bodyscapes [...] abstracted away from the history that is being made” (Pratt 63), a history in which they were exploited as cannon fodder and cheap labour, and which deeply affected civilian populations in the most remote parts of the British Empire.

In *The Daughters of Mars*, rather than a “contact zone” between the white travellers and coloured locals, a social space “where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 7), Cairo becomes a meeting place for Australian men and women, liberated from the moral constraints of home. In Egypt, the sisters develop friendly relationships with young Australian officers, with whom they dine at the luxurious Shepherd Hotel and admire the pyramids and the Sphinx by starlight. Some of these liaisons turn into romances; like the real-life Australian nurses, the Durance sisters and their friends gradually lose their provincial timidity. As Peter Rees reports, “mixing duty with romance in this exotic yet dangerous environment became a focus for many of the nurses” (16). Yet, the nurses watch each other, safeguarding the boundaries of sexual propriety, because for white people in the colonies respectability “was a defense against the colonized and a way of more clearly defining themselves” (Stoler 71). In comparison with this impromptu social life, camel/donkey/horse rides, garden strolls, teas and parties, “to which they were so used now and so worldly at” (Keneally 122), the life on an Australian farm appears increasingly unreal (Keneally 35). Egypt functions therefore as a prelude to the horrors of war, during which the nurses witness suffering and death, but also engage in an active social life, inconceivable back home. This fusion of hard work with exotic delights will characterise their experience in the Middle East. Later in the novel, having delivered

the Gallipoli casualties to Alexandria, the nurses are offered “an embarrassment of recreations”: sightseeing, horse rides, picnics, bathing, parties, *thés dansants* (Keneally 122). Sally is also given a particularly intense training in visual arts by her sweet-heart Charlie Condon, with whom she visits Sakkara. Consequently, through their perpetual travelling, from provincials living at the antipodes of Empire, the Durance sisters are transformed into cosmopolitans. They acquire an impressive worldliness by participating in a culture of travel, refinement and sophistication (Lionnet 65–67).

Furthermore, in *The Daughters of Mars*, border crossing and the nurses’ dramatic experience as members of the medical staff coincide with radical reinvention of the female self. Although their work during the Gallipoli campaign is deeply traumatizing, at the same time, in spite of the stress and spartan conditions, they manage to save lives and to survive dangerous situations. They are active participants in the war effort, which radically questions “the stereotypical presentation of women as war’s ‘other’” (Ouditt 1994, 16). Like many real-life Australian nurses, the Durance sisters become more confident and unwilling to accept discrimination (Butler 2003, 54). Their courage and heroism is juxtaposed in the novel with some male characters’ lack of control in situations of danger. It is important to note, however, that the sense of independence they acquire as women in the course of their exotic travels, re-inscribes the ideology of anti-conquest, depriving the local population of agency. As Alison S. Fell contends, “white women and colonized men were both constructed as Other in wartime Europe, having the potential to disrupt the binary assumptions upon which white imperial masculinity was constructed” (159). While the daughters of Mars challenge gender norms,⁷ they take for granted the righteousness of the colonial mission and never question the sense of the war or the imperial ideologies sustaining the global conflict.

The sisters’ extensive travels also result in a shift in perspective, which reconfigures the relations between Europe and the colonial periphery. Discussing the front-line with her lover Kiernan, Naomi realizes that proportions have altered dramatically: “nothing is distant from anywhere else here. Did you know the entire British line is barely more than a hundred and twenty miles? Melbourne to Beechworth? A great deal of slaughter in a little space, she agreed” (Keneally 341). Moreover, when a French Quaker is surprised that there are Friends in a remote place like Melbourne, Naomi comes to the conclusion that “the same could be said for Paris” (Keneally 368). In the chapter tellingly entitled “Cosmopolitans,” sightseeing with her friends in Paris, Sally is surprised by her mature reactions to the paintings at the Louvre, which are the effect of her earlier artistic experience in Africa. The comparisons she makes while visiting Notre Dame reveal the cosmopolitan insight of a world traveller: “Like the pyramids, the cathedral could be approached by ordinary steps taken by one’s daily legs – the same legs with which one emerged from Kempsey’s Barsby’s Emporium and crossed Belgrave

Street to Mottee's Tearooms" (Keneally 280). If initially their Australianness represented a certain deficit, at the closure of the novel, the protagonists' insularity seems to have disappeared, replaced by worldliness, maturity, culture and knowledge.

Significantly, in *The Daughters of Mars* the Durance sisters' newly acquired cosmopolitanism is compatible with their imperial nationalism. The Australian characters are proud of their antipodean identity and will not tolerate being patronized by the British. While the conviction that "each Australian was worth a number of the others" (Keneally 283) proves naïve in the realities of slaughter, the Durance sisters retain a quiet pride about Anzac difference within the Empire. Furthermore, Australianness is foregrounded as an artistic theme in Sally's discussions with Charlie, who is a painter. Admiring collections of European art in French galleries, he comes to the conclusion that this art is incompatible with the demands of Australian landscape: "It's all so different from here. It's not Europe. It's non-Europe. And always will be" (Keneally 399). The vastness and sublimity of Australia contrasts radically with the harmonious, well-ordered French countryside; the amazing colours of Australian nature "would explode Cézanne's palette" (Keneally 398). Charlie's dilemmas echo the ideas of Australian Impressionists, known as the Heidelberg School, and their search for an emergent Australian identity and aesthetics (Introduction to Australian Impressionism; Gray 11–12). The novel closes with an art exhibition, in which the grim paintings inspired by war are more noticeable than the Australian landscapes. This art combines local and global sources of influence, provincial and cosmopolitan ones. In a metafictional way, Keneally points to his own literary project – creating a First World War novel with a distinct Australian flavour, yet appealing to an international audience. The closing scene throws into relief the radical impact of the global conflict on Australian culture. War's transformative power – in terms of individual and group identities at the periphery of the Empire – is thus highlighted as the central theme of *The Daughters of Mars*.

3. Critical Cosmopolitans: *Blue Ravens* by Gerald Vizenor

In *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel*, Anishinaabe writer and critic Gerald Vizenor, relying on the life-stories of his great-uncles from the White Earth Reservation, Becker County, in north-central Minnesota (Vizenor 2013), imagines two Chippewa soldiers, Basile and Aloysius Hudon Beaulieu, who serve in the American Expeditionary Forces during the First World War. Border crossing is present in the novel on the levels of content and form, since Vizenor mixes genres and styles by referring to his theoretical essays and blurring the borderline between fiction and history. Furthermore, the elusive concept of Native liberty or *survivance*, which Vizenor defines in his critical work as "the union of active survival and resistance

to cultural dominance” (2009, 24), is at the centre of the text. *Blue Ravens* is the fruit of extensive archival research; the writer insists that it is a *historical* novel and not pure fiction (Vizenor 2013). Although the narrator is Basile, who creates stories-within-stories, fragments of the text, the descriptions of combat at Château-Thierry and Montbréhain in particular, are composed in an impersonal style similar to historical discourse.

Blue Ravens shows that, in spite of the provisions of the American Selective Service Act, according to which Native Americans could claim exemption from the draft, all Natives “were ready for the adventure of combat, not for a passive alien exemption of service in the Great War” (Vizenor 2014, 94). Historical sources confirm that, although most Native Americans living on reservations were not yet recognized as citizens of the United States (Morris and Morris 626), they were eager to serve to maintain warrior traditions and prove their courage and loyalty by the side of white men (Winegard 8). *Blue Ravens* includes long lists of war casualties from Becker Country with a succinct comment on the circumstances and site of their death, a historic(al) roll of honour incorporated in a fictional narrative. Puzzling to the Western reader, these Native names have an important function, for they “create a sense of presence, a tease that undermines the simulations of absence and cultural dominance” (Vizenor 2009, 5). Although it focuses on the sequels of colonisation, war trauma and death in the war zone, *Blue Ravens* resists the spirit of victimry (Vizenor 2009, 24) by commemorating the courage and sacrifice of the indigenous community during the 1914–1918 conflict.

Most importantly, the characters of the novel are not “Dead Indians,” relics of the past, surrounded by the exotic signifiers of a dying culture (King 53–54), but active agents of resistance who transform their tribal inheritance for the modern age. Vizenor uses the tropes of mobility, border crossing and worldliness to challenge the stereotypical, colonial depictions of static and isolated Indian lives. The community of the White Earth reservation edit their own newspaper which informs them about local, national and international news, including that of war, long before the draft.⁸ To sell this weekly newspaper, Aloysius and Basile travel on the railroad as far as Minneapolis. The two brothers live close to nature and partake in indigenous rituals; at the same time, they are creative artists, Aloysius – a painter, Basile – a writer, interested in Western literature and visual art. On a visit to Minneapolis, Aloysius approaches Yamada Baske, an established Japanese painter, to discuss the visionary blue ravens he creates. Having been offered a tin of watercolour paint by the older man, he follows his suggestion and adds a slight touch of rouge to the scenes of blue ravens. Totemic art is enriched by Baske’s impressionism, combined with traditional Japanese painting styles. Vizenor highlights the transformative power of the creative act, which fuses several cultural traditions. Through their extensive readings, the influential encounter with the Japanese artist, and the contact with the global world provided by the reservation newspaper the protagonists develop “cosmopolitan sensibilities [...]

attuned to patterns of contact, exchange” and movement (Lionnet 91) long before they leave for France.

However, if Vizenor explores the impact of various cultural traditions on his protagonists, he also stresses how they reinterpret the reality within the inherited frames of ancestral cultures. In a way surprising to the reader, it is Homer’s *The Odyssey*, the foundational classic of European culture, that becomes Basile’s “literature of native memories and endurance in the war” (Vizenor 2014, 103). At the same time, the blue ravens painted by Aloysius and the tricky stories created by Basile are “the crucial totems and portraits” of their experience at the European front (Vizenor 2014, 20). Basile imagines the Kaiser as an ice monster, a relative of the ice woman in the Anishinaabe mythology. Significantly, if in *Blue Ravens* war changes familiar Native stories (Vizenor 2014, 115), the universe of war is transformed by Native visions, too:

We were brothers on the reservation, brothers in the bloody blue muck of the trenches, slow black rivers, brick shambles of farms and cities, brothers of the untold dead at gruesome stations. Bodies were stacked by the day for a wretched roadside funeral in the forest ruins. We were steadfast brothers on the road of lonesome warriors, a native artist and writer ready to transmute the desolation of war with blue ravens and poetic scenes of a scary civilization and native liberty. (Vizenor 2014, 8)

Yet, visions of glory are soon replaced by vistas of ruins and desolation, as well as descriptions of mutilated bodies. In the trenches, the two brothers are selected as scouts for particularly dangerous missions, because their commander believes that “stealth [is] in [their] blood” (Vizenor 2014, 121), an opinion commonly shared by white officers during the First World War (Winegard 114). He also treats them as dispensable cannon fodder to spare white lives. While in the novel Native Americans prove to be excellent soldiers, they also use their skills to protect themselves and their companions. War paint highlights the colonial fantasy of the savage warrior and helps them scare German soldiers into surrender, yet it also functions as a ritual of camouflage and survival. For Vizenor, the view of Native soldiers as victims of a callous military is too limiting; the novel highlights the “quality of action” inherent in *survivance* (see Vizenor 2009, 100). However, Aloysius and Basile’s experience at the front is depicted in a succinct, economic manner, which, on the one hand, as noted above, is reminiscent of historical documentation, and, on the other hand, subtly renders the mental wounds they sustained in combat. Basile in particular suffers from dreadful nightmares and flashbacks.

Interestingly, the return to the U.S. is traumatic for the protagonists of *Blue Ravens*. While they “were both inspired by the mystery, anxiety, and irony of the passage to war,” the return to the reservation “was neither peace nor the end of war” (Vizenor 2014, 169). For the Native American characters, the Great War is not a chasm that fractures a peaceful existence (Hynes 1990: xi), but an event that only adds new facets to the trauma of federal occupation on the reservation.

Back home, they are neither able to create nor to find employment. Both feel uneasy about the Americans' misuse of patriotism and honour in the post-war years. Moreover, they miss their furlough in Paris, during which they were deeply impressed by the architecture and atmosphere of the French capital. This is why, having learnt of the success of Aloysius's paintings at the Galerie Crémieux in Paris, they decide to go back to France. The Great War thus causes them to question the relation between the local and the global, and to detach themselves from their American homeland, as they become more aware of racial exploitation and injustice at home, and the opportunities offered by the French metropole: "we were exiles on a federal reservation but not as soldiers, and we were never exiles in Paris. So, we were expatriates in the City of Light, in the city of avant-garde art and literature. Paris was our sense of presence and liberty" (Vizenor 2014, 256).

The two brothers' post-war years in Paris are represented in *Blue Ravens* as a profound immersion in cosmopolitan culture. Vizenor stages their encounters with various real-life celebrities, such as, for instance, a rather hostile James Joyce, Marc Chagall, who is fascinated by Aloysius's paintings, and Marie Vassilieff, who becomes Basile's lover. They discuss art, literature and politics with the avant-garde artists of Europe, exposing "the contradictions and ironies of radical politics and aesthetics between the White Reservation and Le Chemin du Montparnasse in Paris" (Vizenor 2014, 225). The Goldenberg Delicatessen on Rue des Rosiers becomes their favourite restaurant, where, teased by the owner, they order goulash, herring or latkes. Furthermore, in *Blue Ravens*, the community of Native expatriates meet at the Café du Dôme, the legendary Montparnasse mecca of poets, writers, painters, sculptors and art connoisseurs. The Native American protagonists can be thus seen as Dômiers in their own right, like Hemingway, Picasso or Lenin, whom Aloysius ironically recomposes as carnivalesque blue ravens in his paintings.⁹ Like the "international modernists" (Walkowitz 2), Vizenor's protagonists oppose sterile traditions: their *survance* narratives question the romanticized clichés of Indians as products of imperial cultures and objects of ethnographic research. As a result, they become representatives of what Walkowitz defines as *critical cosmopolitanism*, "comparing, distinguishing, and judging among different versions of transnational thought; testing moral and political norms, including the norms of critical thinking; and valuing informal as well as transient models of community" (2).

Significantly, the two brothers' creative work transforms the Parisian avant-garde community. Not only do Aloysius's blue ravens revolutionize native art, but his new school of art, known as *École Indienne*, changes the shape of modernism. In fact, his paintings, exhibited at the Crémieux gallery, are viewed as a unique form of expressionism, compared to the abstract works of Georges Braques, Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall. Basile's stories are translated and published in French; the applauded *Le Retour à la France: Histoires de Guerre* functions as a *mise-en-abîme*, reduplicating the war episodes in Vizenor's (post)modern text. While modernism is traditionally approached in terms of established dichotomies, such

as, for example conventional/experimental, nation/world, centre/margin (Platt 3), *Blue Ravens* moves beyond such definitions by staging mutual exchanges between white and indigenous artists. Importantly, indigenous culture is not simply appropriated in the novel by the metropole in search for spiritual regeneration. The syncretic dynamic of the literature and art created by the protagonists “critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and *creolizes* them, disarticulating the given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise” (Mercer 255). Thus, in a radical gesture, Vizenor reconfigures the Native American artists as modernists per se, their creative work an important source of inspiration for the metropolitan elites. This carnivalesque vision of exchanges and continuities between the cultures of the imperial centre and the periphery thereby undermines the cliché of “modernism as a prestige culture of the ‘West’” (Platt 2).

In *Blue Ravens*, the First World War is a catalyst of global change: “The Great War fractured the ordinary stay, wily scenes, native reflections, ethnographic warrants, and empire cultures, and nothing has ever been the same on the White Earth Reservation, Montbréhain, Rue Mouffetard, or the River Seine” (Vizenor 2014, 248). The post-war Paris depicted in the novel becomes a genuine contact zone, a space of transcultural encounters in which subjects whose trajectories intersect “get constituted in and by their relations to each other” (Pratt 8). Aloysius’s and Basile’s identities evolve towards a form of hybridity, metaphorical creolization, fusing indigenous oral traditions with “a highly literate, urbane and enlightened polity” (Lionnet 69), yet simultaneously influencing the mainstream culture as well. In fact, the relationship between cosmopolitanism and creolization, usually seen as its peripheral opposite, is reconfigured in *Blue Ravens*, which seems to redefine “creolization as the cosmopolitanism of the subaltern, and cosmopolitanism as the creolization of the elites” (Lionnet 65). Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that the protagonists of Vizenor’s novel discover deep affinities with other migrant characters, Jews, facially mutilated soldiers, impoverished war veterans, war widows and their orphaned children, all tragic victims of a global conflict. Vizenor proposes a vision of an inclusionary cosmopolitanism (Anderson 71–72), based on a paradigm of universal humanity, an openness to the elites, as well as to the powerless. Importantly, in *Blue Ravens*, the Great War not only proves to be a revolutionizing force, but the source of tragedy, trauma and death, yet also the factor that breaks geographical, epistemological and ontological barriers and recomposes conceptual, ethical and artistic frontiers.

Conclusion

In the three novels under consideration the First World War involves the colonial travellers in territorial, psychological, cultural and political border crossings, which cause them to redefine their colonial loyalties and their place in the British

Empire. While in the pre-war period travel was a privilege of the (white) elites, in Alan Cumyn's, Thomas Keneally's and Gerald Vizenor's novels, the Great War introduces, despite its huge costs, a sort of egalitarianism that allows the colonial protagonists to become tourists, cosmopolitans and/or critical observers of the metropole. Cumyn's *The Sojourn* explores the dichotomy between the colonial centre and margin by highlighting intricate imperial clichés shaping the dynamic of the colonial encounter. While the English characters of the novel continue to view Canadianness as inferior and subordinate, the Canadian protagonist situates Englishness in a critical light. The reverse migration of Canadians to the Mother Country, as depicted by Cumyn, illustrates a uniquely Canadian attachment to the British liberal ideals, which, however, moves beyond the parent-child metaphor towards an idiosyncratic hybrid vision of Britishness. Whereas the English characters consider the war essentially an imperial project, the Canadian protagonist is motivated by ideas of freedom and comradeship, which his class-defined relatives are incapable of understanding. The novel thus exposes the minoritizing and peripheralizing mechanisms typical of cultures of dominance (see Brah 210), and the creolizing efforts of minority cultures to resist such domination.

In *The Daughters of Mars*, Keneally depicts Australian nurses discovering the complex, territorial and political cartography of the Empire. The global conflict allows the two sisters to travel, Odysseus-like, all over the colonial world and visit "exotic" locations, in comparison with which Australia appears dull and mundane. Faithful to historical documentation, the novel illustrates the Australian women's often marginalised war effort and their subsequent critique of gender norms, yet Keneally fails to provide radical visions of inter-racial alliances between his female protagonists and the colonial populations they encounter on imperial routes. Their worldliness is a form of *exclusionary* cosmopolitanism, in which "no weight is given to exploration of disparate cultures" (Anderson 73). Consequently, the Durance sisters' emancipation – as women and peripheral subjects of the Empire – coincides with an acceptance of the values of the metropole and active participation in the imperial project.

By contrast, the cosmopolitanism of Vizenor's Native American protagonists is inclusionary, characterised by a "sympathetic imagination and intercultural exchange" (Anderson 73). The most radical of the texts under consideration, *Blue Ravens* offers a revolutionary vision of colonial encounters, which result in a critique of imperialism, a deconstruction of Western epistemological privilege, and a challenge to a conception of modernism as an exclusively Western phenomenon. While commemorating the Native Americans' contribution to the war effort, Vizenor exposes the hypocritical policies of the American government which used its indigenous population as cannon fodder but was unwilling to recognize their war sacrifice. However, far from portraying his characters as passive victims of the cruel conflict, the novelist depicts them as active agents, reshaping cultures and selves through their narratives of *survivance*. Distancing

himself from a conception of war end as closure, Vizenor also rethinks the relation between cosmopolitanism and creolization in the new socio-political (dis-) order of global migrations that emerged after the Armistice.

The three novels under consideration engage with war trauma and its devastating sequels, yet at the same time they focus on the transformative power of displacement caused by war, and radically depart from the cliché of static trench warfare. Situating the Great War in a postcolonial perspective, they explore previously neglected experiences and ideologies. As a result, the first global war is reconfigured in terms of mobility, contact and/or transnational encounters, which cause radical shifts in consciousness, as well as aspirations for cultural/political autonomy. Questioning the view of war as a privilege for the peoples of the imperial peripheries, *The Sojourn*, *The Daughters of Mars* and *Blue Ravens* also echo twenty-first century concerns with national identity, cosmopolitanism and creolization. Published approximately a hundred years after the 1914–1918 conflict, the three texts thus testify to the Great War's continuing potential to inspire new and thought-provoking ethical and aesthetic projects.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by grant DEC–2013/11/B/HS2/02871 from the Polish National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki).

Notes

- 1 I analyse these contrasts in more detail in Branach-Kallas 2015.
- 2 The drawings that Ramsay sends Margaret from the war zone once he comes back to the front highlight the role of the soldier-artist “as truth teller, as the seer who has both the unique capacity and the sacred obligation to expose the war for what it is” (Gordon 102). In *The Famished Lover*, a sequel to *The Sojourn*, Cumyn depicts Margaret, unhappily married to Boulton, longing for Ramsay in the post-war years.
- 3 According to Vance, long considered an immature phase in Canada's colonial past, the British connection has only recently been recognized as an important part of Canadian identity. For Vance, the establishment of Canadian outposts in Great Britain during the First and the Second World Wars was one of the most significant mass migrations of the twentieth century: “In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain came to Canada and helped to shape the nation as a critical part of the British Empire. In the twentieth century, Canada went to Britain and established, at least for a time, a Maple Leaf Empire” (2012, 4).

- 4 Keneally both questions and re-inscribes the Australian legend of the Anzac. I analyse the “Anzac” themes as well as Keneally’s representation of nursing sisters in “Misfits of War: First World War Nurses in *The Daughters of Mars* by Thomas Keneally,” where I argue that, while including the Australian nurses in the Anzac mythology, Keneally’s novel does not interrogate Australian women’s support for the imperial war.
- 5 In his descriptions of the sisters’ adventures Keneally relies, to a large extent, on Peter Rees’s popular history, *Anzac Girls: An Extraordinary Story of World War I Nurses*.
- 6 As Rees reports, “By the early months of 1915 the ranks of local and foreign prostitutes in the Egyptian capital had swelled to accommodate the leave-time needs of the Anzacs.” Within a fortnight, there was an outburst of venereal disease, which eventually led to serious riots in the Wazzir (36). Neither Rees nor Keneally mentions the impact of these events on the local population.
- 7 See Branach-Kallas 2017 for an extensive analysis of gender roles in Keneally’s novel.
- 8 For the history of this “cosmopolitan” reservation newspaper, see Vizenor 2009, 35–5.
- 9 On the writer’s attitude to Bakhtin’s dialogical thought, see Vizenor 1995, 147.

References

- Anderson, Amanda. 2006. *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Brah, Avtar. 1996. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Branach-Kallas, Anna. 2015. “Narratives of (Post-) Colonial Encounter: The Old World in Contemporary Canadian Great War Fiction.” *North America, Europe and the Cultural Memory of the First World War*. Ed. Martin Löschnigg and Karin Kraus. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag WINTER. 95–106.
- Branach-Kallas, Anna. 2017. “Misfits Of War: First World War Nurses in *The Daughters of Mars* by Thomas Keneally.” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensa* 52. 4: 409–426. <https://doi.org/10.1515/stap-2017-0018>
- Butler, Janet. 2003. “Nursing Gallipoli: Identity and the Challenge of Experience.” *Journal of Australian Studies* 27. 78: 47–57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14443050309387870>
- Cumyn, Alan. 2003. *The Sojourn*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.
- . 2006. *The Famished Lover*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Gross Lane Editions.
- Das, Santanu. 2013. “Introduction.” *Race, Empire and First World War Writings*. Ed. Santanu Das. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1–32.

- Fell, Alison S. 2013. "Nursing the Other: the Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs." *Empire and First World War Writings*. Ed. Santanu Das. New York: Cambridge University Press. 158–174.
- Fussell, Paul. 1975. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York and London: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, Neta. 2014. *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Gray, Anne. 2002. "Introduction." *Australian Art in the National Gallery of Australia*. Ed. Anne Gray. Victoria, London, Seattle: National Gallery of Australia. 10–19.
- Hynes, Samuel. 1990. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. London: The Bodley Head.
- Introduction to Australian Impressionism. National Gallery of Victoria. http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/australianimpressionism/education/insights_intro.html
- Keneally, Thomas. 2013. *The Daughters of Mars*. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi: Atria Books.
- Keshen, Jeff. "The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder in Canada and Australia." *Canada and the Great War: Western Front Association Papers*. Ed. Briton C. Busch. Montreal and Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press. 3–26.
- King, Thomas. *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Toronto: Anchor Canada.
- Lionnet, Françoise. 2012. *Le su et l'incertain. Cosmopolitiques créoles de l'océan Indien / The Known and the Uncertain. Creole Cosmopolitics of the Indian Ocean*. La Pelouse, Trou d'Eau Douce, Ile Maurice: L'Atelier de l'écriture.
- Mercer, Kobena. 2003. "Diaspora Culture and the Dialogic Imagination: The Aesthetics of Black Independent Film in Britain." *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*. Ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur. Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Blackwell Publishing. 247–260.
- Morris, Jeffrey B. and Richard B. Morris, ed. 1996. *Encyclopedia of American History*. Seventh Edition. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Olusoga, David. 2014. *The World's War*. London: Head of Zeus.
- Ouditt, Sharon. 1994. *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Platt, Lenn. 2011. Introduction to *Modernism and Race*. Ed. Lenn Platt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1–18.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. 2008. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rees, Peter. 2009. *The Other Anzacs: The Extraordinary Story of Our World War I Nurses*. Crows Nest: Easyread Large.
- Rhoden, Clare. 2014. "Even More Australian: Australian Great War Novels in the Twenty-First Century." *The Great War in Post-Memory Literature and Film*.

- Ed. Martin Löschnigg and Marzena Sokołowska-Paryż. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. 273–288.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. 2002. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Trotter, David. 2005. “The British Novel and the War.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 34–56.
- Vance, Jonathan F. 1997. *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- . 2012. *Maple Leaf Empire: Canada, Britain, and Two World Wars*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Vizenor, Gerald. 1995. “Interview with Helmbrecht Breinig and Klaus Lösch.” *American Contradictions: Interviews with Nine American Writers*. Ed. Wolfgang Binder and Helmbrecht Breinig. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. 144–165.
- . 2009. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 2013. “White Earth Montbrehain: Native American Indians in the First World War.” Lecture at the University of Michigan, May 11. <http://blueravens.site.wesleyan.edu/audio-video/>
- . 2014. *Blue Ravens: Historical Novel*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.
- Walkowitz, Rebecca L. 2006. *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Winegard, Timothy C. 2012. *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Winter, Jay. 2015. “Families.” *The Cambridge History of the First World War*. Vol. 3: *Civil Society*. Ed. Jay Winter. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 46–68. Cambridge Histories Online. <http://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/histories/>