

Policing History: Burke's Constabulary and Forensic Functions of Rhetoric and the Controversy over the War of 1812 Commemoration

John Moffatt

Ron and Jane Graham School of Professional Development,
College of Engineering, University of Saskatchewan

Abstract

In 2011, Canada's Conservative government announced its support for a range of events commemorating the bicentennial of the outbreak of the War of 1812. Opposition to this position followed swiftly in the Canadian media, with prominent columnists such as Jeffrey Simpson and Catherine Ford speaking out against a national celebration of the war. This paper will examine the rhetoric of that opposition, as expressed both by established journalists and by other citizens in both print and electronic media. The analysis will centre on how the Harper government's effort to use 1812 as an instrument for identity-building may be portrayed in terms of what Kenneth Burke termed the "constabulary function" of rhetoric in *Attitudes Toward History* (1937). According to rhetorical scholar Jordynn Jack, Burke identified this constabulary function as "the set of rhetorical strategies that political and economic elites use to bolster a deteriorating social order and maintain the status quo while drawing attention away from broader, systemic problems within the social order itself" (Jack 67). As Jack indicates, constabulary rhetoric may be approached through several of Burke's 'pivotal terms' including alienation, cultural lag, transcendence, symbols of authority, and secular prayer" (Jack 67). The latter term in particular, defined by Burke as "*the coaching of an attitude by the use of mimetic and verbal language*" (Burke 322; his emphasis) is useful to a reading of the opposition to a national, state-sanctioned commemoration. This rejection of an epideictic rhetoric celebrating the 1812-1814 war implicitly attacks the government's use of history as secular prayer in promoting a nostalgic, even anachronistic vision of Canadian identity, at the expense of support for contemporary Canadian cultural industries.

Keywords: Kenneth Burke, epideictic rhetoric, constabulary rhetoric, War of 1812, public memory in Canada, rhetoric of Canadian identity

Introduction

The 1812-1814 War kept Canada from absorption into the United States, but it wasn't a war of independence: we remained a colony and continued largely to look to the British Empire for identity for another century and a half. We've also tended to be pleased with what, recent travel restrictions aside, is the world's longest undefended border. A strident insistence on the 1812 War as our Bannockburn, or our Hollywood-style "Braveheart" moment, pushes the event into uncomfortable ideological territory.

In this paper, I will argue that the government's decision to commemorate the War of 1812 bicentennial creates a situation which sharply opposes official and unofficial/oppositional rhetorics involving history and identity. The official position, represented here for simplicity's sake by the Prime Minister's official message, "The War of 1812: The Fight for Canada," approaches the bicentennial in unambiguously epideictic terms, as a "ceremonial [rhetoric] of display" which seeks to "praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time" (Aristotle 1:3 1358^b). Here, it is an occasion to praise "our ancestors," understood as mostly English-speaking people loyal to the Crown, and uses a narrative of their defence of Canada to invite identification on the part of all contemporary Canadians with the loyalty and military heroism of the Canadians of 1812. As such, the official rhetoric is unambiguously concerned with "the Noble," defined by Aristotle as

That which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise; or that which is both good and also pleasant because good. If this is a true definition of the Noble, it follows that virtue must be noble, since it is both a good thing and also praiseworthy. Virtue is, according to the usual view, a faculty of providing and preserving good things; or a faculty of conferring many great benefits, and benefits of all kinds on all occasions. (1:9 1366^a)

Of the nine virtues that Aristotle associates with nobility, the key one here is courage, defined as "the virtue that disposes men to do noble deeds in situations of danger, in accordance to the law and in obedience to its commands; cowardice is the opposite" (1:9 1366^b). Taken at face value, then, "The Fight for Canada" invites identification with the War of 1812 as a noble enterprise, and by implication, casts failure to identify as akin to cowardice, a failure of virtue.

The critics, however, represented here by the journalistic response in the Canadian media, implicitly see a different kind of rhetoric in the Prime Minister's patriotic message. Understanding Canadian identity as fundamentally engaged with division and difference, these critical voices depict the official epideictic rhetoric's insistence on identification with a noble moment in which "we all stood

firmly together” as a misrepresentation of both the past and the present; moreover, that misrepresentation is motivated by a political will to undo or overwrite contemporary liberal/Liberal discourses of Canadian identity that question the validity of traditional narratives of patriotism. An analysis of this oppositional rhetoric suggests that the Harper government’s use of 1812 as an instrument for identity-building exemplifies what Kenneth Burke termed the “constabulary function” of rhetoric in his 1937 book *Attitudes toward History* (139). Moreover, the oppositional rhetoric positions itself as what Burke in the same books terms a “forensic” response (254) to that constabulary function.

According to rhetorical scholar Jordynn Jack, Burke identified this constabulary function as “the set of rhetorical strategies that political and economic elites use to bolster a deteriorating social order and maintain the status quo while drawing attention away from broader, systemic problems within the social order itself” (Jack 67). As Jack indicates, constabulary rhetoric may be approached through several of Burke’s “pivotal terms’ including alienation, cultural lag, transcendence, symbols of authority, and secular prayer” (Jack 67). The latter term in particular, defined by Burke as “*the coaching of an attitude* by the use of mimetic and verbal language” (AH 322; his emphasis) describes the rhetorical activity on the government’s part to which the critics are most opposed. This rejection of a national, state-sanctioned commemoration as an epideictic rhetoric celebrating the 1812-1814 war implicitly attacks the government’s use of history as secular prayer, used to promote a nostalgic, even anachronistic vision of Canadian identity which actually exacerbates the divisions it coaches the audience to overcome.

As Jack points out in her article, “the constabulary function refers specifically to the ways in which political and economic systems of power are maintained through rhetorical acts. In this way, the constabulary function provides a vocabulary for ideological critique of material and symbolic power” (67). While it isn’t within the scope of this paper to review all of the ways in which *Attitudes Toward History* addresses “cultural malfunction” (Jack 71), we can focus on the constabulary function of rhetoric to explore how an “artefact” such as War of 1812 bicentennial is portrayed by critics as an official effort to manage “deteriorating social order” (Jack 67). The Prime Minister’s epideictic rhetoric aims to provide what Burke terms an epic “frame of symbolic adjustment,” which provides, as Burke puts it, “a way of building the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time” (AH 34).

As Jack outlines it, Burke describes how epic frames of symbolic adjustment within Western Civilization can ultimately be “stretched to their breaking points, when they no longer suit social conditions,” creating what Burke

terms “alienation or cultural lag” (*AH* 139, Jack 71) . We can associate this condition with the public’s ignorance of or indifference to Canadian history that both the government and its critics would in their different ways like their discourse to address.

The “alienation” or “cultural lag” which the bicentennial at once incarnates and seeks to address involves the lack of identification between contemporary Canadians and what the federal government’s official message identifies as “our ancestors/origins/foundations” (cf. 1812.gc.ca). From the government’s point of view, we need to (re-)accept these elements as our role models. We can turn our attention here to the Prime Minister’s official message, which for much of 2012 could be accessed via links on a range of Government of Canada web pages.¹

The PM’s message is entitled “The War of 1812—The Fight for Canada”. There, Mr. Harper invites

all Canadians to share in our history and commemorate **our proud and brave ancestors** who fought and won against enormous odds... The War helped establish our path toward becoming an **independent** and **free** country, **united under the Crown with a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity**. (emphases mine)

The text acknowledges the traditional Canadian trio of “solitudes”—English, French, and Aboriginal—with other communities filed enthymematically under “linguistic and ethnic diversity.” And while the Crown is only mentioned once, it is associated with both unity and respect for diversity, circumventing any suspicion that loyalty to the British Crown is un-Canadian, by making loyalty consubstantial, in Burke’s terms (cf *RM* 21), with the other identity groupings. There is nothing here that determinedly excludes anyone in Canada, but the text could more easily describe the British-oriented Canada of the early 20th century than the culturally and ethnically diverse Canada of 2012. This insistence on a vision of Canada that last flourished under John Diefenbaker illustrates how, as Jack notes, “those most likely to uphold the old system” (74) actually contribute to the alienation/cultural lag they claim to address. Francophones, westerners, multicultural communities, and progressives who identify with peace-keeping and health care as unifying symbols will find little to engage them in this discourse. Thus, a bicentennial commemoration will attempt, as Jack puts it, to “promote social cohesion even when the social order itself is inadequate” (72). The government’s “coaching of an

¹ For example, it could be found on any of Environment Canada’s local weather pages, sandwiched, significantly, between a link to the Government’s Economic Plan and another to the Government’s controversial plans to overhaul Old Age Security.

attitude” is what primarily comes under attack from the critics of the commemoration, since the tensions that distinguish the reality of Canadian political and cultural identity are essentially overwritten by the narrative which the bicentennial and its \$11.5 million commemoration fund represents (Taber and Galloway). As Charlotte Gray has written, the government

Makes no secret of its eagerness to erase the Liberal-dominated narrative of recent Canadian history, with its emphasis on the Chart of Rights and Freedoms, multiculturalism, and the flag, and replace it with other, older traditions that embrace military victories and historical identification with Britain. (Gray 41)

Gray’s observation identifies the element of constabulary rhetoric called “symbols of authority”. Burke points out that people “are taught adherence to the older system of authority” in a capitalist system, and that “political mechanisms are organized to enact laws in accordance with its spirit” (*AH* 139) While Burke was specifically talking about a criminal context in which “cultural misfit” compels certain individuals to be criminals,² we can apply the idea in terms of how the government’s attempt to create adherence to the authority of the conservative vision through rhetorical acts (to follow Jack’s analysis), actually “reinforce[es]” “the very elements that produce a ‘cultural misfit’ in the first place” (Jack 77).

In a 2011 article in *Maclean’s*, Peter Shawn Taylor describes the agenda driving the 1812 commemoration in the following terms:

according to [Heritage Minister James] Moore, [the commemoration] strikes a blow against efforts of previous Liberal governments to define Canada as a series of modern Liberal accomplishments such as medicare and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. “There is this leftist mythology that Canadian history began with the election of Pierre Trudeau and was solidified in 1982 with the signing of the Charter,” he gripes. “That’s utterly irresponsible” (Taylor).

Elsewhere in the same article, Mr. Moore is quoted as stating that,

“This war leads directly to Confederation in 1867,” [...] ascribing the most basic characteristics of Canada—a constitutional monarchy, the preservation of a French-speaking Quebec, an

² “From 1926 to 1930, Kenneth Burke researched illegal drug use and criminology while ghostwriting a book for Colonel Arthur Woods, a member of John D. Rockefeller’s Bureau of Social Hygiene” (Jack 66).

accommodating native policy and our healthy economic and political relationship with the Americans—to the successful defence of Canada’s borders. “We were invaded and we repulsed that invasion. Because of the War of 1812 we grew up to be uniquely Canadian.” (Taylor)

These views are challenged in Josée Boileau’s article “Guerre de 1812—Refaire l’histoire” in *Le Devoir*. Boileau describes the conservative narrative as “une relecture historique qui n’allait pas tarder à être dénoncée par des historiens de toutes tendances, qui trouvaient que le gouvernement conservateur exagérait l’impact de cette guerre obscure” (Boileau). Boileau dismisses the idea that the war helped preserve the French language, citing Québec historian Jacques Lacoursière as noting that British immigration posed a greater threat to French at the time than an American invasion. With regard to the War of 1812 “lead[ing] directly to Confederation,” she notes that the parliamentary debates of the Confederation era contain no references at all to the event: “Et 1812? Pas-un-mot!” (Boileau).

For the heritage minister to argue that he is correcting an imbalance in Canadian historical memory is one thing, but to do so through an appeal to an alternative tradition which itself lacks a basis in actual history constitutes an overt act of cultural lag-inducing secular prayer characteristic of Burke’s constabulary rhetoric, an invitation to modify the public consciousness in the present on the authority of a past that never existed. Moore’s “We were invaded... we repulsed... we grew up to be uniquely Canadian” (Taylor) is symptomatic of the problem, in that the actual nature of *we* is a fraught question; the first *we* historically refers to the settlers of British North America and their First Nations neighbours; the second *we* largely represents British regulars, First Nations warriors, and a rather small and inconsistent number of civilian militia units; the third *we* is the modern, complex Canadian public that can only embrace and internalize the previous two *we*’s by appeal to an anti-historical myth of national unity.

Therefore, as Jack observes, “To combat these problems, the propagandist deploys “transcendence” or “symbolic bridging and merging” (Jack 72, *AH* 179). Jack points out that in *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke describes *Transcendence* as occurring

When one finds that there is good and bad in everybody, but for hortatory purposes he divides people into classes- and by treating them as members of those classes, he tries to coach his human attitude in accordance with his philosophy of classes, thereby schematically dividing the good from the bad, the vital from the decadent, the rising from the dying. (*AH* 80; cited in Jack 76)

As Jack summarizes, “one transcends an earlier, more ambivalent perspective on human nature in favour of a simplified view.” The identification of this practice/process with propaganda is particularly relevant to a discussion of the 1812 commemorations, and its insistence on a monolithic narrative of Canadian identity.

The official position, as expressed in “The Fight for Canada,” implicitly invites the constabulary version of transcendence in its association of military tradition and Canadian origins, and thus with Canadian unity and identity in general. The overlap that exists in the clusters of military-oriented language and origin/foundational language in the PM’s text is telling. The text repeatedly equates terms related to 1812, to war in general, and to things military, to key terms associated with origins: *seminal, ancestors who fought, founders, heroes who fought... fought together to save Canada, established our path, affected [our] course*. The convergence of warfare and origin-terms, summarized in the final invitation to “pay tribute to our history and heritage,” leaves the reader with a sense that the idea of unity itself is located within the nexus of loyalty expressed through military action. Visualizing Anglophones, Francophones, and First Nations standing together in marshalled ranks in combat is offered as a concrete vision of how Canada ought to work; the military context associates this vision with order, and order is associated with a concrete national identity.

The incompatibility of this vision with Canadian attitudes toward heroism and identity underscore the “cultural lag” of the government’s vision. As Catherine Ford argues in a column published in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* on October 19, 2011 (“Extolling War of 1812 Foolish”), the heroic struggles that Canadians actually identify with are environmental and social, struggles which makes heroes of David Suzuki, Terry Fox and Tommy Douglas. Moreover, they are rooted in the recognition of the very divisions (regional, ethnic, linguistic) that constabulary transcendence seeks to overwrite. In fact, as Daniel Francis puts it, the entire discourse of heroism in Canada is predicated on division itself. In his 1996 study *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*, Francis writes that for Canadians, “hero worship is as likely to divide as it is to unite. The history of the country has been a history of conflict and compromise... in such a place, it is difficult to agree on who constitutes a hero” (113). He continues, “Heroic figures in Canada have tended to emerge from the regions or from minority struggles against the status quo. By and large they are sticks used by one part of the community to beat on another” (Francis 113-14). And yet, as the title of his chapter, “Divided We Stand,” indicates, Canadians seem to recognize their actual country in the real constraints of articulating identity under conditions of division, rather than through an artificial symbolism that requires them to be catechized in who they are. In this oppositional viewpoint, Canadian identity does not lie in how

Canadians once rose to overcome linguistic, cultural, regional, and political division, and now could do the same again if they could just go back there, and find transcendence in the re-enactment of those moments, essentially embracing Burke's cultural lag. Rather, our identity emerges in our ongoing engagement with these divisions. One could argue that if the Conservative slogan might be, "The War of 1812: Let's Celebrate," or "Let's Party Like It's 1812," the opposed slogan might well be, "The War of 1812: We Need to Talk." The oppositional rhetoric calls for resistance to the maintenance/perpetuation of cultural lag by arguing that the real significance of the War of 1812 will only emerge by interrogating its relevance. Real transcendence, in other words, lies in confronting, rather than commemorating the war, an attitude which engages with Morris Wolfe's comment that "Canadians... have the shortest memories of any people on earth. It allows us to feel superior to the Americans" (Wolfe; cf Ferguson 90).

By contrast, the government's constabulary rhetoric is by definition non-transformative, arguing for a structured amnesia rather than an informed public memory. This sense of "The Fight for Canada" as non-transformative is apparent in how the text treats the Americans. They appear once as invaders ("American invasion") at the end of the second paragraph; however, the subsequent *invasions* and *repulsions* are rhetorically "unmanned," and the Americans only come into focus again as our good neighbours in the second-last paragraph, again containing a "divisive" vision of the War. This was clearly a war between friends, a good war, a friendly, Disneyesque war which left marks, but no scars; no ill seems to have flowed from it.

By removing the War of 1812 from history's messier aspects, "The Fight for Canada" highlights key elements of epideixis which invite the kinds of critique that journalists and cultural critics have directed against the commemoration project. Aristotle states that the epideictic necessarily "either praises or censures somebody" (1:3 1358^b); "The Fight for Canada" unambiguously praises "our proud and brave ancestors" and advances them as role models for a monarchist, militarist identity which admits no alternative grounds for identification, and thus implicitly excludes those who don't share that vision from the symbolic act of fighting for Canada. If, as Aristotle goes on to say, the epideictic rhetor "is, properly speaking, concerned with the present, since all men praise or blame in view of the state of things existing at the time, though they often find it useful also to recall the past and to make guesses at the future" (1:3 1358^b), the government view as expressed through Mr. Harper's message either only praises the segment of the Canadian population which readily finds grounds to identify with the heroes of Crysler's Farm or Chateauguay, or implicitly criticizes the rest as lacking a sense of Canadian identity. Reflective of the appetite for revisionism expressed above by Heritage Minister Moore, Mr. Harper's position extends no obvious hand to Canadians who

don't already like these select traditions, and thus, if "The Fight for Canada" is intended to persuade the general populace to rally around Queen and Country, it makes no effort to expand the appeal beyond the converted. This failure to cultivate or enable a broader identification with this historical narrative is perhaps the most obvious mark of the constabulary nature of the PM's rhetoric, in that the commemoration is clearly meant to be understood as addressing a need for increased historical consciousness in our national identity, but effectively does nothing to facilitate real consubstantiality between *all* contemporary Canadians and those who experienced war on Canadian soil in 1812-1814.

Eugene Garver, in *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character* (1994), notes that

the convertibility between deliberation and epideixis looks in some respects like the mutual translatability between use and mention, since deliberative rhetoric uses opinions about the good to advocate a policy while epideixis displays those opinions to win applause for the speaker... In epideictic rhetoric, there is not only a mutual translation between practical and impractical goods, between objects of choice and things we can admire and value without necessarily doing anything about them. (72)

Garver's observation draws attention to a central problem within "The Fight for Canada" as epideictic rhetoric. As rhetorical practice, the text certainly intends to persuade its audience of both the relevance of the War of 1812 and the Government's sound ethos in promoting that relevance. At the same time, in directing the message to an audience which is clearly not intended to respond critically, the Prime Minister's message positions its epideixis as "impractical goods," with no deliberative purpose apart from witnessing to the government's patriotism. If, however, the message is part of a project of changing how Canadians see their history, as Minister Moore has made explicit, a double problem arises. History is on one hand "impractical," and therefore not grounds for serious debate; this attitude accounts for the government's willingness to fund the 1812 spectacle as publicity or entertainment, while cutting or neglecting other public services which preserve or facilitate analysis of history.³ At the same time, Mr. Moore's description of the "left-wing" narrative as "totally irresponsible" and his call for a substitution of narratives (the traditional for the modern, or the epideictic for what we shall follow Burke in calling the *forensic*), rather than for an inclusive narrative informed by debate, paints the whole idea of *questioning* any received

³ The government's cuts to Libraries and Archives Canada, the elimination of the long-form census, and cuts to Parks Canada have been widely perceived as evidence of the government's selective, and highly political, appreciation of history (cf <http://www.savelibraryarchives.ca>).

narrative as irresponsible radicalism. The only good history is dead history, which is “impractical” in rhetorical terms and therefore can be enjoyed, free of consequence.

Indeed, in the middle of the message, we learn that “Unmistakeably, the War of 1812 was an event that affected the course of our country **militarily**, **politically**, and **culturally**” (my emphases). The sequence alone is significant, reflecting priorities of a government whose enthusiasm for military symbolism is matched by its indifference or even hostility to cultural industries and institutions, antagonistic to the media in general and to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in particular (cf Theilheimer). The following three paragraphs of the text might in formal terms invite us to see the Prime Minister developing the military, political, and cultural contexts that the celebrations illuminate. In the first two cases, the text is clear enough. The war “was instrumental in creating Canada’s Armed Forces,” represented by “many of our current reserve regiments in Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada which can trace their origins” to the war. Collectively, the influence is summarized as “the beginning of a long and proud military history in Canada.”

The paragraph on political relevance centres on foundation-stone metaphors while alluding to “Confederation” and “many of our political institutions,” collectively summed up as “the Canada we know today.” The word *culture* doesn’t appear again, and the paragraph in which we might expect commentary on the shadow the War of 1812 casts on Canadian culture is dedicated to our friendship with the United States.

The avoidance of culture as a topic in “The Fight for Canada” is significant on multiple levels. First, the text ignores the war’s most obvious and concrete impact on Canadian culture, namely anti-Americanism. More importantly, however, this avoidance sidesteps the necessity of addressing the meaning of war itself in a society which until recently prided itself on its peacekeeping reputation, however imperfect and even controversial our peacekeeping record has been⁴. The constabulary nature of the government’s rhetoric is evident in its promotion of a cultural lag in which Canadians are only allowed to see their military traditions in a state of arrested development, prior to and outside the humanitarian role in which most Canadians born within the last 50 years understand our military presence in the world. And, in maintaining cultural lag, the text forecloses on a debate on the subject. “The Fight for Canada” doesn’t include any terminology, let

⁴ Throughout his book *What We Talk About When We Talk About War*, Noah Richler cites well-established Canadian journalists and historians (columnist Christie Blatchford and historian Jack Granatstein are examples) who have expressed hostility to the idea of peacekeeping as a Canadian value (Richler *passim*).

alone clusters of key terms, that invite *discussion*. We can *share, participate, and take part*, but not *discuss, debate, or even reflect*.

This disregard for a national discussion has been taken as evidence of the government's unwillingness to engage with the real significance of the war. As Jeffery Simpson put it in the *Globe and Mail*, "Some wars are horrible but necessary, such as the Second World War. Others are horrible but stupid, such as the War of 1812" (Let's Not Exalt the Folly of 1812, October 11, 2011). In later columns, Simpson would be increasingly dismissive of Harper's "toy-soldier plans to celebrate the obscure War of 1812" (Simpson, "Quebec has replaced Alberta at the Margins"), suggesting that Canadians are being invited to play childish games rather than remember, let alone understand and learn from their own history. He writes that, "fair-minded" observers

would demand that the commemoration be called off entirely, or that the money be spent teaching people on both sides what really happened and what a folly the whole thing was. (Simpson)

Or, as journalist Stephen Marche puts it in his essay, "That Time We Beat the Americans" (*The Walrus*, March 2012), "Canada exists because of a strained friendship" (30).

Simpson's language positions his rhetorical practice as an antidote to the PMO's constabulary rhetoric on two levels. First of all, he uses terms that suggest that celebrations are themselves identifiable or consubstantial with the chaos of the war itself. *Dumb, bad, vague, scattered, and messy* are antithetical to the ceremony and decorum associated with the epideictic for which the PM reaches in his message. Terms used to describe the War itself, such as *forced, dragged, fighting among themselves, death, and broken promises* implicitly position the alternative concept of transcendence through glorious warfare as a whitewashing exercise in secular prayer, invoking it as enforcement of a moribund world view of war as inherently glorious.

By contrast, Simpson insists on a realistic view of the War of 1812 when he concludes the article by stating that "people in Canada who preferred a US victory sent intelligence information to invading Americans; Federalists in the US supplied intelligence to British forces. This was a *cross-border war*, and there was a *civil war* within each side. Chances are, this *critical element* won't be highlighted in the *cardboard* version promoted by the commemoration fund" (Simpson; my emphases). Positioning the ambiguities of a cross-border, civil war as *critical*, and the opposite as a *cardboard* representation, distils the agon between the opposition and government narratives into a struggle between the forensic and the epideictic as motivated contexts for rhetorical activity.

Simpson's approach recalls a dimension of the Forensic which Kenneth Burke develops under his description of that term in his *Dictionary of Pivotal Terms* in *Attitudes Toward History*. Burke's discussion of "Forensic" is not a re-definition of Aristotelian forensic/legal rhetoric. Rather, defined as "material supplied by the forum, the market place" (AH 254), Burke's forensic is at once a body of phenomena manifesting the ethical complexity of modernity, and a terministic screen indicative of a particular attitude to modernity; he describes it as including "the materials of law, parliamentary procedure, traffic regulation, scientific-causal relationships evolved by complex and sophisticated commerce (of both the material and spiritual sorts)" (AH 254). Burke further describes awareness of the Forensic as a condition of adulthood, both literal and metaphoric; he calls it "overwhelming" for naïve sensibilities. "Naïve heroism," he writes, "prepares the individual for disillusionment, since "the onslaught of the Forensic must always come somewhat as a shock" (AH 255). The confrontation of idealized and un-idealized history in the debate over the meaning of the War of 1812 is an instance of the "shock" of the forensic.

Seen in this light, Simpson's critique, with its opposition of "messy" and complicated realities and the "cardboard/toy soldiers" simplicity of the commemoration fund casts the real conflict squarely into the territory of whether or not naïve hero worship is an appropriate way for Canadians to remember history. His viewpoint corresponds to Marche's observation that "Canada exists because of a story that is hard to tell" (Marche 30), and that genuine Canadian history is thus resistant to the kind of secular prayer that enforces cultural lag.

The final question to consider is whether a critique like Simpson's, as an example of the Burkean forensic, goes beyond what Burke in the same section of *Attitudes toward History* refers to as "Debunking." The Debunker, "no matter how mature his writing may be on the surface," remains according to Burke at the stage of alienation caused by the "onslaught" of the forensic in all its complexity and compromise. What is necessary, according to Burke, is a genuine "Transcendence" (distinct from that encouraged by constabulary rhetoric), which "does not occur until the critic "negates the negation." This process, whereby the rhetor/critic puts the pre-forensic and the forensic together, has also been called the state, "beyond good and evil," or "beyond the opposites" (AH 256).

The government's position, with its emphasis on unified identity and victory, positions itself to cast opponents as debunkers, as alienated, and as embracing failure to become a nation; in a recent article published in the *National Post*, C.P. Champion, while acknowledging that James Moore probably overstates the direct connection between 1812 and Confederation, nevertheless describes media criticism of the PM's position as "peevish and irrational" (Champion), and arrays a body of traditional Canadian scholarship including A.R.M. Lower's 1946

From Colony to Nation, former Parks Canada historian Robert Henderson, and the genealogies of several Fathers of Confederation in defence of Mr. Moore, against the positions represented by Mr. Simpson, an unknown blogger, Queen's University historian Ian Mackay, and Roger Annis, "a fellow left-wing activist" with whom the opposition position is apparently consubstantial.

However, when read in terms of Burke's description of the forensic as a rhetorical process, the opposition represents an opportunity to see the government's secular prayer as enforcing the childlike pre-forensic state in the audience, rather than moving Canadians toward a genuine transcendence. By contrast, the ostensible pessimism of the critics with regard to unity positions the ongoing process of managing divisions as **the** Canadian project, the act with which meaningful identification **is** possible. We have survived by not enforcing alien standards of unity that actually divide; we survive by continuing to "negate the negation." Burke argued that, in assessing the ethical dimensions of secular prayer, "all we can ask is that the modes of prayer employed (with their reverse, invective) shall be sufficiently mature and complex to take the key factors of the situation properly into account" (AH 91).

Ultimately, then, the debate over the 1812 commemoration opposes, on one hand, an epideictic rhetoric which identifies patriotism with a lack of critical thinking, and which assumes that to question or debate the nature of contemporary identification with 1812 is to fail to identify with "the fight for Canada," with on the other hand, a rhetoric rooted in the Burkean forensic which positions the act of questioning not as a simple debunking of myths (a destructive act), but as finding through the act of debunking the real means of engaging with history.

"The Fight for Canada" promotes a cultural viewpoint reminiscent of Burke's observation regarding the "primitive societies" in which "the forensic is at a minimum, but not wholly absent" (AH 254). The epideictic rhetorical orientation of the official message, in exhorting the audience toward a common myth, echoes Burke's description of this primitive state of the forensic, whose "basis is to be found in the council of elders, who seek to evolve and explicit verbalization and rationalization of the tribal acts, attitudes, and policies" (AH 254). Burke goes on to describe the initiation into the forensic as a natural, if not necessarily welcome, part of a process of maturation. For a child, the forensic is *alien* (Burke's emphasis) because its innate complexity is only realized through experience, and therefore lies outside the realm of naïve assumptions about how the world works. Burke describes the realization of the transactional nature of the forensic as "overwhelm[ing]," especially since any naïve heroism, even of a purely secular sort, prepares him for the same disillusionment, as he gradually becomes mature

enough to size up the ways in which people cash in on their moral assets, and as he discerns the same behavior in himself. (AH 255)

“The Fight for Canada” from its title on through the processes of identification described earlier, is nothing if not a deliberate “rationalization of the tribal acts, attitudes, and policies” on a naïve level which, in a deft act of what Clyde Miller called the “cardstacking device” (Miller), marginalizes the inconvenient and conflict-ridden dimensions of the real history, to the extent of downplaying the fact that “we” were fighting an identified enemy. By contrast, Marche and Simpson in particular draw attention to how the War of 1812 as a civil conflict was nothing if not an exercise in forensic reality. *Globe and Mail* columnist Doug Saunders put the matter in even more starkly forensic terms when he described “winning” the War of 1812 as “the worst thing that has ever happened to this country,” equating the anti-American mindset that flowed from the various mythologies that arose in the war’s wake as a retarding influence on political, educational, and cultural development, turning Canada into “a nation that repelled, not attracted, the ambitious and desirable.” Saunders concludes his article by stating,

The victory had indeed allowed Canada to purge itself of a great many people, institutions, ideas and possibilities. In three years of bloody fighting we had successfully secured our border – and then, for a century after, used it to keep the sunlight out. Two centuries later, we are still feeling the effects. (Saunders F4)

Rhetorically, then, (since Burke equated attitude with incipient action; cf *RM* 242), an insistence on the forensic *as* an attitude can also be seen as secular prayer, both on Burke’s part, and on the part of rhetors like Simpson, Marche, and Saunders whose implicitly forensic approach to understanding history is itself a secular prayer which runs counter to the naïve epideictic, coaching in its turn an attitude in which recognition, and appreciation, of the ethical complexity of remembering 1812 is essential to a realistic sense of national identity, reflective of the actual conflicted country rather than of an idealized unified country that never existed in fact.

The opposition of the epideictic and the forensic in this specific rhetorical situation/discourse showcases one further dimension of the forensic as Burke describes it. If alienation is a likely immediate consequence of the recognition of the forensic, there is, Burke argues, a risk of remaining fixed in that alienated state, and becoming a mere “debunker,” “peevisish and irrational,” in Champion’s terms, and this problem is of immediate relevance to a rhetorical critique of social criticism of the kind we are addressing.

So the question ultimately becomes, do the opponents of the 1812 celebrations “negate the negation” in their criticism, or do they remain debunkers? The rhetorical identification enacted through the PM’s message is positioned to cast opponents in a negative role, rejecting symbolic national unity, belittling the ancestors, and ultimately obstructing the promotion of historical memory. However, a consistent feature of the opposition rhetoric is an insistence that the audience, the Canadian public, approach the question of remembering the war in a constructive manner. Rather than deny its meaning, the rhetoric of the opposition insists that the audience consider the distance between the “pre-forensic”/ childhood “thesis” (Simpson’s “toy-soldier celebration”) and the forensic materials of Canadian life (a divided country unlikely to rally around King/Queen and Country, a legacy of betrayal of First Nations, a diverse population for whom a British identity is of limited appeal or applicability, and an ambivalent relationship to America and the broader North American space). Now, instead of simply opposing or dismissing the commemorations as the childish act of a government nostalgic for a past that never existed, opposition (“negation”), the opposition represents the will and ability to reject a false solution to the problem of identity in Canada. Embracing the forensic then is itself a transcendence of alienation, in that the forensic becomes the condition of Canadian identity which embodies a complex modern consciousness.

This embrace of complexity as an expression of identity, and even as a national duty, is clearly articulated in the *People’s Citizenship Guide: a response to conservative canada* (capitalization sic), edited by Esyllt Jones and Adele Perry. As they write in their introduction,

Nations are complicated, and so are our feelings about them. Canada has a long history of repression, exclusion, and exploitation. But Canada is also a diverse country made of the ideas, labour, and cultures we all contribute... The Canadian government requires a long list of things from people who are applying for citizenship, including a test of their knowledge of Canada. But much of the “Canada” on which this test is based reflects a nationalistic, militaristic, and racist view of Canada and its history... Unlike the Canadian government, we do not wish to enforce a monolithic view of Canada that excludes whatever facts and experiences complicate its nostalgia for a simple past that never really was. Above all, this guide is meant to challenge the current government’s approach, and instead encourage everyone to question what it means to be a citizen of Canada. (5-6)

In this passage, the keyword clusters offer a distillation of the cultural conflict of which the 1812 controversy is a facet. On one hand, we have *nations, complicated, feelings, history, repression, exclusion, exploitation, diverse, ideas, labour, cultures, contribute, facts, experiences, complicate, challenge, encourage, everyone, question, means, citizen of Canada*; the opposing cluster includes *Canadian government, requires, nationalistic, militaristic, racist, enforce, monolithic, excludes, nostalgia, simple*.

In these excerpts from the introduction to the *People's Citizenship Guide*, the unequal size of the clusters is telling, not because it represents an unequal distribution of information, but because the clusters exemplify their content: The cluster that begins with *nations* and concludes with *citizen of Canada* equates *complicate(d)* and *diverse* with *contribute*, and thus initiate a Burkean symbolic merger which identifies *contribute*, as an agent of complication and diversity, with *challenge, encourage, and question*. In the final clause in the quotation, *encourage everyone to question what it means to be a citizen of Canada*, the identification of the verbs *encourage* and *question* make the object of the latter verb, *what it means to be a citizen of Canada*, consubstantial with both the inclusive *everyone* and with the entire range of details (*facts and experiences*), some negative in association (*repression, exclusion, exploitation*), some positive (*ideas, labour, and cultures*), which make up the second and third sentences; all are associated with *history and Canada*.

By contrast, the relative brevity of the alternative cluster bespeaks the narrowness of the vision with which it is associated. *Canadian government, enforce, monolithic, and excludes* all isolate the point of view which is associated with *nostalgia* and a *simple past*, both of which are negated by *that never really was*, thereby equating the conservative view of history with the effacement of real history. Moreover, both *nostalgia* and *simple past* are made consubstantial with *nationalistic, militaristic, and racist*, strongly implying that a desire to return to the values of the "old" Canada involves at least tacitly wishing away the people who make modern Canada complex. Significantly, if conservative history excludes whatever facts and experiences complicate its nostalgia for the pre-forensic, we find another symbolic merger occurring, paradoxically through an act of rhetorical division in the concept of exclusion itself, since *exclusion* has already been made consubstantial with those *facts and experiences* which the government's discourse has effectively banned from the nation's *simple past*. By contrast, *exclusion*, along with *repression* and *exploitation*, is consubstantial with *ideas, labour, and cultures* as part of a genuinely national history which, by virtue of being *complicated, encourage[s] everyone to question, and thereby to contribute to what it means to be a citizen of Canada*.

The secular prayer in which the authors of the *People's Citizenship Guide* effectively join their voices with the critics of the 1812 initiative "coaches an attitude" which resists the cultural lag which the government's nostalgia promotes, by encouraging a forensic, transactional attitude towards national identity, in which the ownership of the complicated, the divisive, and the destructive facts of Canadian history ultimately "negates the negation" to transcend mere debunking. As such, it is an effective strategy of resistance against the government's constabulary deployment of the epideictic.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. *Rhetoric*. W. Rhys Roberts, trans. NY: Dover, 2004. Print.
- Boileau, Josée. « Guerre de 1812 – Refaire l'histoire. » *Le Devoir* 19 juin, 2012. Web. 26 Nov 2012.
- Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*. Third edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Print.
- _____. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974. Print.
- _____. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. Print.
- Champion, C.P. "The War that Created Canada". *National Post* Jan 22 2014. Web. 24 January 2014.
- Ford, Catherine. "Extolling War of 1812 foolish." *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* Oct 19, 2011. Web. 3 April 2012.
- Francis, Daniel. *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997. Print.
- Ferguson, Will. *Why I hate Canadians*. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997. Print.
- Garver, Eugene. *Aristotle's Rhetoric: An Art of Character*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. Print.
- Government of Canada. "The War of 1812—The Fight for Canada." (<http://1812.gc.ca/eng/1305743548294/1305743621243>). Web. Last modified 22 June 2012. 7 December 2012.
- Gray, Charlotte. "Reign Maker". *The Walrus* 9:1 (January/February 2012), 34-42. Print.
- Jack, Jordynn. "Kenneth Burke's Constabulary Rhetoric: Sociorhetorical Critique in *Attitudes Toward History*." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38:1 (January 2008), 66-81. Print.
- Jones, Esyllt and Adele Perry, eds. *People's Citizenship Guide – a response to conservative Canada*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011. Print.
- Marche, Stephen. "That Time We Beat the Americans: A citizens' guide to the War of 1812." *The Walrus* 9:2 (March 2012) 24-31. Print.
- Miller, Clyde R. "How to Detect Propaganda." n.d. <<http://writing.colostate.edu>>. Web. 12 April 2012.

- Richler, Noah. *What We Talk About When We Talk About War*. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2012. Print.
- Saunders, Doug. "My ancestors and the worst thing that has ever happened to this country." *Globe and Mail* June 16 2012: F1, 4. Print.
- Simpson, Jeffery. "Let's Not Exalt the Folly of 1812." *Globe and Mail* October 11, 2011. Web. 13 October 2012.
- _____. "Quebec Has Replaced Alberta at the Margins." *Globe and Mail* April 25, 2012. Web. 25 April 2012.
- Taber, Jane and Gloria Galloway. "War of 1812 Fund adds to Harper's Patriotic Initiatives." *Globe and Mail* Sept 28 2011. Web. 2 October 2011.
- Taylor, Peter Shawn. "Damn Yankees are trying to steal our victory in 1812!" *Maclean's* Oct 11, 2011. Web. 26 Jan 2012.
- Theilheimer, Ish. "CBC cuts tied to Conservative Ideology". HarperIndex.ca. May 27, 2009. Web. 5 April 2012.
- Wolfe, Morris. "Tim Buck, Too." *Essays New and Selected*. Toronto: Grub Street Books. n.d. Web. 18 Nov 2013.