

**WORK, CLASS, AND GENDER IN CANADIAN FICTION,
1890s-1920s**

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the representation of working women in popular English-Canadian novels from the 1890s to the 1920s. Drawing upon sociohistorical contexts, this study examines the oft-neglected theme of women's work in Canadian literature. Through sustained, comparative analysis of a sample of popular fiction from this era, I explore the way these novels worked to intervene in, and partially construct, readers' understanding of gender economies surrounding female labour. I also interrogate how far popular literature of the period explored and represented these new opportunities, and to what extent novelists retained a traditional emphasis on the primary role of women as wives and mothers.

More canonical authors such as Nellie McClung, L. M. Montgomery and Grant Allen are considered alongside neglected or obscure authors such as J. G. Sime, Agnes Maule Machar, and Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve to help build a reasonably comprehensive picture of the fictional working woman in this era and her differing cultural and symbolic representations. These texts explore a variety of different forms of female employment ranging from farming and factory work to nursing and typewriting, always considering the representation of women's domestic, unpaid duties alongside their newly acquired economic and cultural roles as working women. By focusing on the representation of less critically-explored forms of female labour, this study offers new insights on the representation of women's work in early Canadian fiction.

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Introduction

Compiled for the World Exhibition of 1900, staged in Paris, by the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (1900), is considered by many to be ‘the first published national portrait of Canadian women’ (Prentice et al 189). The survey, funded by the federal government with entries authored by prominent members of the NCWC offers chapters on topics as diverse as ‘Professions Open to Women,’ ‘The Political Position of Canadian Women,’ and ‘The Industrial Possibilities of Canada,’ as well as statistical tables of women’s wages and employments, and an extensive list of institutions that offered professional degrees open to women. In her Introduction G. Julia Drummond (head of the NCWC at the time) explains the reasoning behind the book’s composition and its role in relation to the exhibition:

owing to lack of space, and also because they felt that the separate classification of women’s work was no compliment to women, but the reverse, there would not be in the Canadian Section any particular space allotted to exhibits of their handiwork; but that in the opinion of the Commissioners, the part of women ... might best be fulfilled by the story of their life and interests told by themselves. (1)

Drummond’s introduction, in acknowledging that ‘separate classification’ was of no benefit when championing women’s work, suggests that men’s and women’s handiworks were displayed alongside one another at the exhibition, implying a level of gender-blindness in the selection, as well as a presumption that ‘women’s work’ was of a similar standard to that produced by men. The *Official Catalogue of the Canadian Section* (1900), confirms that a number of women did in fact contribute examples of farming goods, fruits, textiles, and even a few samples of ‘lime and stone’ (Scott 268) and ‘works of art’ (ibid 83-6).¹ However, I have been unable to find any mention of the NCWC volume in this catalogue, so whether it was indeed present for inspection by exhibition visitors is unclear. Nevertheless, the fact that such a study of female artisanship and achievement was actively supported by the Canadian government is itself significant, and one would assume regardless of whether it was present in Paris, the volume would also have been circulated within Canada itself, raising the status and public awareness of Canadian women’s work.

¹ The gender of contributors is not always clear in the catalogue. Although many entries use ‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs,’ or given names, eg. ‘Annie Louisa Pratt’ (Scott 84), others use only initials, eg. ‘J. E. Molleur’ (Ibid 311), making any conclusive statement on the ratio of male to female contributors impossible.

The editors of *Canadian Women: A History* (1988), touch on this collection's significance only briefly, but emphasise that '*Women of Canada's* program for change was not stated in so many words; it was, rather, implied by the careful chronicling of achievements and remaining challenges' (Prentice et al 189). These 'challenges' can be seen in *Women of Canada* in comments such as those by Henrietta Muir Edwards who bemoans that 'woman is queen in her home and reigns there, but unfortunately the laws she makes reach no further than her domain' (51). Similarly, statements such as the following by Carrie M. Derick illustrate a boldness and pride in female achievement that contemporary readers must surely have found empowering: '[w]ithout aggression, without any noisy obtrusiveness, a few Canadian women by deep thought, by clear vision, or by honest service have prepared the way for those who will follow, and have proved the right of all to work as they are able' (62).

This thesis will argue that the right of women 'to work as they are able,' was a contested and heavily debated issue in turn of the twentieth century Canada. Drawing upon sociohistorical contexts and contemporary materials such as this NCWC volume, this study will focus on the oft-neglected theme of women's work in English Canadian literature. Through analysis of a sample of popular fiction from this era, I will explore the way these novels worked to intervene in, and partially construct, readers' understanding of gender economies surrounding female labour. This thesis does not claim to offer a comprehensive survey of the representation of the working woman in Canadian fiction. Such a study would require far more space than I have available and would have prevented the detailed analysis of individual novels, and comparison of their ideological premises, which form the basis of my critical inquiry. These texts explore a variety of different forms of female labour ranging from farming and factory work to nursing and typewriting, always considering the representation of women's domestic, unpaid duties alongside their newly acquired economic and cultural roles as working women.

The popular novels selected for this project were published between the 1890s and 1920s.² This time period has been chosen as it encapsulates an era of rapid change in the employment opportunities available to women. It will allow me to trace the constantly evolving nature of public opinion surrounding women and their growing presence in the

² This study limits its analysis to texts published before the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929 as this global crisis had drastic consequences for both Canadian employment and the perception and portrayals of labour more generally that this thesis would be unable to explore in appropriate depth.

Canadian workplace and to investigate how this was interpreted in popular literature of the day. The separate spheres ideology of the Victorian era which had stressed that women's proper sphere was *inside* the home remained prominent in this period but as the twentieth century progressed, cultural expectations were repeatedly challenged by both the increased desire and, more significantly, the *necessity* for many women to find work and support themselves. The era also saw women gaining an increasing public visibility through their roles in social reform movements, in the campaign for woman suffrage, and as a reserve army of labour during the First World War. A central question for this thesis will be whether popular literature fully explored and represented these new roles, or whether novelists retained a traditional emphasis on the primary role of women as wives and mothers.

Although this study will maintain a close focus on issues of gender and literary representation, I will avoid privileging gender over other social categories that significantly shape the subjectivities of the worker characters represented in popular novels. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (1995), Anne McClintock argues that 'race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively ... Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways. In this sense, gender, race and class can be called articulated categories' (5). It is thus important to remember in any literary study that 'no social category exists in privileged isolation; each comes into being in social relation to other categories, if in uneven and contradictory ways. But power is seldom adjudicated evenly – different social situations are overdetermined for race, for gender, for class, or for each in turn' (Ibid 9). Questions of class and gender are often particularly pronounced in the fiction of this period, whilst the question of race, largely absent from the texts themselves given the ascendancy of English-Canadian whiteness in literary works written in this era (a phenomenon discussed in depth later in this chapter), still makes periodic appearances throughout this study, especially when discussing the representation of Irish and First Nations domestics and labourers.

The decision to solely focus on Canadian novels written in English will also allow me to explore the way certain cultural and literary trends crossed the Atlantic and the Canada/US border and how these were adapted and reconceptualised in the literature of this period to

appeal to a Canadian readership.³ I am also very interested in the cultural construction of a distinctly Canadian breed of 'British' whiteness in this era of intense settlement and immigration, when the previously dominant figure of the English emigrant became threatened by the rapid influx of immigrants to Canada at the start of the twentieth century, many of whom were not of white, western European origin. For these reasons, I felt it necessary to exclude French-Canadian literature from this period from my study, though it is important to stress that some of the novelists under examination (notably J. G. Sime) still chose to set their novels in French-Canadian locales and depict Quebecois characters in their stories.

It is also important to note that this study will explore representations of working women by both male and female authors. Whilst this will allow for an exploration of the potential differences in the portrayal of female labour between authors of different sexes, this decision was in fact undertaken to ensure a more accurate appraisal of popular literature of this period, as this remained an era when many of the most prominent authors were male. Nevertheless, in *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel* (1999), Arlene Young bemoans the 'distressing irony' that

it was men, rather than women authors, who first succeeded in convincingly portraying women who freed themselves from the conventions of femininity. But it was, perhaps, inevitable. Women, like members of the lower middle class, have only a marginal status in Victorian culture; consequently, women who wrote felt themselves and the heroines they created too vulnerable to withstand the censure of the dominant social ideology and its orthodox code of femininity. (155)

In Britain, male authors were responsible for some of the most controversial depictions of the both the New Woman and the working girl. As Young outlines, their privileged status as *male* authors gave them the freedom to write on women's struggles from a position of authority; their critiques of the predicament of the working woman and the conditions that caused her oppression could be read more as cultural surveys (mimicking the social investigators of the nineteenth century) rather than outright challenges to existing power structures. Similarly, male authors' activism on behalf of women could be justified from a

³ These phrase 'Canadian readership' here is partially misleading as the majority of these novels were in fact marketed to a more international readership (largely American and British), but this point will be discussed in more depth below in the section on "'Canadianness' and Popular Fiction,' and should not prevent me from uncovering how these texts would have been received in Canada regardless of the publishers' intended audience.

paternalistic position of concern and care for the nation's female population, thereby neutralising any potential dissent and militancy *among women*.

Since this thesis focuses on the popular literature of a century ago, some of the texts under examination in this study are reasonably obscure to modern critics and out of print. Where possible I will provide an account of the stature of the selected authors during the era they wrote in, though it should be noted that a few of these novelists (notably Gertrude Arnold) remain largely undiscussed in Canadian literary criticism. More canonical authors such as Nellie McClung, L. M. Montgomery and Grant Allen will be considered alongside neglected or obscure authors such as J. G. Sime, Agnes Maule Machar, and Jessie Kerr Lawson to help build a reasonably comprehensive picture of the fictional working woman in this era and her differing cultural and symbolic representations.

Two works which have had a strong influence on the focus and scope of this project are Lindsey McMaster's *Working Girls In The West: Representations of Wage-Earning Women* (2008) and Carolyn Strange's *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (1995). Both of these studies address the representational possibilities of the working girl and the ways she was adopted within the popular imagination of the day as both a symbol of modernity and progress and also, even more significantly, as a cautionary figure, utilised by authors and reformers alike to emphasise the dangers of female workers' newfound autonomy in the rapidly urbanising and industrialised workplace. Strange's study takes a more historical and sociological approach – focusing on the popular media, criminal records and social conduct handbooks – while McMaster's analysis remains one of the only studies of the figure of the working girl to consider her *literary* representation in any depth or detail. Given McMaster's focus on 'the West' and her decision to limit her discussion of fictional representations to only one chapter of her book, I considered that a more extensive study of working women in the literature of this period was long overdue. In particular, there is a need for an analysis extending beyond 'the West' to offer a survey on a national scale of this theme and its potential for dissonant and conflicting portrayals across the North American continent.

McMaster's study opens with a description of the 'working girl' as 'a figure rich in representational possibility – a new inhabitant of a modern urban scene that suggested imminent transformation in gender roles and Canadian society' (4). She swiftly underlines that these 'transformations' were largely considered to be detrimental to Canadian society at

the turn of the twentieth century, '[y]oung working women ... [seeming] to embody all that was unnatural and unnerving about modern times: the disintegration of the family, the independence of women, and the promiscuity of city life' (Ibid 2). The problematic nature of the working girl was largely tied to her gender. Whilst men had long been depicted as workers and breadwinners, the cultural and societal expectations of women, encased in a 'reassuring narrative of marital and domestic completion,' did not leave much room for the newly emerging figure of the working woman, especially when her very presence in literature (and in real life) undermined these 'reassuring narratives' by offering 'whole new trajectories for women in the industrialising nation' outside of marriage and childbearing (Ibid 4). The relationship between women and their work was therefore under constant negotiation and contestation. As McMaster succinctly summarises, '[w]hereas men could easily, almost automatically, inhabit the part of the worker, with the rights and recognition that accompanied the position, the roles of the woman and worker were constructed in opposition – almost as antithetical – to each other' (Ibid 8-9).

McMaster has commented on the fact that the working girl herself is an elusive figure, usually found in the 'often marginalised forms of issue-oriented social realism or romantic melodrama' (Ibid 12). For McMaster, this presents a potential stumbling block to direct social commentary by authors who chose to adopt this new fictional construct as 'a characteristic conflict emerged between representing women as useful, necessary, and valued workers and perceiving them instead as icons of romance and domesticity' (Ibid 24). Indeed, many of the novels under discussion in this study open with heroines firmly focused on their careers and a newfound autonomy expressed through their work, only for these concerns to become largely sidelined in the narratives and replaced by elements of more traditional romance or melodrama. However, as will be discussed in more detail below, the fact that these problematic, assertive working women were presented with such regularity in the most popular, mainstream novels of this era is itself telling. There was undeniably a certain glamour surrounding the subversive figure of the working girl in this era, even if she was almost always safely contained back inside the private sphere by the novels' close. Her popularity throughout this period suggests a desire on the part of female readers to imagine – however fleetingly – alternate destinies for themselves outside the strict boundaries of turn-of-the-century social propriety: a need which the literature under examination in this study clearly fostered.

McMaster also draws attention to a clear divide in narrative representations of the working girl when crossing the 49th parallel: '[m]any American writers seized upon the working girl as a heroine through which to explore the dubious social repercussions of modernity, but Canadian writers were hesitant to address this female harbinger of change' (Ibid 44). I would largely agree with McMaster's assessment here, as this hesitation helps to explain why the figure of the working girl remains in large part a trope within the Canadian literature of this period: a temporary fluctuation in the heroine's subject position before she is safely reclassified as wife and mother by the novel's conclusion. The early Canadian canon therefore lacks works equivalent to those produced in the United States in this era, most prominently novels such as Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Dorothy Richardson's *The Long Day* (1905),⁴ but I would nevertheless argue that the very fact that the cultural imagination within Canada was not yet receptive to such open engagement with social realism in regard to the working girl is itself intriguing. What was it about the Canadian public consciousness that prevented active engagement in the nation's literature with the very real women who were flooding the Canadian factories, offices and high streets?

W. H. New has argued that '[t]he general resistance to "city themes" [in Canadian literature] was perhaps a refusal to recognise social inequities in Canada, perhaps part of a continuing rejection of women's newly visible role in literature and (urban) politics. The city was in some sense figuratively theirs, just as received versions of "Nature" were extensions of male myths of control' (*History* 140). The troubling presence of increasing numbers of single women working in cities, and the potential perils such work placed upon female propriety forms the central focus of Strange's *Toronto's Girl Problem*, which explores how '[t]he country's first working girls were its pioneer urbanites in an era when less than one-quarter of Canadians lived in large towns or cities' (3-4). This inequality between populations in urban and rural areas helps us to understand how the working girl became a figure of potential suspicion and scorn as she was living a lifestyle considered foreign (and thus potentially dangerous) to the majority of Canadians in this period. As Strange outlines, '[w]orking girls manifestly violated behavioural norms set out for marriageable women, not so much because of the work they performed but because of the social conditions in which they worked' (Ibid 4). Indeed, the main concern over young women who flocked to the cities

⁴ Dorothy Richardson was a middle-class woman from Iowa who when compelled to find work in a factory in New York, chose to relate her experiences of this work in her fictionalised, semi-autobiographical novel *The Long Day: The Story of a New York Working Girl, As Told By Herself*. She should not be confused here with the prominent British author Dorothy Richardson who was also writing in this era.

to find work was not over their new employments, but rather over their newly acquired *leisure time*.

As Strange persuasively articulates, '[w]hether flocking to lakeside amusement resorts or window shopping along Yonge Street, their unselfconscious public presence was a vivid reminder that they did not adhere to the traditional norms of restraint imposed upon single women' (Ibid 6). In moving to the cities, these women thus attained "free time": a phrase largely unheard of in rural or farm settlements where almost all the waking hours were needed in order to complete the work duties of the farm and homestead, and where outside entertainments were few and far between. These women working in urban areas were thus conspicuous not only for their independence and autonomy in moving to the cities alone to find work, but also in their leisure-time pursuits, frequenting shows, visiting bars and restaurants alone, and even, most distressingly for conservative commentators, socialising with men unchaperoned. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that Strange's study focuses on cultural perceptions of the working girl and her perilous engagement with the conspicuous leisure pursuits of the city. In reality, 'the vast majority of wage-earning women in late nineteenth-century Toronto were neither dilettantes toiling for pin money nor bold career women: they were highly exploited workers for whom independence was more likely to be a burden than an opportunity' (Ibid 25).

Given these concerns over the living and working conditions in urbanising areas, it is unsurprising that 'in her own time, the working girl's political and economic marginality in urban life endowed her with enormous cultural relevance, for contemporary observers saw in her struggles the troubling side-effects of industrial capitalism' (Ibid 3). Indeed, much of the social reform literature of this era focuses on the working girl as a victim of both economic and sexual exploitation, easily susceptible to the pleasures and dangers of the city, never more than one step from the fall into prostitution and moral and financial ruin. However, as McMaster argues, '[a]lthough journalists and social reformers of the day voiced concern about the plight of working women, it would seem that literature directed at the middle-class literary audience was not expected to foreground social injustice too insistently' (45). It is therefore important to draw distinctions between the social reform literature of this era, with its extensive demonising of the city and its potential perils, and the fiction of the day, which often drew on these themes of potential danger and corruption in order to supply moments of melodrama and dramatic tension rather than to help underscore serious critiques of the rapidly urbanising nation and its impact on the growing female workforce.

Finally, it is important to note that this thesis offers a more nuanced definition of the working woman or “working girl” than that offered by McMaster’s study. McMaster’s definition of the “working girl” ‘does not depend so much on specific class or economic categories (although these are still relevant) as much as it does on the representational agendas that allowed a variety of wage-earning women to figure as “working girls” in the popular imagination and the texts of the time’ (Ibid 8). Whilst this study will likewise focus on the ‘representational agendas’ that help characterise women and their work in the novels under examination, it will also consistently draw attention to the impact that class divisions, and cultural expectations about these classes, have on the fictional portrayal of working women. Although the chapters of this project largely divide varying female professions by class – farm work and domestic labour, the urban working class, and the professionalisation of women’s work – it will draw attention throughout to moments of social mobility, cross-class cooperation or resistance as presented in the literature of the period. The purpose of this is to investigate whether the working girl was in large part a representative figure free of ‘specific class or economic categories,’ or whether her depiction remained firmly grounded in culturally-expected modes of class identification and affiliation.

One of the most popular cultural myths of this era, and one that the literature of the period largely endorsed, was that of Canada as a classless society. Offering a fresh start to anyone regardless of their past, Canada was presumed to be free from the entrenched social hierarchies of the British class system. McMaster has argued that this myth is largely responsible for ‘curtail[ing] class commentary’ and helps explain the exclusion of social problem fiction from the Canadian canon (53). However, when exploring representations of work and labour in this period and the rise of the labour novel, it is important to remember that this phenomenon was indeed largely a myth. The majority of jobs were still assigned a societal value relative to pay and the profession’s perceived status, and the desire for social mobility was thus still predominant – although the fantasy that such mobility was easier to achieve in Canada than other parts of the Empire remained prevalent well into the twentieth century.

In *Industry and Empire* (1968), Eric Hobsbawm outlines how in the late nineteenth century, ‘[t]he safest way of distinguishing oneself from the labourers was to employ labour oneself’ (85). It is thus important to pay attention to the role class plays on both sides of the employer/employee relationship, as employers were often revealed to rely heavily on their employees to reinforce their superior status, just as workers or servants might seek a more

prestigious employer in order to improve their own position in the hierarchy. Class is also heavily inflected by gender relations as, in the words of Pat and Hugh Armstrong, '[p]eople experience class not just as individuals in unequal productive relations that are divided by both sex and class, but also as members of household units characterised by unequal relations between the sexes' (*Theorising* 75). Women therefore did not experience class in the same way as their male counterparts. Their employment opportunities were more limited as they were sex-typed into "female" professions, and the majority of women ultimately gave up their paid labour to work inside the home supporting their husbands and raising a family: '[t]heir status was derivative. Their class was determined, as was their livelihood, by their husbands' (Kinnear *Female* 5).

When analysing questions of class and distinctions in social and economic circumstances between labourers, we must also be careful not to elide or ignore 'poverty narratives.' In *Remnants of Nation* (2001), Roxanne Rimstead defines poverty narratives as 'cultural sites where identities are constructed and negotiated rather than merely reflected, cultural sites of struggle between hegemonic and counter-cultural discourses' (4). For Rimstead, poverty narratives in relatively wealthy countries such as Canada, 'often unfold a national imaginary which locates the poor outside the imagined community on the fringes as fragments of nation' (Ibid 7). The tradition of describing the poor as a "nation-within-a-nation" has its origins in eighteenth-century Britain, and became especially prominent in the nineteenth century when the rise of social investigation led to the first real understanding of the extent of poverty both in Britain and its outlying imperial posts. The poor became depicted as strangers within their own homelands, as a "race apart," who held back the progressive potential of an industrialising nation (Ibid 9). In detailing the extent of the nation's poverty, social investigators and philanthropists were attempting to draw attention to those members of their society who were normally sidelined if not outright ignored. However, Rimstead explores the ways such 'gestures to include the voices of the poor often subtly reinscribe cultural erasure by presenting the poor as objects of study within somewhat rigid conventions that stress obscurity and rescue' (Ibid 25). Therefore, those novels under study that deal with questions of philanthropy and social improvement must be examined critically to uncover the extent to which they draw genuine attention and debate to the impoverished of the day, or whether they are instead complicit in this process of 'cultural erasure.'

As with questions of class, the gender-based implications of poverty cannot be overlooked. As Rimstead cautions ‘one standard way of writing poor women out of male-centred novels about the poor and the working class is to have them descend through low-wage jobs (waitress, domestic, dancehall girl) to fall eventually into prostitution and out of the story’ (Ibid 32). This tendency to view poor, working class women as more susceptible to the fall into prostitution is remarkably prominent throughout the literature of this era, and well into the twentieth century. It will be explored in more depth in the chapter on the urban working class, to ascertain how such stigmas became a key literary trope of the period. This is essential to any study of class- and gender-based inequities as ‘[w]hen we fail to question stereotypes, dominant discourse, and textual conventions of portraying the poor, we may be complicit in the symbolic violence that normalises the exclusion of the poor [and women more generally] in market society’ (Ibid 4). It is therefore important to approach these texts with ‘oppositional reading practices’ (Ibid 26) to allow us as critics to explore both the ways these texts worked to reinforce the status quo but also to consciously (or perhaps even subconsciously) open up interstices for potential negotiation and disassembling of these societal givens.

Women’s Work: Waged Labour and Unpaid Labour in the Home

In their study *Theorizing Women’s Work* (1990), Canadian sociologists Armstrong and Armstrong bemoan the ways in which ‘[e]xplanations of male employment have often been generalised to apply to all workers’ (14). This critical tendency elides the time-consuming, unpaid domestic work many female workers undertake alongside their paid labour. Armstrong and Armstrong’s study redefines “work” ‘to include both domestic and wage labour, because work is how we provide for most of our daily needs; because work consumes much of our energy; because work has a powerful influence on our health, our relations, our possibilities, and our understanding of the world’ (Ibid 17). This study will employ a similar definition of “work” when analysing literary texts as, by drawing attention to both women’s paid and *unpaid* labours inside and outside the home, we can explore the extent to which these modern debates over women’s labour were already under discussion at the turn of the century and how these arguments developed across the period to reflect the changing political, social, and cultural status of the working woman.

In 1891, only 11 per cent of Canadian women over 15 were categorised as “employed,” a statistic that rose to 14 per cent by 1911 (Prentice et al 142). In real numbers,

the women in paid labour increased by 41,959 or 21.4 per cent between 1891 and 1901, with most of these workers congregating in urban areas. However, it is important to note that many of the women who worked in the home – as farmhands, seamstresses, and shopkeepers – were excluded from the census as having “no occupation,” meaning that the numbers of women working in this era was likely much larger, though the extent to which they received financial rewards for their exertions varied widely. Indeed, in central and eastern Canada even those female workers who were paid for their labours usually averaged wages that were only 55-60 per cent of those earned by men carrying out similar tasks (Ibid 127). This was largely justified by the assumption that women were not self-supporting or supporting dependents, but maintained financially by families or husbands, leading to the common preconception that female employees were working for “pin money” to spend on frivolities and luxuries (Frager and Patrias 35). This wage differential is even more striking when you consider that almost half of these women were working as “professionals” in industries such as teaching, nursing and the clerical sector. By 1901, one quarter of all employed females held white-collar jobs; this had doubled to nearly one half by 1921, meaning that employment for women offered not only the prospect of a regular (if limited) wage, but also a chance at social mobility (Ibid 55).

The majority of women from the working and lower-middle classes found employment in the country’s burgeoning industrial sector, working in factories or mills. Although technological advances, particularly the increasing reliance on industrial machinery, allowed women to undertake roles previously considered unthinkable for feminine hands, it is important to remember – as Wayne Roberts explains – that ‘[f]ar from desexing the opportunity structure, the use of technical innovations capitalised on and reinforced the supposedly hereditary “feminine” virtues. It was said that while machines did not require muscular strength, they relied rather on “alertness and exactness of attention and constant application”’ (*Honest* 8). Such work was considered ideal for more delicate and nimble female hands. Whilst many women relished the novelty of such tasks, even in spite of their repetitiveness, Roberts has argued that such a movement away from the domestic sphere only served to reinforce their subordination as ‘[w]omen emigrated from the traditionally more self-sufficient household economy only to encounter occupational ghettos designed to maximise the abilities of their domestic inheritance in a factory setting’ (Ibid 9). Indeed, the ghettoization of women into the lowest-level positions in factories and mills led to a certain degree of ambivalence about their employment. Whilst many women enjoyed the freedoms

associated with earning a wage, and the right to use their free time as they wished, the low wages and poor working conditions in these environments meant that many women frequently changed jobs in the search for better pay, whilst others only “stuck it out” until they could secure a potential husband and return to the security of the domestic sphere. Indeed, as the editors of *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History* (1997) outline, ‘[n]ecessity, not general belief in their right to a job, sent women to work’ (216).

The segregation of the working woman into the lowest-paid, low-level and menial positions within an industry has long been justified, in Armstrong and Armstrong’s words, ‘on the basis of women’s physical size or shape, their “natural” skills or incapacities, their maternal instincts or emotional makeup, their weakness of strength in bearing children’ (*Theorizing* 21). However, such justifications are arguably ‘socially structured rather than biologically determined’ (Ibid), as women throughout the centuries have proven that in times of dire emergency or need that they can fulfill almost any labour deficit, regardless of its gender classification: as women did during the First World War when they acted as a literal ‘reserve army of labour’ (Ibid 72). Indeed, as Armstrong and Armstrong outline in their earlier study *The Double Ghetto: Canadian Women and Their Segregated Work* (1978), the sex segregation that women experience within the domestic unit is merely mirrored and reinforced when they enter the industrial unit. These divisions are based not on scientific evidence or statistical proof of female proficiency (or deficiency) in certain industries, but rather these ‘sex typed jobs’ (14) are assigned ideologically: ‘[c]ulture generates ideologies which define masculine and feminine work. These ideologies, internalised through the socialisation processes of patriarchal societies, channel men and women into sex-specific jobs’ (Ibid 15).

In *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (1987), a study of early twentieth-century American feminism, Nancy Cott argues that ‘[m]ale professions fending off female interlopers suggested that they considered the presence of women colleagues above a certain point incompatible with their own vision of professional excellence, a threat to professional esteem. Unambiguous male predominance became an implicit and essential condition of continued professional identity and distinction’ (223). Concerns over the presence of female ‘interlopers’ and their subversive potential to destabilise existing employment structures ensured that ‘[i]n places where men and women worked alongside each other the sexual division of labour required elaborate ideological and structural bolstering to ensure its preservation’ (Strom 222). Understanding the ways in which this sexual division of labour

was ideologically structured and reinforced is particularly useful to critics exploring representations of fictional working women across North America. We can then explore whether these ideologies were either consciously or subconsciously reinforced by novelists of the period in their depictions of female labour, or whether, conversely, authors may have sought to work against such culturally defined strictures to posit sites and moments for potential agency, or even revolt, on the part of female labourers. Throughout these analyses it will also be necessary to pay attention to ways in which these texts and their authors deliberately gender the tasks their female workers undertake in these narratives. Are the labours undertaken by women always feminised? Or are there perhaps moments when female heroines are seen to enjoy their ability to take on more “masculine” roles? Did authors perhaps feel the need to reinforce these characters’ essential femininity in other ways in order to counterbalance the increased presence of women workers in the more masculine spheres of industry?

The growing cultural acceptance of women’s employment throughout this era opened new fictional possibilities to authors that would have been deemed unthinkable (or at least outrageous) fifty years previously. As Young articulates in her study, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel*:

[t]here is no doubt, however, that the gradual opening up of real employment and financial opportunities for women in the late nineteenth-century opened up new narrative possibilities as well. The fact that women could support themselves respectably by working outside the home presented the truly independent woman – the woman whose story need not be determined by male fantasies – as a viable fictional option. (130)

However, this comment focuses on British fiction and may have limited applicability in a Canadian context. Canada was still a predominantly agricultural society up until the very end of the nineteenth century, which meant that Canadian women – particularly those in the prairie provinces – would have had fewer opportunities for employment outside the home than would women in any part of England at this time. The developments Young refers to would not have become prevalent in Canada until the early twentieth century, although Canadian readers of British fiction in this earlier era may have still have felt inspired by, and thus have aspired to, the possibilities already open to their sisters across the Atlantic. However, for all the narrative possibilities the burgeoning population of working women may have presented to Canadian and British authors, these novelists would still have had to navigate the overriding cultural expectations of female propriety and respectability that still

limited the opportunities for working women to ‘get ahead’ in the new labour market. As Sharon Hartman Strom argues in her study *Beyond The Typewriter* (1992), ‘[t]he desire to control women went beyond the desire to supervise their work; it extended to the containment of both the female body and the feminine influence’ (222). If a woman chose to put her career first and appeared ambitious she faced a classic double bind: ‘[i]f unmarried she was a freak of nature and therefore doomed to be a social pariah, and if married, socially acceptable but a reaffirming demonstration of the inherent weakness of woman and the folly of wasting good positions or special training on her’ (Ibid 358).

In *A Female Economy* (1998), Mary Kinnear reinforces the necessity for female labour studies to focus on endeavours both inside and outside the household as ‘[w]ork in the home was almost universally performed by women and must therefore take central place in an account of women’s work’ (62). Analyses of women’s housework duties and their representation in Canadian texts will thus form another key facet of this study. This will allow for an investigation of the extent to which housework was idealised (and even at times, romanticised) in an effort to reinforce the rhetoric of the “angel in the house”⁵ and the separate spheres ideology, both of which argued that women’s rightful place was in the private sphere of the home, rather than the public sphere of employment. However, the ethereal image of the angel rather obscures the arduousness of the tasks many women had to perform, which included not only childbearing, organising the household, cooking and cleaning (unless the family were well off enough to hire servants), but also, in cases where a family business was at stake, offering their services and labour for free in their partner’s commercial ventures as well. As Alison Prentice et al. make clear, ‘[m]ost of their work was unpaid, absorbed into the family economy; but even when irregular or unpaid, it was vital’ (108).

Indeed, it is important to note, that a woman’s ‘connection to the market and to the “public” has been assumed to derive from her connection to her husband’ (Armstrong and Armstrong *Theorising* 14). These gender assumptions have been used by material feminist critics such as Christine Delphy to argue that marriage serves as a contract into unpaid labour. Such debates have origins in the period under discussion in this study, as the need for recognition of female unpaid labour was hotly contested in the 1880s by prominent figures

⁵ The term ‘the angel in the house’ was first coined by Coventry Patmore in 1854 in his poem of the same name, and became synonymous with the image of the ‘ideal woman’ as a one whose duties extended first and foremost to the care of her husband, her family and the maintenance of a well-ordered, respectable household.

such as Friedrich Engels who argued in his seminal treatise *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884) that '[the wife] differs from the ordinary courtesan only in that she does not hire out her body, like a wage worker, on piecework, but sells it into slavery once for all' (71). At the fin-de-siècle many American and European feminists took up this rhetoric of female "slavery" and "bondage" to argue against the institution of marriage itself, and this study will therefore need to explore the power dynamics of marriage as depicted in these novels. I will investigate whether marriage is always presented as a reward and "happy ending" for the heroine, or whether some of these authors may have subverted reader expectations to suggest moments of compromise, negotiation, or even outright revolt and refusal in their characters' journeys towards presumed marital bliss.

Armstrong and Armstrong have argued that housework, 'because it is outside the money economy in a society which determines value on the basis of money, is valueless' (*Double* 136). Whilst this study will not attempt a materialist analysis of women's work, the work of material feminists such as Delphy can still offer insights which are particularly useful to critics focusing on the distinctions between women's paid and unpaid labour. In her study *Close to Home* (1984), Delphy argues that 'patriarchy is the system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, [and] that this system has an economic base, and that this base is the domestic mode of production' (18). As she later continues:

[societies] depend on the unpaid labour of women for domestic services and child-rearing. These services are furnished within the framework of a particular relationship to an individual (the husband). They are excluded from the realm of exchange and consequently have no value. They are unpaid ... The husband's only obligation, which is obviously in his own interest, is to provide for his wife's basic needs, in other words he maintains her labour power. (Ibid 60)

Thus, for Delphy, those women working in the domestic mode of production are not paid, but rather *maintained*. This "maintenance" is thus dependent on the services she provides to her husband and family: '[t]hey depend on the will of the employer, her husband ... Her keep does not depend on her work, but on the wealth and good will of her husband' (Ibid 70). Indeed, Delphy argues that the reason farmers were so keen to take wives was because – through their status as wives rather than farmhands – women would be obligated to carry out both domestic and manual farm duties without the need for the farmer to provide remuneration. The security of marriage and prospects of a future family were presented as a reward in themselves. However, as Delphy compellingly articulates, '[t]he [same] work

acquires value – is remunerated – as long as the woman furnishes it to people to whom she *is not related or married*’ (Ibid 95). Therefore, the interstices between paid and unpaid domestic labour must be closely analysed as the fact that domestic servants were remunerated for services many housewives provided for free might help explain why domestic service remained one of the least desirable and financially unrewarding professions in this era.

Given their lack of economic or material value, housekeeping, mothering and other housewifely duties were thus given an alternative “value” through what McClintock dubs this era’s “cult of domesticity.” For McClintock ‘domesticity denotes both a *space* (a geographic and architectural alignment) and a *social relation to power*’ (34). Thus, in McClintock’s view the cult of domesticity acted as a way for the emerging middle-class (in both the imperial centre and emerging colonial societies) to rationalise and reinforce their superior cultural value in relation to other classes through a clear demarcation of domestic space: ‘[d]omestic space was mapped as a hierarchy of specialised and distinct boundaries that needed constant and scrupulous policing’ (Ibid 168).⁶ Women, in their venerated positions as wives and mothers, were thus given new value, ensuring the status and prestige of a household through socially defined ideals of “appropriate” housekeeping and childrearing. Indeed, given the intense ideological reverence placed on women’s domestic roles it is perhaps unsurprising so many women were keen to give up their paid employment to enter the less financially-rewarding, but more socially venerated duties of an unpaid wife and mother. As Veronica Strong-Boag succinctly states in her study of Canadian working women in the 1920s, ‘[w]omen had careers in motherhood; at best, they had jobs in the market place’ (‘Girl’ 134).

Given this intense cultural pressure placed on women in this period, and the superior status offered to many women who chose to place marriage and family above employment, we must be careful not to dismiss or belittle decisions taken by these novels’ heroines that may not sit well with more modern feminist sensibilities as, in the words of Julia McQuillan and Julie Pfeiffer, ‘[f]eminism does not necessarily condemn conventionally “female” choices’ (29). As critics we must avoid slipping into a degree of complacency regarding the pre-eminence of paid employment over those domestic duties in the home undertaken willingly and contentedly by many women. As Monika Hilder discusses in her recent exploration of domesticity in *Anne of Green Gables*:

⁶ It is important to note here that McClintock’s study focuses on nineteenth-century British society; the ‘middle class’ she refers to arguably emerged later in Canada, in the early twentieth century.

[b]ecause we wrestle with a more fragmented view of domesticity and gender informed by an either/or mentality, a framework that limits women, some critics rigidly value domesticity as a lesser form of labour. But nineteenth century female writers such as Montgomery and Stowe held a more holistic view, a both/and perspective that honoured and considered domesticity as an ethos apart from gender and therefore a site for human empowerment. (213)

Indeed, as Misao Dean argues in her own study, many of the literary heroines in early Canadian fiction 'paradoxically achieve independent selfhood through conforming to the domestic ideal' (*Practising* 109). By recreating the sociohistorical and ideological contexts these novels' readers would have engaged with, I can therefore explore how complicit these novelists were in reinforcing the cultural expectations of this era, or whether they chose to subtly critique or subvert them.

Another cultural phenomenon of great significance in this period was the leisured middle class wife. As Judith Rowbotham outlines:

it seemed increasingly a mark of rising social status and undoubted wealth if a man could afford the luxury of supporting the women of his family as 'ladies,' without needing their physical contribution to his daily production. More and more, therefore, successful industrialists, merchants and members of the professions limited the active roles hitherto played by the female sector of their families, particularly the roles by their daughters, in order to imitate an upper-class elite. (15)

However, whilst the ability to support a leisured wife was considered a significant status symbol among the prosperous middle classes, McClintock has convincingly argued that this very prospect was more aspiration than reality at the turn of the twentieth century. The assumption that the "typical" middle-class woman could employ 'at least three' domestic servants is not borne out in the employment statistics from this period, as in McClintock's words, '[l]ittle regard has been given to the representational discrepancy between Victorian (largely upper middle-class) portrayals of women and the myriad, middling domestic situations that took contradictory shape across the span of the century' (161). Given that most middle-class women could therefore not afford the domestic labour necessary to be truly idle, they instead worked tirelessly to conceal all signs of their own domestic duties: '[a] wife's vocation was not only to create a clean and productive family but also to ensure the skilled erasure of every *sign* of her work. Her life took shape around the contradictory imperative of labouring while rendering her labour invisible. Her success as a wife depended on her skill in the art of both working and appearing not to work' (Ibid 162). Thus, in McClintock's reading

of the middle-class household, 'idleness was less the absence of work than a conspicuous labour of leisure' (Ibid 162).

This 'character role' (Ibid 161) of the leisured middle-class wife is particularly well-realised in Madge Macbeth's novel *Shackles* (1926). Although this novel will not be discussed in depth within this study for reasons of space, a brief examination here of its central themes opens a variety of questions which will be repeatedly explored throughout this survey of Canadian fiction's working women. *Shackles* tells the story of a long-suffering housewife and budding novelist Naomi Lennox, who longs for a "room of one's own" (in true Virginia Woolf style) to work on her latest novel, *The Book of the Hour*. However, with the constant interruptions of her husband and the fulfilment of her domestic duties – the family cannot afford a housemaid and only manage to stay financially afloat through the extra money she makes writing essays and short stories for magazines – she finds her writing repeatedly suffering:

[b]y the time tidiness has been restored, Naomi's creative impulse has been staled and her energy dissipated. Thoughts had become fogged. Words – those precious draperies that should wrap an idea with grace and elegance – deserted her; or they fell from her patient machine like lumps of putty that no amount of manipulation could transform into a becoming mantle. (Macbeth 76)

Naomi's problems arise largely from her husband and her uncle's inability to understand the amount of work involved in the upkeep of their household. As Macbeth's narrator informs us: 'Naomi performed her household tasks so cheerfully and with such apparent lack of effort that she scarcely seemed busy at all. Hers was the art that concealed art, so to say' (Ibid 97). This concealment of her domestic labour mirrors the phenomenon discussed by McClintock in *Imperial Leather*; Naomi seemingly performing her role so well that even her own family buy into her 'conspicuous labour of leisure' (162).

Naomi bemoans the belittlement of her authorial endeavours by her husband Arnold in a conversation with fellow married authoress Shireen Dey, who tells her '[y]ou do too many other things' (Macbeth 109). Naomi agrees with Shireen but lacks her financial security and understanding husband. Nevertheless, even in the Dey household, a gender imbalance is clearly required in order to achieve the environment necessary for Shireen to spend her days working at her writing:

[t]he Dey *ménage* was not unlike the echo of an ancient matriarchate in which the division of labour between the two sexes was reversed. What housekeeping was done fell to Julius's share. Had there been children, he would have been their nurse and companion. Shireen not only earned their living, but took the position that is usually accorded to a man in the present-day civilisation. Everything revolved around *her* needs and desires. Her work was paramount. Julius felt no humiliation in serving her to the obliteration of his own personality. He was the wife, she the husband. (Ibid 112-13)

The Deys have the money to employ servants to help with the housework, whilst Julius himself organises his wife's contracts and royalties (thus still maintaining a degree of control over her) whilst leaving her free to write her novels. However, the suggestion remains that two personalities cannot exist as equals within a domestic household. Thus, for Macbeth, even when financial security is assured, one member of the partnership must willingly allow their "obliteration" so that the other can be creatively nourished and supported.

Naomi's struggle comes to a head midway through the novel when she realises that '[Arnold's] utter lack of comprehension where the routine of the house is concerned ... his kingly acceptance of my labours without the remotest conception of what they cost me, and the sublime way in which he takes my cheerful service for granted ... It's all wrong! It isn't fair!' (Ibid 133). However, when she finally summons the courage to discuss this inequity with her husband, she is duly chastised and her writing castigated as a selfish endeavour:

[t]he only justification for life is service – SERVICE – doing needful things for other people. It is that which dignifies housekeeping and, if I may say so, robs your writing of any claim to special consideration. When you order your home, you are serving individuals, the community, and, broadly speaking, the world. When you write little stories, you are serving your vanity, your greed for money, and yourself! (Ibid 147)

The dignity of domestic 'service' is thus reinforced as the ideal of perfect womanhood (in Arnold's eyes at least), and Naomi's writing diminished to the status of 'little stories' without larger cultural or societal impact. However, the mediation of this argument through Macbeth's narrator is clearly designed to draw attention to the inequalities and hypocrisies central to Arnold's arguments, the narrative repeatedly making the reader aware of Arnold's own selfishness when he engages in marital rape, donates a large portion of their income on a whim without consulting Naomi, denies himself hospital care so his wife can minister to him following a severe accident, and even engages in an adulterous affair.

Nevertheless, for all her considerations of various means of escape from her relationship with Arnold – even rejecting a suitor who offers to be her ‘Mr. Gaskell’ in exchange for a ‘spiritual communion’ outside the bonds of marriage (Ibid 158) – Macbeth’s heroine proves herself unable to break her ties to her husband, ending the novel just as she began with her husband interrupting her at her writing desk with the line ‘I’m not going to disturb you ...’ (Ibid 318). It would thus appear that Delphy’s words on the working housewife hold largely true when applied to early twentieth-century fictional heroines: ‘[s]he pays for her freedom to work outside, and to have an independent income, with a double day’s work’ (102). This image of the ‘double workload’ will thus form another part of this study, as whilst many women in this period would have faced a similar struggle to balance the duties of home and workplace, very few of the novels under consideration within this study address these issues in such a straightforward and forthright manner. Indeed, in nearly all instances, the working women in these novels instead choose to give up their occupations upon marriage. Whether such portrayals suggest a level of conservatism in the treatment of female labour in fiction of this period, or whether these novelists were simply aware of the stark realities working women faced in this period will also need to be considered, as will the extent to which these novels manage to successfully portray marriage and children as satisfying compensation for the loss of the economic and personal autonomy that the working girl (in large part) appeared to relish at the turn of the century.

The Single Working Woman: New Girl, New Woman, or Spinster?

Writing in 1916 in an article for *Maclean’s* entitled ‘Speaking of Women,’ Nellie McClung bemoaned the stereotype of the Canadian West as a land of bachelors awaiting eager female immigrants: ‘[o]ne would think, to read the vaporings which pass for articles on the suffrage question, that good reliable husbands will be supplied upon request, if you would only write your name and address plainly and enclose a stamped envelope’ (26). Indeed, many modern historians have refuted the propagandist rhetoric deployed within this period to encourage prairie settlement, by highlighting how many of the “odd women” who emigrated to Canada in search of employment and potential suitors remained single throughout their lifetimes. In Winnipeg in 1916, over 20 per cent of women between the ages of 35 and 64 were single, widowed, or divorced (Prentice et al 154). This statistic may have concealed a much higher number of women living alone, given the difficulty for women of obtaining a divorce. It was not until 1925 that the new Divorce Law gave women the right to divorce upon evidence of adultery, a right given only to men up until that time (Ibid 255). Thus many women in this

period who had been deserted by wayward husbands would still have been classified as “married” despite their real lived status as single women or, more disturbingly to social commentators of this period, single mothers.

In an employment context, single women were expected to work for a few years until they were able to find a husband. Upon marriage, most women would give up their employment to focus their time and energies on their new family. For this reason, many professions, teaching being perhaps the most prominent in this era, instituted a “marriage bar” that compelled women to leave their posts upon marriage. This was largely justified through the aforementioned ‘cult of domesticity,’ but also through the plight of the ‘pore wurrkin’ gurl’ as novelist Bertrand Sinclair described her, a figure of pity who was presumed to have been forced into labour to support herself, and often other dependents. Given such conditions, it was largely seen as selfish for married women to stay in employment and deny other women, and more significantly men, their livelihood. However, there remained the cultural expectation that all “ordinary” women would eventually marry, a fact which made ‘the older single woman an aberration; she was, theoretically, by the age of twenty-five or thirty, supposed to be safely tucked away in a man’s house’ (Strom 394). This logic was used not only to stigmatise the figure of the spinster as well as mature female workers, but also to justify the lack of upward momentum in many of the professions open to women, as there was little point training a woman in a higher-level position if it was presumed she would leave her employer to marry within a few years.

However, it is important to note that ‘female singlehood was a characteristic that brimmed with economic and cultural significance in the early decades of industrial urbanisation’ (Strange and Loo 214). Representations of the single woman in this era fell into many categories and cultural classifications, such as Bachelor Girls, New Girls, New Women, and perhaps most troubling of all, spinsters. These cultural stereotypes will be considered briefly below so that the extent to which these cultural “types” are recreated or alternatively *reinvented* in the literature of this period can be explored in later chapters. Issues of female sexuality were particularly significant in relation to the figure of the single working girl as ‘when a professional woman remained single, her supposed celibacy reinforced her image as an honorary man, whose sexuality was effectively neutered’ (Kinnear *In Subordination* 16). As McMaster has commented, this need for a strong moral compass and veneer of celibacy is reinforced in literature of the period by the tendency for working girls to lack traditional family structures (82) – many are orphaned, or forced to fend for themselves

from an early age – and this lack of parental influence or chaperonage reiterates the need for rigorous morals and purity on the part of the working heroine, given the assumed ravages (economic and social) of the Canadian workplace.

Sally Mitchell's *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915* (1995) offers a persuasive account of the rise of girls' culture in Britain, and will be used here as a critical baseline for the exploration of this culture in a Canadian context. Mitchell argues that '[t]he new girl – no longer a child, not yet a (sexual) adult – occupied a provisional free space. Girls' culture suggested new ways of being, new modes of behaviour, and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women (except in the case of the advanced few)' (3). Continuing this point, Mitchell explores how

[g]irlhood, in its archetypal form, is bounded on each side by home: by parental home on one side, by marital home on the other. In the space between the two family homes – for however many years that space might last – the new girl has a degree of independence (supervised though it might be by the mistress at work or at school). She is freed from the direct rule of her mothers and father, and her independence, though not literally new among the working class, is newly idealised, becoming an icon for girls of all classes. (Ibid 9)

The ideological value of the 'New Girl' is significant here, as she is a key figure in much of the literature of this period. The cross-class appeal of the 'New Girl' is also important given the predominantly middle-class character of the fictional working women under discussion in this study. Whilst working-class women feature in many of the texts, in very few of the novels do these women hold a central role. This reinforces the aspirational image associated with the idea of the young 'professional' working woman, as well as the popularity of the 'New Girl' as a cultural stereotype that readers of all classes were keen to consume.

In her chapter on working girls Mitchell explores the tensions that surrounded the increasing opportunities for young women to enter employment (for however limited a time) before they started their 'adult' lives as wives and mothers. Mitchell outlines that '[t]he concept of the worker as a girl, not a mature woman, removed her from the sexual marketplace, and brought her a new freedom in social and living arrangements' (Ibid 43). The connotations of innocence and purity associated with 'girlhood' thus allowed these young women to enter environments normally considered 'unsuitable' for respectable women, though these new freedoms had a 'corresponding cost': '[t]o think of the worker as a girl is to emphasise lack of maturity, lack of skill, need of supervision, emotional (rather than

intellectual) labour. It encourages separate job categories, impassable barriers to advancement, deskilling, separate pay scales' (Ibid 44). Nevertheless, the increased necessity of women's work across this era (especially given the loss of eligible men during and following the war) meant that many young women were willing to take on the mantle of 'girlhood,' enjoying the freedoms and leisure activities open to working girls, even if such liberties left them trapped in 'girlhood' well into their twenties and thirties. Most intriguingly for this study of working women, Mitchell also argues in *The New Girl* that '[a]s work became part of girls' culture, girlhood was increasingly conceptualised as an age class without reference to economic status' (Ibid 43). Whilst I would agree with Mitchell that 'girlhood' increasingly became viewed as an extended age class that made female employment socially acceptable through its representation as a temporary, preparatory or 'learning' experience, before they undertook their expected womanly duties, I would suggest that economic status still played an important role. Indeed, women of upper-middle and aspiring lower-middle classes took great pains to reinforce their status as 'business women' rather than 'working girls' in order to take advantage of the former label's superior social standing.

The NCWC's *Women of Canada* includes an anonymous contribution, 'Women of Canada – Historical Sketch,' which stresses that '[t]he "new woman" was old in the Republic before she crossed the border to emancipate her Canadian sisters' (13). The ease with which such an admission is made is intriguing given the collection's emphasis on championing Canadian women's achievements and progress, suggesting that even in some of the most outwardly reformist movements, such as the NCWC, the figure of the 'New Woman' was treated with a certain degree of ambivalence and trepidation. This reluctance to adopt the figure is telling given her already widespread notoriety in both Britain and the United States by the turn of the century. The figure of the New Woman emerged in the late nineteenth century, though the term did not gain notoriety and enter the public literary consciousness until 1894, when it was coined by prominent English authors Sarah Grand and Ouida in separate articles in the *North American Review* on the state of modern womanhood (Ledger and Luckhurst 75). The New Woman was a decidedly divisive figure. Her supporters saw her as an intelligent, socially conscious, and often career-driven woman who articulated ambitions outside of motherhood: though she usually still retained a healthy appreciation for maternal virtues (Ibid 76). The New Woman's detractors, conversely, depicted her as mannish and overeducated, usually as either a bad mother or an 'embittered spinster' and

generally lacking ‘all the attributes usually associated with ideal Victorian womanhood’ (Ibid 75).

One of the earliest references to this figure in Canadian literature can be found in Lily Dougall’s *The Madonna of a Day* (1895), the novel’s protagonist Mary Howard announcing early in the novel to a gentleman ‘I am “emancipated,” I am “advanced,” in fact I am the “new woman,” so far as she is not a myth’ (Dougall *Madonna* 17). Indeed, in the same year as Dougall’s novel, Maria Amelia Fytche’s *Kerchiefs to Hunt Souls* (1895) featured a protagonist who unabashedly enjoys the fact that ‘[m]arriage, thank goodness, is not the aim and end of woman’s life in this nineteenth century’ (Fytche 9). Although both these novels arguably use such statements to poke fun at their protagonists and their newly acquired sense of emancipation and social freedoms, such off-hand comments in literature of this period clearly suggest that the rhetoric surrounding the figure of the New Woman had become familiar to Canadians early on, even if Canadian women at the turn of the century were still reluctant to claim such ideals as their own, as the anonymous NCWC author’s comments seem to imply.

In *New Women, New Novels* (1990), Ann Ardis articulates how ‘[a] tremendous amount of polemic was wielded against her [the New Woman] for choosing not to pursue the conventional bourgeois woman’s career of marriage and motherhood. Indeed, for her transgressions against the sex, gender, and class distinctions of Victorian England, she was accused of instigating the second fall of man’ (1). In a Canadian context, this ‘second fall of man’ took on imperial overtones. Fears of racial degeneration, aggravated by the reluctance of women to relinquish new roles in employment to undertake their maternal duties, were exacerbated by Canada’s former colonial status and a desire to prove themselves equal to their British neighbours. Cecily Devereux argues in her work on the links between maternal feminism and the rise of New Imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century that ‘[a]lthough it would be oversimplifying the case to position the New Woman as the epitome of *fin de siècle* feminism, it is clear that she did serve as a focus for antifeminist sentiment precisely because, like the prostitute, she appeared to endanger the strength and security of the Anglo-Saxon race’ (‘New Woman’ 176). Both suffragists and imperialists placed a strong emphasis on the merits of motherhood and employed maternal feminist rhetoric to champion their causes. Canadian novels that dealt with the figure of the New Woman therefore ‘share the problem of how to shape an unacceptable social situation into an acceptable narrative form,’ usually solving this problem by ‘resort[ing] to extraordinary devices to arrive at a printable

resolution' (Gerson *Purer* 146). As mentioned above, New Woman rhetoric was often used early in popular novels dealing with 'the woman question' to show both an awareness of current debates and a scepticism about such viewpoints, a point reinforced by the fact that both heroines in those novels are safely reinstated in a more conservative, heterosexual union by the novels' close. Indeed, this tendency to treat the figure of the New Woman as a problematic figure who must be 'understood' is discussed in great depth by Dean in *Practising Femininity*: '[b]y focusing on women as the problem, New Women novels restate the hierarchy of gender by demanding that women explain themselves to an implicit reader, reinscribing the seemingly "radical" elements of plot and character into a conservative sex/gender system' (60). For Dean, even the most 'radical' texts of the period – such as J. G. Sime's *Sister Woman* (1919) – rely on discourses of women's biological drive towards motherhood and the underlying power of a decidedly conservative inner-self which reinforces the fact that '[w]omen are confined to a sphere of complementarity with men, whereby they come to recognise their authentic selves in service and self-sacrifice' (Ibid 67).

Thus, for critics such as Carole Gerson and Dean, the texts which were most patently marketed as 'New Woman' novels dealing with 'New Woman' concerns were those that ultimately ended up endorsing the most conservative and socially-acceptable forms of Victorian womanhood. The extent to which the texts under examination in this study support or work against such readings will thus need to be considered, as will the extent to which the very labelling of a novel as 'New Woman' may have prevented the novelist from engaging with contemporary issues of Canadian working women in any real substantive way. In fact, Linda Kealey has argued that ultimately '[t]he much talked of "new woman," who promised to alter substantially the shape of women's lives, became identified with the professional woman, whose career aspirations conformed to maternal feminist expectations' ('Introduction' 14).

In the introduction to her study of British gentlewomen's emigration to Canada, titled *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty* (1982), Susan Jackel outlines how

[f]or the middle-class woman, her social standing, her self-respect, her whole provision in life depended on her success in the marriage market, and society was unpitiful in its treatment of those who went unchosen. 'Failed in business' was the cruel phrase used on the genteel spinster, and where marriage was so emphatically a business, a means to status and support, failure brought penalties ranging from ridicule to outright destitution. (xv)

In order to ward off these socially-prescribed penalties, the majority of spinsters – whether they were gentlewomen or working-class labourers – were compelled to find something productive to substitute for their lack of wifely and maternal duties. As Rita Kranidis explores in her study of Victorian spinsters, '[t]he spinster's value does not lie in feminine idleness, which differs from the standard valuation of middle-class women, whose idleness represents a positive and complementary excess of resources ... The middle-class wife is idle and superfluous, inessential, in a way that is quite distinct from that of the spinster, who clearly was compelled to take up some pursuit' (174). Various descriptions include 'un[re]productive' or 'superfluous,' 'surplus,' and, perhaps most damningly, as 'redundant,' the spinster therefore becomes characterised as a 'problematic excess' (Ibid 4).

Kranidis claims that the figure of the middle-class spinster was arguably more problematic than the working-class spinster due to the cultural expectations placed upon the middle-class woman:

[w]orking-class women's cultural and social positioning did not fluctuate as often or as drastically as the cultural identity of the middle-class woman, whose very essence relies most heavily on her identity as wife and mother and on her place in society. Whether working-class women married was not as pressing a concern for Victorian society since it did not in any way dramatically affect their status as cheap labour. Thus, although both middle-class and working-class women were 'exported' to the colonies, it is middle-class women who are encountered in the discourse of the 'superfluous' woman and also those who are deemed 'unsuitable' for colonisation. (32)

Whilst I would argue that working-class women were under a similar level of cultural and ideological pressure to marry and have children in order to attain true personhood – as Sime's *Sister Woman* explores in great depth – the issues Kranidis raises here about the value of the spinster's labour are significant. Given their status as middle class, or often even as gentlewomen, spinsters who were unable to find work or husbands in Britain were routinely 'shipped off' to colonies, though their very status as middle- and upper-class women often made them unwilling to take the low paid, hard-wearing positions open to single women in Canada, resulting in their continued classification as 'superfluous.'

In many British novels from the mid-nineteenth century, spinster sisters or aunts were routinely sent to the New World as 'an "out" of sorts, a way of figuring foreign places as receptacles for English undesirables of any kind' (Ibid 102). However, Kranidis argues that in

undertaking such actions, the novelists' "solution," 'creates an alternative space for characters who are problematic either in terms of gender of class, or both' (Ibid). The extent to which Canada is posited in Canadian novels of this period as an 'alternative space' or 'fresh start' for those considered 'redundant' by the imperial centres will therefore need to be explored in this study to determine whether Canada did indeed offer new opportunities for single women seeking employment or whether instead Canada reinforced these odd women's status as 'surplus to requirements.' For example, in their study of 'The Female *Bildungsroman* in Nineteenth-Century America' (1992), Eve Kornfeld and Susan Jackson argue that L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) is one of a series of novels in which 'spinsters are portrayed quite differently than in American culture in general: not bitter, disillusioned, or unfulfilled, spinsters ... are independent financially and mentally; they play an important role in the lives of the heroines and their communities' (145). Whilst Kornfeld and Jackson's survey largely covers American novels (aside from the one Canadian example of L. M. Montgomery), this question of whether the spinster could escape her 'superfluous' stereotype and act as a positive, inspiring force within narratives of this period is intriguing. Even Kranidis notes that 'the spinster is understood to be valuable precisely insofar as she is a malleable commodity; lacking the generally prescribed boundaries of personhood, she may take on other identities' (94). These competing representations of the single woman therefore need to be considered throughout this study. Whether as a New Girl, New Woman, or as a spinster, this study will try to uncover if these more positive readings of single female agency can be mined from texts from this period who engage with these cultural figures, or if, conversely, the majority of authors from this period shared in their cultural condemnation, seeking to either safely reinstall these subversive figures back in the home or else exile them to foreign lands.

The First World War and the impact of woman suffrage

'The loyalty of the colonist is intense to a degree that is almost pathetic,' remarks Lily Dougall, a prominent journalist and novelist, in her contribution to *Women of Canada*. In her account of 'The Home and Social Life of English-Speaking Canadian Women,' Dougall explains that '[i]t is pathetic because the Mother Country has no conception of its strength and, until this recent time of war, little appreciation of its value. Loyalty to the throne is pre-eminently the great touch of nature which makes all British colonists akin' (20-21). Although Dougall's comments here refer to Canada's involvement in the Boer War, her comments help illustrate the enthusiasm and unequivocal support for their British compatriots that led so

many Canadians to volunteer as soldiers upon the announcement of war in Europe in 1914. The First World War was dubbed ‘the most popular war in history when it started’ (J. M. Roberts 430), but modern critics often find Canada’s eagerness to involve themselves in what would ultimately become an extended and bloody conflict which cost 68,000 Canadian lives hard to justify. John Herd Thompson has argued that our modern standpoint, ‘jaded by “a century of total war,”’ is mostly responsible for this, and inhibits our ability to understand its meaning ‘to those inhabitants of a more peaceful century who found themselves confronted with it’ (11). Women’s eagerness to participate on the home front may be more understandable to us than men’s willingness to enlist, as the war opened up many new opportunities for them in the area of work. The absence of a large proportion of the working male population led to the first real test of women’s ability to act as a “reserve army of labour,” a challenge which the majority of women met without complaint, many excelling and enjoying the chance to enter traditionally “male” industries.

As the editors of *Canadian Women: A History* make clear, the war, for the first time ‘established the propriety of women working for wages before marriage, even when the young woman belonged to the middle class’ (Prentice et al 140). During the war, 2,504 members of Canadian Nursing Service were actively involved in overseas duties (Ibid 141), and many women took on roles in white-collar professions, in the service sector, and in the factories. Both existing and new female factory workers were moved from the more feminine, “light” manufacturing duties, towards “heavier” manufacturing work, largely in munitions. Cynthia Comacchio claims that by the end of the war ‘more than 35,000 women, about 20 per cent of whom were married, were employed in munitions’ (66). However, with the close of war, many men returned to the factories, and female employees were obliged to return to their previous, “lighter” and less well paid roles. Women also came under renewed pressure to marry and help replenish the depleted population, their maternal duties taking on new significance both practically and symbolically. Indeed, the 1921 census revealed more married Canadians than any previous date on record: ‘[t]hree-quarters of Canadian women were married by age thirty-four, and over 90 per cent of all women and 91 per cent of all men eventually married’ (Ibid 72). Nevertheless, with the loss of over 60,000 of Canada’s most eligible and virile young men, many women lost their potential suitors and were left unable to marry and fulfil their “national duty”.

Before the outbreak of war, a strong strain of pacifism, discursively tied to women’s maternal instincts was prevalent, largely influenced by feminist thinkers such as Olive

Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose popularity was widespread across North American feminist and intellectual circles. This breed of pacifism was heavily invested in the notion of maternal instinct as women's strongest impulse. In her essay 'Woman and War' (1911), Schreiner argues that

[t]here is, perhaps, no woman, whether she has borne children or be merely potentially a child-bearer, who could look down upon a battle field covered with slain, but the thought that would rise in her, 'So many mothers' sons! So many bodies brought into the world to lie there! So many months of weariness and pain while bones and muscles were shaped within; so many hours of anguish and struggles that breath might be [...]' And we cry, 'Without an inexorable cause, this should not be!' No woman who is a woman says of a human body, 'It is nothing!' (206-7)

This form of impassioned maternalism is a prominent feature of most pre- and early-war debate in Canada, Schreiner's influence proving especially noticeable in the political thought of writers such as Nellie McClung and Flora Macdonald Denison. Many feminist authors who chose to tackle the hyper-masculinised rhetoric surrounding war adopted an equally gendered subject position focused on a mother's biological instinct to protect and nurture her offspring. War-mongering was thus depicted as the antithesis of this maternal impulse. Nevertheless, with the deepening of the conflict in Europe and the increased loss of Canadian lives overseas, many of the war's most vehement detractors were prone to reverse their anti-war stances, as can be seen in the cases of both McClung and Denison: 'the reality, as opposed to the abstraction, of war presented painful problems of personal conscience. Both had been against war; both had dearly loved sons who enlisted; both eventually came to support the Allied cause. Only a few Canadian women sustained their pacifist opposition to violence' (Prentice et al. 207).

Until recently, the Canadian war novel has 'been an exclusive male domain' (Coates 'Myrmidons' 113), and for this very reason this study will focus extensively on war fiction written *by women* that deals extensively with questions of women's war time employments. These novels focus on the work carried out by women in the public sphere where they finally fulfilled their potential as a "reserve army of labour," but also, just as prominently, highlight the less-public but equally valuable work women undertook inside the home during the war: maintaining the household, farming the land and keeping the family together. In her study *French Women and the First World War* (2000), Margaret Darrow succinctly outlines the

difficulties women faced when attempting to write about and fictionalise their wartime experiences:

[w]hat women did in the war or what was done to them by the war was explained – and explained away – as minor adaptations of a traditional feminine destiny. Thus, the feminine war story became simply the Eternal Feminine, and both the war and the story dropped out. Or, if the war remained front and centre, then the story pushed women to the periphery or denied them feminine attributes and thus a feminine experience. War had a story, but women did not; to bring them together into a single narrative threatened both terms: women ceased to be women or war ceased to be war. (5-6)

This struggle between the representation of feminine and wartime experience will thus form a central part of my examination of wartime fiction, as in many cases the simple act of writing women into the narrative of war was an empowering gesture at the turn of the century that doubtless would have reassured and bolstered the spirits of those “left behind.” This fiction also highlighted the many victories (however fleeting) that women experienced when traditionally male-dominated industries were opened up to them and female workers proved themselves not only proficient but oftentimes outstandingly good at many of these tasks that had been previously denied them due to their gender.

Public opinion regarding the working woman changed dramatically across the period under examination, and many critics have argued that this was largely due to the efforts of the suffragists and other female-led reform movements to present the “professional” working woman to the general public as a respectable and useful member of Canadian society in the emerging twentieth century. Carol Bacchi has noted that ‘[a]lmost 60 per cent of the female suffrage leaders were employed outside the home, a rather remarkable statistic given that in 1911 only 14.3 per cent of the total female population over age ten were gainfully employed’ (4). As working women themselves, it is thus not surprising that alongside their fight for the vote, many of these women were also keen to see their valuable contributions to both Canadian society and its economy properly recognised. However, it is important to recognise that for many of these professional working women, suffrage was usually only one facet of a larger reform-driven mentality. Bacchi attests that ‘[a] reform spirit characterised the age and woman suffrage attracted many infected with this spirit. Very few suffragists were not engaged in other reform activities’ (8). However, it is also important to stress that many of the women who took up career roles in reform movements usually worked within the rubric

of women's "acceptable" employment spheres, focusing their efforts and stepping into the public spotlight on behalf of other women and children.

Prentice et al. have argued that '[a]s their family responsibilities diminished, women involved themselves with broader issues at the provincial and national levels' (177). Although these groups varied in their exact agendas and aims, the main focus of all of them remained the betterment of Canadian society through the maternal attention and specifically feminine skills that only Canada's female population could provide. The aforementioned National Council of Women of Canada, was formed in 1893 by Lady Aberdeen and acted as an umbrella group to help organise the extension of women's domestic roles into larger society. Largely secular in nature, it was mostly populated by upper- and middle-class women from urban areas (Ibid 180). By contrast, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was a smaller, religious and community-led organisation that drew its ranks largely from the lower-middle-classes. The first local WCTU in Canada was founded by Letitia Yeomans in Picton, Ontario in 1891. At the height of its powers, the movement had over 9,000 members. The WCTU argued that 'only complete prohibition could save society from crime, family breakdown, political corruption and immorality' (Ibid 172). Although less ambitious in scope, the Women's Institute, founded in 1897 by Adelaide Hoodless, was another significant site for female community and potential resistance. By 1903, the movement was so popular it could boast 53 branches in Ontario alone (Ibid 183). Despite their significance in drawing attention to the important protective roles women could undertake as wives and mothers, these movements were all hindered by the political powerlessness of women. It is thus unsurprising that many women chose to be members of multiple reform groups across this period in an attempt to bolster their political voice and their demands for recognition and change. However, it is important to remember that despite their focus on the plight of immigrants and the working class, the largely Anglo-Saxon composition of these organisations ensured that they were generally 'unwilling to accept immigrant women's initiatives, thereby ensuring that the Canadian reform movement remained a middle class phenomenon' (Ibid 185).

Ellen Dubois, one of the earliest scholars of the woman suffrage movement argued that

the significance of the woman suffrage movement rested precisely on the fact that it bypassed women's oppression within the family, or private sphere, and demanded instead her

admission to citizenship, and through it admission to the public arena. By focusing on the public sphere, and particularly on citizenship, suffragists demanded for women a kind of power and connection with the social order not based on the institution of the family and their subordination within it. (63-4)

However, DuBois' separation of the public and private spheres is problematic as it glosses over the fact that in many cases, and especially in a Canadian context, this demand for 'admission to citizenship' was almost always couched in terms of women's maternal roles *within the family* and how these positions made them ideally suited to help regenerate and nurture the growing Canadian nation. This ideological stance, dominant among Canadian suffragists between the 1880s and 1902s, is referred to by contemporary critics as 'imperial feminism' or 'maternal feminism.' Devereux, who has written extensively on this movement, links the 'racially regenerative' measures the suffragists supported – temperance and raising the age of consent – to a larger 'civilising mission,' that she argues is tied to empire-building ('New Woman' 178). As Devereux outlines:

[t]he imperial mother had a unique iconic value in these colonies, where her function as racial regenerator was made especially acute by the exigencies of empire-building, and by the immediate contest between the Anglo-Saxon race and its colonized "others" ... Degenerating Anglo-Saxondom was to be rescued and restored equally in the womb of the imperial mother and in the bosom of the "daughter" nations. (Ibid 179)

Indeed, Devereux has argued that it is precisely because the white woman's role in the imperial project was made so prominent in the Canadian public consciousness that 'enfranchisement was won in the outposts of empire before it was achieved in the "mother country"' (Ibid).

Nevertheless, although maternal feminism was perhaps the most predominant facet of feminist rhetoric deployed by suffragists and reformers across this period (especially in the fiction under examination in this thesis), an alternate, arguably more radical faction of feminist thought was also at work in this era. "Equal rights" or "equity" feminists articulated their standpoints in terms of justice rather than specifically gendered skills, denying the culturally prescribed dominance of masculine thought by claiming women had an equal right to speak on issues relating to their day-to-day lives and experiences. These differing branches of feminist thought were far from static, so that many suffragists 'accepted both feminist arguments, emphasising one or the other as seemed most useful or appropriate, apparently

without feeling any contradiction' (Prentice et al 170). Yet, despite this lack of rigid feminist platforms, the "maternal" position came to the forefront of political debates, especially when arguing for women's increased presence in the public sphere, whether it be in political, reform-based positions or in the offices and workplaces of the average Canadian.

Fears of "race suicide" and the degeneration of the human race were rife across the British Empire at the turn of the century, largely a result of the social investigation into the poor living conditions of the working classes in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, and the unexpected ill-health of a large proportion of the male population which came to light when many of those who enlisted were judged unfit for service during the Boer War. In response to these fears the process of eugenics, a term initially coined by Englishman Francis Galton in 1883, came to great prominence. Galton described eugenics as 'the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally' (17n). Eugenic practices took on multiple forms, leading to an increased focus on fertility, but also an increased desire for restrictive breeding. In his study of the Canadian eugenics movement, *Our Own Master Race* (1990), Angus McLaren explains how eugenicists believed that

[w]oman's role was determined by her reproductive function. Biology, not politics, subjected her to man. If she was unhappy the answer was not to wrench her from her natural calling and plunge her into an unequal contest from which she could only emerge defeated and embittered; the answer was to provide her with the support necessary to permit her to fulfil more adequately her function as childbearer. (20)

The 'unequal contest' here refers to female attempts to enter the workforce and live and work alongside men as equals. Such desires did not fit with the new national focus on racial regeneration and the rhetoric of imperial motherhood, and led to a certain degree of scaremongering by public health officials and doctors to try and encourage women back to their "natural" occupations as mothers. In her treatise on *Infant Mortality* (1912), the prominent doctor and public speaker Helen MacMurchy vehemently stated that '[w]here the mother works, the baby dies. Nothing can replace maternal care' (16-17).

With motherhood thus depicted as a personal duty, and infant mortality seen as a result of failed parenting, the pressure on women to put children first came to greater prominence, whilst restrictive breeding was encouraged for those classified as "feeble-minded." Feeble-mindedness was used as shorthand across the period for anyone who did not

meet the parameters required to produce new generations of good, white, imperial stock. These undesirable elements of the Canadian population (largely of working-class or immigrant origin) were thus used as a scapegoats for societal woes and vices, some reformers such as MacMurchy even going as far as to promote their institutionalisation and sterilisation to limit their future damage to the Canadian “race” (McLaren 37). Nevertheless, figures such as MacMurchy were still keen to ensure that women deemed worthy to reproduce understood their vital role: ‘[t]hose who marry but voluntarily refuse parenthood are robbing themselves of their greatest joy, and are failing to serve the highest interests of their country and their generation’ (*Sterilization?* 88).

Devereux proposes the new category of ‘eugenic feminism’ for what she describes as an ‘empowered maternalism that was embedded in racial and social hierarchies’ (*Growing* 42). Works that can be classified under this rubric depict anti-temperance and opium campaigns as ‘eugenic measures that were undertaken ‘to “conserve the race” by eliminating “poisons” that diminish the strength of the national community’ (Ibid 9). Whilst Devereux’s study focuses exclusively on the work of Nellie McClung, elements of eugenic feminism can be found in texts across this period – especially those dealing with issues of maternity and the question of who should (and more significantly who *should not*) become mothers. Devereux explains that in the early twentieth century

Canada, and especially Canada West, would serve the British empire as a location for the generation of a new and stronger community of Anglo-Saxons, a new world peopled by a sturdy branch of old-world peoples, into which revitalised stock would be assimilated all those who could vanish into the racial category of whiteness, and from which would be excluded all those seen to be unassimilable and, in a range of ways, ‘unfit.’ (Ibid 54)

Whilst the majority of the texts under discussion in this thesis do not depict the act of mothering-as-national-imperative in as explicit a manner as Devereux claims McClung’s work does, I would still argue that the underlying urge to assimilate productive immigrant elements and the expulsion of those deemed “unfit” or unproductive can be seen in multiple texts from this era. Similarly, we must appreciate the significance given to motherhood across this period in order to understand why so many women willingly gave up their careers to start families, and how this move was depicted not in terms of a loss of independence, but rather as an acceptance of another equally, if not *more productive*, role.

Although we can thus see many similarities between the emphasis on racial science and eugenics used by figures such as MacMurchy and Galton, and the rhetoric of eugenic feminism that was championed by popular literary figures such as Nellie McClung, it is important to note that the eugenics movement itself had a limited influence on the Canadian population and its governing policies, especially once the reality of the eugenics programmes in Nazi Germany came to light in the late 1930s. Although certain elements of eugenic thought and philosophy can be found in the literature of this period, for the most part, eugenicists ‘could not woo most Canadians away from a belief in the possibility of self-improvement’ (McLaren 169). Thus, this focus on the value of productive “whiteness” and imperial regeneration was in many ways foregrounded within this very rhetoric of Canadian ‘self-improvement’ in the early twentieth century and will be briefly discussed in this next section in more depth.

The construction of “whiteness” and social purity movements

In *On the Edge of Empire* (2001), Adele Perry stresses that ‘[w]hite people, like peoples of colour, were racialised, and the historical processes by which whiteness was constituted and empowered can and must be excavated’ (197). Whilst critics have increasingly begun to focus on the cultural construction of English Canada and its reification of imperial whiteness, Perry’s work is significant for its focus on the importance of gender in this early period of nation-building. Indeed, in a more recent study, Perry has continued this research to explore how ‘the ambiguities of settler colonialism had special resonance for women. Imperial rhetoric and policy bestowed a literally pregnant mission on settler women, defining them and their reproductive work as essential to, and constituent of, settler regimes’ (‘Interlocuting’ 159). The representational responsibilities expected of white women within this period were thus twofold: not only did they help construct and endorse an image of ‘iconic white womanhood’ but they also played a vital role as producers (or reproducers) of the human resources necessary for successful settlement. However, it is important to note, as McMaster does in her study of working women in the west that ‘the representational strategies involved in the construction of an iconic white womanhood lend themselves more easily to a middle-class ideal of wives and mothers in a white domestic haven than to working-class women whose morally and racially suspect workplaces might sully their spotless whiteness’ (147). It is thus important to remember that within this period the term “race” was not only used to designate ethnicity, but also as a way of indicating economic and

class-based categories in Canadian society. Indeed, this very “slipperiness” of the term “race” is commented on by Mariana Valverde in her study of early reform movements where she discusses how the term ‘allowed Anglo-Saxons to think of themselves as both a specific race and as the vanguard of the human race as a whole, the ambiguity of term hence allowed white Anglo-Saxon supremacy to be justified without argument or evidence: it was obvious that as Anglo-Saxons progressed or declined, so would the world’ (109-10).

The social and cultural constructedness of white English-Canadian privilege cannot be ignored when studying texts from this era. Jennifer Henderson has argued that over time ‘race has been attached not just to bodies but also to forms of conduct’ (18). Daniel Coleman’s *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006) offers one of the most comprehensive literary studies of this phenomenon, and his arguments will be discussed briefly below. His conception of ‘wry civility’ can be of great use to any critic focusing on this period of Canadian literary history when imperial and nationalist prerogatives still rendered non-assimilable, non-white figures problematic, if not completely invisible. Coleman stresses that

what has come to be known as English Canada is and has been ... a project of literary, among other forms of cultural, endeavour and that the central organising problematic of this endeavour has been the formulation and elaboration of a specific form of whiteness based on a British model of civility. By means of this conflation of whiteness with civility, whiteness has been naturalised as the norm for English Canadian cultural identity. (5)

Coleman convincingly argues for ‘civility’ as a central organising problematic of English Canadian whiteness, through his assertions that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ‘the temporal concept of progress and the moral-ethical ideal of orderliness were demonstrated by cultivated, polite behaviour (most commonly modelled on the figure of the bourgeois gentleman), which, in turn, made these concepts fundamental to the production and education of the individual citizen’ (Ibid 10). However, in taking on the behaviour and expectations of civilised people, the settler-colonist, in Coleman’s words, ‘also internalises imperialism’s temporal gap, feeling himself to be caught in the time-space delay between the metropolitan place where civility is made and legislated and the colonial place where it is enacted and enforced’ (Ibid 16). This ‘anxiety of belatedness’ can be seen in texts across the period, both in the novelists’ attempts to co-opt and endorse pre-established British cultural norms as Canadian and in their adoption as signifiers of the nation’s modernity, but also, just

as interestingly, in the attempts made by some authors to distinguish a specifically “Canadian” offshoot of civilised society. For many authors, Canadian civility was thus ‘modelled on Britishness, but a Britishness that had been (or would be) purified in North America ... Canadian imperialists imagined that, having proven its strength of purpose through overcoming the adversities of life in the northern frontier, the Canadian character ... would gradually overtake England as the new centre of empire’ (Ibid 25-6). Notwithstanding these grand aims, any colonial writer still suffered from cultural belatedness or delay in their decision to write about Canadian subjects and topics as

the most legitimate and respectable site of publication is the metropolitan centre, where significance is determined and assessed. The settler may speak in and about the colony, but the written version of his speech will be interpreted in the metropolitan centre (judged in accordance with British constitutional law or with the conventions of British literary taste) for its measure of civility. (Ibid 16)

For Canadian authors already anxious about their belated civility and modernity, it is perhaps unsurprising that the image of Canada these texts portrayed to popular audiences both foreign and domestic, still largely chose to elide the existence of more “primitive” aboriginal and immigrant elements that could be seen to diminish Canada’s status as a pinnacle of modern, imperial society.

It is because of these moments of conscious omission or even in some cases demonisation of non-white, non-middle-class or immigrant elements within the texts under study that Coleman’s concept of ‘wry civility’ becomes so useful. In his own words, the concept encompasses “civil” in the sense ... [that it explores] the contradictory or ambivalent project that purports to provide a public space of equality and liberty for all at the same time as it attempts to protect this freedom and equality from threats within and without – and “wry” in the sense of being critically self-conscious of this very ambivalence and of the contradictions it involves’ (Ibid 43). This self-consciousness about the ‘myth of progress’ is essential, as even now ‘[t]he temptation in historical critical endeavour is always to assume that our research allows us to “see” what was invisible to the people of the past and therefore to assume a progressive relation to them – we have evolved above and beyond them’ (Ibid 45). As literary critics, we must therefore remain suitably ‘wry’ in our critiques of these early texts, remaining willing to engage and understand mentalities and subject positions that whilst different from our own, are not necessarily inferior or less-valuable just because they do not live up to modern cultural expectations.

I will now move on to explore the ways in which the construction of whiteness and civility had a ‘special resonance for women’ (Perry ‘Interlocuting’ 159). In her study of ‘Britishness, “Foreignness,” Women and Land in Western Canada, 1890s-1920s’ (2006), Sarah Carter succinctly outlines how ‘[g]ender further complicates any simplistic link between whiteness, power and privilege. White women did not enjoy the same advantages as their male counterparts, although they shared components of elite status’ (44). She adds that ‘[t]here were gender-specific ways of marking difference, of elevating some femininities and masculinities, while denouncing others. Whiteness had its own hierarchies. It was an unstable, moving category; its meanings and boundaries continually changing’ (Ibid). Carter’s points raise important questions about how whiteness was used to create boundaries of difference and status from *within* as well as without its own signifiers. Gender plays a valuable role in the delineation of these internal hierarchies, as women rarely had the ability to control and manipulate their own racial status: this was usually mediated through the masculine figure of either a husband or a father.⁷

McClintock has famously argued that ‘women and men did not experience imperialism in the same way’ (6), and this statement forms the crux of her study *Imperial Leather*, which explores (among other things) the process whereby ‘as domestic space became racialised, colonial space became domesticated’ (Ibid 36). However, these processes of domestication took on a different purpose in the cities as ‘the invention of race in the urban metropolises ... became central not only to the self-definition of the middle-class but also to the policing of the “dangerous classes”: the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on’ (Ibid 5). Given that a large proportion of Canadian working women would have fallen into *at least* one of these “dangerous classes,” we can begin to unravel how the working girl came to be suspect, not only in terms of social propriety, but also racially. Did her “unclean” work in the city, outside the sphere of the home, under the observation of public eyes, have the potential to sully her purity: her inherent “whiteness”? McClintock argues that

[w]omen who transgressed the Victorian boundary between private and public, labour and leisure, paid work and unpaid work became increasingly stigmatised as specimens of *racial*

⁷ A notable exception to this generalisation is the case of the Eaton sisters. Edith Eaton and Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve were two sisters of Chinese-Canadian heritage who both adopted exotic pen-names to help market their writing. However, whilst Edith chose the Chinese pseudonym “Sui Sin Far” (“Water Fragrant Flower”), her sister Winnifred, aware of the strong anti-Chinese sentiment in this era, adopted the Japanese pseudonym “Onoto Watanna,” manufacturing a history for herself as a Japanese-American which allowed her to achieve a reasonable degree of literary celebrity through her popular series of far-eastern romances.

regression. Such women, it was contended, did not inhabit history proper but were the prototypes of anachronistic humans: childlike, irrational, regressive and atavistic, existing in a permanently anterior time within modernity. (Ibid 42)

The inherent ‘regressiveness’ of the working woman, could thus only be solved by her capitulation to the ‘cult of domesticity’ through her decision to give up work and start a family. Given the imperial prerogatives towards racial regeneration and the need for healthy, white Canadian stock, women would remain in an infantilised status – as working *girls* – until they accepted their maternal duties and took their valuable place in the project of nation-building. The extent to which these racial debates and the project of Canadian “whiteness” may have influenced the fiction of this period will therefore need to be explored to help understand the motivations behind the generic tendency in popular fiction towards the reinstatement of the heroine back inside the home.

Briefly, a note on the term ‘English Canada’, which will necessarily be used throughout this study, even though it is potentially ambiguous. Nowadays, this term is predominantly used to refer to ‘English-speaking Canada,’ and the term was similarly used historically to distinguish those provinces in which English was the official language, or where the population would use English in preference to French. However, this term was also traditionally used to refer to the predominance of British ethnic groups following Confederation. Here, the choice of ‘English’ becomes significant as ‘in the 1871 census the English were only half the size of the combined Scottish and Irish groups’ (Carter ‘Britishness’ 46). As Canada increasingly became home to a host of immigrants, many not from the “desirable” stronghold of Western Europe and the United States, the terms, “English” or “English-speaking,” “British,” “Canadian” or “pioneer” were used instead of “white” to mark the distinction from the “foreigner” or “stranger” (Ibid 47). Whiteness was therefore no guarantee of successful integration into Canadian society, as social and cultural factors were also key. Indeed, as Jackel has commented, ‘[even] the appellation “English” was not always a term of compliment in Canadian usage, although “British” usually was’ (Introduction xx). The reservations about “Englishness” over the more pan-ethnic “Britishness” was largely due to concerns over the class and caste system associated with the English. As Jackel explains, ‘[t]o Canadians, caste and nationality seemed irrevocably joined together in the English mind and psyche. Class consciousness was not unknown in Canada at the century’s turn, but it was developing in directions quite distinct from old-country notions of inherited and fixed positions in the social hierarchy’ (Ibid xxi). It was for this reason that

many Canadian employers claimed “No English Need Apply,” (Ibid xx) preferring to employ the more stereotypically hard-working, though predominantly working-class immigrants from Scotland and Ireland instead. Such a decision is particularly intriguing given the aforementioned ‘racial regressiveness’ of these nations, although perhaps such workers were preferred because they were without the pretension and caste-awareness associated with their English compatriots.

In a chapter for *Women of Canada* entitled ‘Literature: English Speaking Women Prose Writers of Canada,’ Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon states (rather humbly for such a celebratory volume) that ‘[w]e can say ... of the work of our women prose writers, that while much of it lacks strength and literary acumen, it is invariably wholesome in tone and pure in its teaching. The bright, bracing climate has infected the writers, and our literature, though still in its infancy, expresses the national character’ (184). The focus here on the ‘wholesomeness’ of Canadian fiction rather than its ‘literary acumen’ is very telling of both the cultural anxiety of this period over Canadian culture’s relative youth and inexperience compared to its British counterparts, and the prominence of a particular breed of didactic, conservative and moral literature at the turn of the century. Indeed, in a letter to a correspondent discussing criticism of Canadian fiction, Nellie McClung complained ‘I think we have a few bilious critics who dislike decency in a book, and if a book is clean to them, it must be dull’ (McClung to Dumbrille). Similarly, L. M. Montgomery, an equally prominent female author in this period, can be found as late as 1924 to be proudly stating in the *Bookseller and Stationer* that ‘[o]ne thing that can be said about Canadian literature is that it is clean ... There are very few stories published in Canada that mothers could not give to their daughters’ (54). This intense focus on the ‘cleanliness’ and ‘decency’ of Canadian literature was presumably a response to the ‘dirty’ and ‘indecent’ rise of social realism and modernism across this period in the States and Britain, as well as the social gospel and social purity movements which continued to hold a great sway over the public imagination across this era.

The social gospel movement prominent in Canada at the turn of the century was a complex organisation which adopted both secular and spiritual viewpoints in order to carry out its quest to recreate ‘the Kingdom of God on Earth’ (McKillop 104), and help save a nation that many feared was on the verge of social and moral degeneration. That the social gospel supporters’ efforts were not always overtly religious is significant, as for those involved in the movement, ‘the practical application of Christ’s teachings was more

important than theological controversy' (Cook 24). Thus, the movement's rise to power in the early twentieth century was as much a reaction to this perceived 'social crisis' as it was 'a reaction to a profound intellectual crisis, and ... a questioning of the role of the clergy and the church in modern society' (Ibid 174-75). Valverde has argued that the term 'social gospel' refers to 'the attempts to humanise and/or Christianise the political economy of urban-industrial capitalism' (18). Whilst I would largely agree with Valverde's definition, as the majority of social gospellers did focus on trying to improve labour relations, it is important to stress that social gospellers were 'more liberal than socialist. Although they borrowed from the socialist critique of capitalism, they wished to Christianise rather than to overthrow the capitalist system' (Vipond 'Blessed' 32).

One of the most popular and widely accessible ways for the social gospel movement to spread its message was through the medium of fiction. These novels largely followed the conventions of the sentimental fiction of the day, infusing these traditional romances and coming-of-age tales with messages of salvation and renewal through the adopted practice of an active, social brand of Christianity that the social gospel epitomised. Mary Vipond has argued that the broad appeal of such novels stems from the authors' abilities to 'keep within the bounds of conventional taste and ... [to provide an] optimistic message that simple solutions did exist for the vast and terrifying problems of the modern world' ('Blessed' 33). Vipond therefore argues that '[s]ocial gospel novels served to reassure their middle class readers that social harmony was not lost forever; that all that was needed to restore peace and tranquility was personal commitment to Christian principles' (Ibid 33). However, existing surveys of the social gospel fiction have taken strong issue with the representation of women in these novels, a position Susan Lindley's 'Women and the Social Gospel Novel' (1985) epitomises when she bemoans that '[t]he study of women and the Social Gospel novel suggest that for most authors, particularly men, any radicalism that the Social Gospel inspired did not extend to the home, the family, and the traditional sex roles. For the most part, women are victims, inspirations to men, or responsibilities to men, not significant thinkers, actors, or initiators' (71). The limits of the social gospel, discussed here by Lindley in an American context, are important to consider when discussing Canadian literature as a majority of the social gospel fiction of this period was still written by men in this era, and critics have argued that some of the most overtly religious female authors of the period, such as Nellie McClung and Agnes Maule Machar, do not safely fit within this framework due to their focus on women's agency (Warne *Literature* 149). Nevertheless, these novels still show

a strong interest in social gospel issues and continue to convey an unashamedly didactic intent.

The social gospel and social purity movements shared many of the same goals and personnel but were distinct entities, though they often worked alongside one another to help further their own agendas. Valverde concisely describes the social purity movement as ‘a loose network of organisations and individuals, mostly church people, educators, doctors, and those we would now describe as community or social workers, who engaged in a sporadic but vigorous campaign to “raise the moral tone” of Canadian society, and in particular of urban working-class communities’ (17). Despite the extensive overlap between the two movements, Valverde clarifies their relationship, stating that ‘while the focus of social gospel activity was the economy and the social relations arising from production, social purity focused on the sexual and moral aspects of social life’ (Ibid 18). Social purity was therefore first and foremost a campaign to regulate morality – especially sexual morality – to help improve the moral character of Canadian society. Valverde stresses in her study that ‘[i]t was not merely a campaign to punish or repress’ (Ibid 24). The social purity movement worked alongside existing philanthropic societies (both secular and religious), and as with the social gospel, many authors used their fiction to promote these ideas and depict how these philosophies could easily be absorbed into daily life and help reinforce a heroine’s superior moral fibre.

Valverde has argued that the social gospel and social purity movements had an undeniably positive impact on female philanthropy in this era: ‘[a]s nurturing and other domestic virtues increased in value, allowing women to serve in public roles through maternal feminism, social purity helped to reconcile the apparently passive virtue of purity with active masculinity’ (Ibid 31). Philanthropy and social reform thus became associated with a form of assertive, morally righteous feminism, made socially acceptable through maternal feminists’ focus on these duties as a natural extension of their mothering and housekeeping duties *inside* the home. Indeed, as Nellie McClung outlines with her characteristic pragmatism in her political treatise *In Times Like These* (1915):

[w]hat would you think of a man who would say to his wife: ‘This house to which I am bringing you to live is very dirty and unsanitary, but I will not allow you the dear wife whom I have sworn to protect to touch it. It is too dirty for your precious little white hands! You must stay upstairs, dear. Of course the odour from below may come up to you, but use your smelling salts and think no evil. I do not hope to ever be able to clean it up, but certainly you must never think of trying.’

Do you think any woman would stand for that? (48)

The predominance of rhetoric on the need to ‘clean up’ Canadian society in fiction of this era whether through reform and social agitation groups, as well as through direct philanthropic institutions, would seem to suggest that McClung’s assertion was indeed correct. Many women would not stand for the state of Canadian society as it was, and the ways they explored these tensions and offered new alternatives in the fiction of this period will therefore form another central strand of the argument of this thesis.

“Canadianness” and Popular Fiction

In an assessment of ‘Professions Open to Women’ from the NCWC’s *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work*, Derick draws attention to a concern central to any assessment of Canadian fiction covering the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, namely the problematic “Canadianness” of many of this era’s authors and their works:

the country is too young and too thinly populated to afford an adequate field for the exercise of unusual gifts. In consequence, Canada’s most celebrated singer is seldom heard at home; the best Canadian pictures are hung in foreign salons; the best books are published first in London and New York. But they are of Canada and for Canada, and loved and honoured by Canadians for present worth and future promise. (62)

This earnest effort to reassure readers that Canadian works of art did not lose their national character when they gained prominence and renown beyond Canada was a common theme for literary critics from this period. Many authors of Canadian birth became expatriates in this era, choosing to take up residence in cultural centres such as London or New York due to the increased opportunities for publication and literary networking outside their more provincial and conservative homeland. Even the authors themselves were frequently found defending their absence in popular publications as we can see in Sophie Almon Hensley’s article on Canadian writers in New York for *Dominion Illustrated Monthly* from 1893: ‘we must not forget that there is a large number of writers, born Canadians, Canadians in heart, and hope, and ambition, who have been obliged to make their homes in other countries but who still assert their claim to be sons and daughters of Canada, and who should unquestionably come under the designation of Canadian writers’ (195). However, as early as the 1920s, many critics were eager to try to disavow Canada’s ties to these expatriate authors. Both Archibald MacMechan’s *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* and John D. Logan and Donald G. French’s *Highways of Canadian Literature* (both published in 1924) exhibit an eagerness to

exclude works ‘formed by alien influences’ (MacMechan 100), clearly distinguishing and highlighting works that were undeniably ‘Native and National’ (Logan and French 20-1). This willingness to gloss over (or even ignore outright) authors who were well received both critically and commercially in their time simply because they cannot be easily categorised and located within a reified label of “Canadianness” has thankfully been challenged in recent years by literary critics such as Nick Mount and Gerson.

Mount’s *When Canadian Literature Moved to New York* (2005) has been particularly useful to me when formulating the scope and author selection of this thesis. Mount’s study examines the abundance of Canadian authors who emigrated to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and persuasively argues for their vital significance in the formation of an early Canadian ‘literature.’ Between the 1880s and 1890s, over a million Canadians left Canada for the United States, so that by the turn of the century almost a quarter of Canada’s total population at that time were in fact resident in America (Mount 6, 21). As Mount outlines, ‘[a]t a professional level, the decision by so many Canadian writers of these years to move to American cities wasn’t about giving up one national literary culture for another, it was about moving from the margins to the centres of a continental literary culture’ (Ibid 13). This ‘continental literary culture’ was in large part fostered by the publishing practices and restrictions of the period which helped to foster a literary culture in which many authors were unwilling to offer their work to a Canadian market when they were assured of better fees and circulation when they sold to an American publisher. Many Canadian publishers would only consider a Canadian author’s work for publication if they had an ‘American edition’ (Karr 203); whilst as Mount himself makes clear ‘the primary medium for new writers and the mainstay for many established writers was not books but magazines, and here New York dominated the continent ... New York was the undisputed leader of the magazine boom of the 1880s and 1890s’ (10).

Many of the authors included in this study are difficult to categorise in national terms, whether for reasons of their birthplace or expatriatism, or a refusal to set their work in a Canadian ‘scene.’ Inevitably, in other critical accounts, they may be referred to as ‘American’ (or in the case of Grant Allen ‘British’) as often as they are considered ‘Canadian’; such usages depend on the critic and their line of inquiry. Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve, often championed as ‘the first Asian American to publish a novel in English’ (Cole ‘Butterflies’ 14), was in fact born and raised in Montreal, and therefore features regularly in studies of early Canadian fiction despite an extended residence in the States and her fiction’s

predominant (though not exclusive) focus on Asian-American protagonists. Mount contends ‘Canadian writers have been *practising* transnationalism since before there was a Canadian literature’ (162), a situation which – for this critic at least – makes early Canadian fiction even more engaging and worthy of further study.

Many of the authors under examination in this study marketed their work for both a ‘continental literary culture’ and their formerly colonial audience across the Atlantic in one of two contrasting modes: through a focus on regionalism and “local colour,” or through the application of an “international” theme. Regionalism was used to add novelty and distinctiveness within an already saturated North-American market, as well as being seen by many authors as a way to ‘give voice to their region and thus character to their nation’ whilst abroad (Mount 122). Alternatively, Carrie MacMillan has argued that ‘[the] advantage of the international novel for Canadian writers was that they could use a Canadian character who travels to a foreign setting, usually the United States or Britain, and could define the Canadian type in relation to other regional or national types. In this manner they could write, however indirectly, about their own country (‘Seaward Vision’ 25). Whilst such storylines allowed authors to appeal to a wider literary market through their setting in “foreign” climes, MacMillan claims that the Canadian protagonist as portrayed in early twentieth-century fiction is ‘more innocent, has a stronger sense of right, greater vigour and promise, and is less artificial and corrupt than his or her counterparts from other countries’ (Ibid). Thus, the extent to which the origins of the protagonists in the novels under examination influence and justify their actions and their work will also need to be considered, especially when they are forced for economic or plot purposes to travel beyond the limits of their homeland. I have chosen not to exclude ‘international’ novels which lack the mediating figure of a Canadian protagonist, in cases where the author had an extended literary reputation and publication history within Canada, or where the author’s personal origins within Canada are undeniable.

The majority of the novels under examination in this survey of Canada’s fictional working women are not works traditionally canonised within the rubric of “Canadian Literature.” One reason for this may be their predominant classification as popular or romance novels. As Gerson has articulated in ‘Canadian Women Writers and American Markets,’ most female Canadian authors from the 1880s onwards were encouraged by market forces ‘to aim their sights at the popular romantic market rather than the loftier realms of high modernism’ (Gerson ‘Canadian Women’ 111). However, by continuing to appeal to the demands of the literary market for easily consumable romances and adventures well into the

twentieth century when US and British authors began increasingly to explore the possibilities of social realism and modernism, many critics of the time began to fear that Canada was being “left behind.” Douglas Bush deplures the situation in his ‘Plea For Original Sin’ in an article for *Canadian Forum* from 1922: ‘Canadian fiction never comes to grips with life, but remains weak and timid; it has nothing to say’ (590). This tendency to devalue popular, or “low,” culture is thus another reason why many of the novels under examination in this study have been ignored or denigrated in analyses of early twentieth-century Canadian fiction.

Nevertheless, in *White Civility* Coleman chooses to focus on works that have been ‘the target of the modernist dismissal’ through their categorisation as ‘hopelessly romanticised and unrealistic,’ due to his contention that “romance,” ‘was the seduction by which it [Canadian fiction] sought to convert its readers to the realism of social engagement’ (37, 167). Coleman continues this argument by stressing that ‘[b]y examining popular, “low culture,” we can observe the unstable dynamics between the official symbolic history of the nation and its fantasmatic, repressed histories, because popular writing is usually produced not only by those who securely hold the reins of power but also by those who are lobbying for power’ (Ibid 35). Popular literary forms were thus used by those wishing to reform or educate the Canadian public without appearing to openly sermonise or undermine existing social hierarchies. The extent to which these reformist tendencies remained hidden to the common Canadian reader is debatable, especially in some of the more openly didactic novels explored here. Yet Coleman’s assertion that popular literature carries the potential for subversion and activism is compelling, especially when considered alongside recent re-assessments of popular romances and sentimental fiction by critics such as Janice Radway and Jane Tompkins.

In her groundbreaking study of early American sensation or “sentimental” fiction *Sensational Designs* (1985), Tompkins articulates a new critical mode for understanding and appreciating fiction that has proved outstandingly popular at the time of publication (as much of the fiction under study here was), but which has since been castigated for failing to stand up to modern critical demands of early national fiction. Tompkins argues that popular novels

should be studied not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment ... [these works were] written not so that they could be enshrined in any literary hall

of fame, but in order to win the belief and influence the behaviour of the widest possible audience. These novelists have designs upon their audiences, in the sense of wanting to make people think and act in a particular way. (xi)

As with Coleman, Tompkins finds value in what these novels can tell us about both a specific historical moment *and* about the desires of individuals and interest groups to change or challenge the status quo within these specific cultural moments. In “reclaiming” or restoring these neglected texts to the canon of critical inquiry, Tompkins calls for the need to see such novels ‘insofar as possible, as they were seen in the moment of their emergence, not as degraded attempts to pander to the prejudices of the multitude, but as providing men and women with a means of ordering the world they inhabited, ... to have a grasp of the cultural realities that made these novels meaningful’ (Ibid xiii).

In endeavouring to follow Tompkins’ lead, in this study I will invoke historical narratives and criticism of both the working woman and the novels in which she was depicted, not only to try and discern the extent to which the fiction of the period mirrored and accurately represented the female workers of this era (or conversely deliberately strayed from them), but more significantly to help ‘recapture the world view they sprang from and which they helped to shape’ (Ibid xiii), so that both their popularity and their role in moulding the Canadian public’s perception of the working woman can be explored and appreciated. Much like Tompkins, I hope that by positioning these novels in their historical and critical contexts, they can be re-evaluated not only for their representation of the critically neglected figure of the working woman, but also for their skill in ‘doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation’ (Ibid 200).

Sensational Designs is also useful when unpicking the other main reason why these popular, sentimental novels are largely neglected by critics. As Tompkins succinctly outlines, ‘the *popularity* of novels by women has been held against them almost as much as their preoccupation with “trivial” feminine concerns’ (Ibid xiv). This trivialisation is usually epitomised in a common revulsion against the more sentimental, didactic elements of popular fiction. Suzanne Clark has argued that ‘the word does not mean just an emotional fakery. It marks the limits of critical discourse as if they were natural. As an epithet, *sentimental* condenses the way gender still operates as a political unconscious within criticism to trigger shame, embarrassment, and disgust’ (11). Thus, for Clark as well as Tompkins, the tendency to diminish and belittle the value of works labelled “sentimental” is intrinsically tied to

gender and the preponderance of these works' emphasis on, and celebration of, particularly "feminine" emotions or feeling. This study thus recuperates texts which have been largely ignored or criticised for their sentimentality, asking how far the continued use of popular romance forms into the twentieth century represents a strategic effort to engage the Canadian public with the social issues which were coalescing around the figure of the working woman.

Radway's work on popular romance fiction, whilst focused on more contemporary writing, holds similar value for critics seeking frameworks within which to examine "women's fiction." In *Reading the Romance* (1984), Radway asserted the need for popular fiction marketed for mass consumption, such as the modern romance (or the sentimental, romantic novel of the early twentieth century) to take a more central place in cultural studies. Through interviews with romance readers about their favourite romance novels and why they read and re-read them, Radway was able to articulate and explore the ways romances work upon their readers to provide both emotional support and escapism. She claims that '[b]y reading the romance as if it were a realistic novel about an individual's unique life ... the reader can ignore the fact that each story prescribes the same fate for its heroine and can therefore unconsciously reassure herself that her adoption of the conventional role, like the heroine's, was the product of chance and choice, not of social coercion' (17). She explains how '[i]n the utopia of romance fiction, "independence" and a secure individual "identity" are never compromised by the paternalistic care and protection of the male' (Ibid 79). Here, Radway begins to interrogate the central concern many modern feminist critics face when analysing not only modern, but turn-of-the-twentieth-century romantic fiction. In many of the novels discussed in this survey of Canadian working women, female characters are seen to show great initiative and verve, striking out on their own to make a living, fending off potential seducers and generally enjoying the (limited) opportunities for female independence that the new century offered. Nevertheless, nearly all the stories close with the heroine choosing to renounce her former independence (both economic and emotional) to marry and start a family. However, if we see these decisions not from our modern, feminist viewpoint – where such actions may seem to suggest a loss of autonomy or reversion to patriarchal expectations – but through Radway's lens of 'romance reading,' then these women, in finding love and settling down, are not losing their independence, but rather being *rewarded* by the narrative for their earlier actions within the text.

We must be careful not to read such narratives too simplistically, however, as whilst some novelists clearly endorsed and wholeheartedly believed in the "reward" of marriage and

family as novelistic destiny, other authors may have worked within the popular narrative trajectory to subtly critique and undermine its very existence. Indeed, Alison Light has argued, that the very need for women to subsume themselves in romance reading is ‘as much a measure of their deep dissatisfaction with heterosexual options as of any desire to be fully identified with the submissive versions of femininity the texts endorse. Romance imagines peace, security, and ease precisely because there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty’ (22). Picking up on Light’s argument, Radway herself argues that ‘the romance is one of the few widely shared womanly commentaries on the contradictions and costs of patriarchy’ (18). Examining popular romance fiction is therefore a rather complex venture. I will explore competing analyses of these texts, considering how they might have been read at the time of publication and also how they may be read now when placed alongside other works written in similar modes. Do some of these works have more potential for subversion or ambivalence than others regarding the status of working women and their culturally prescribed destinies?

Briefly, we must also consider the role the fictional working girl played in ‘dime novels.’ In most of these novels, the protagonist, a young working woman, usually bereft of family and friends, is forced to make her way in the world and quickly finds herself facing adventure and intrigue. Such novels only tend to make mention of the protagonists’ work or her workplace at the novel’s opening, but as Nan Enstad significantly notes, ‘the novels were about *being* a female worker throughout. The attacks the heroine encounters are always in the context of her status as worker’ (73-4). For Enstad, dime novels, marketed primarily at working- and lower-middle-class readers, ‘invoked the difficulty of working-class women’s lives – toiling at jobs that offered low pay, dirty and dangerous working conditions, and little hope for advancement – and offered them fabulous fantasies of wealth, fashion, success, and love’ (Ibid 19). None of the novels under examination in this study could be labelled dime novels, and many of them can be classed, at least tentatively, as ‘domestic fiction’, a genre Enstad distinguishes from dime novels due to their emphasis on ‘moral value’ (Ibid 41). At the same time, I would argue that the selected novels’ repeated focus on melodrama, travel, attempted seductions and the dangers of the urban environment share many resonances with popular genre fiction or dime novels. Most significant for this study is Enstad’s examination of the working girl heroine of dime novels, traditionally a woman who ‘confronts an array of attacks and adventures but is not made powerless; on the contrary, her actions secure her position as a virtuous and laudable worker and woman’ (Ibid 44).

This thesis is divided into chapters that separate women's work by profession. This approach allows for comparison of specific professions across a range of literary texts, and also allows larger themes to be explored across occupations to discern whether similarities emerge in the treatment of women's work across class- and profession-based boundaries. Each chapter follows a similar structure, opening with an examination of the historical and social contexts which helped develop and disseminate specific cultural ideologies about the particular branch of women's work under discussion. They will then explore literary representations of these figures (e.g. the Type-Writer Girl, the teacher, the factory worker) in order to analyse how these texts endorse, problematise, or even occasionally condemn outright, dominant constructions of femininity and women's work.

The professions of the female author and journalist will not be examined in this study. This is largely because these vocations have already been explored critically in great depth by modern literary scholars.⁸ I have chosen to focus instead on the representation of less critically-explored forms of female labour, such as nursing, factory work, secretarial work, teaching and seamstressing, thus enabling this study to make an original contribution to knowledge, and offer new analyses and perspectives on the representation of women's work in early Canadian fiction.

⁸ Examples of existing critical analysis of these professions can be found in Faye Hammill's *Literary Culture and Female Authorship in Canada* (2003), Janice Fiamengo's *The Woman's Page* (2008), and Connie Bellamy's *The New Heroines: The Contemporary Female Bildungsroman in English Canadian Literature* (1986).

The Female Urban Working Class

Writing for the *Toronto Star* in 1912 under the penname of ‘Videre,’ journalist and aspiring novelist Maude Pettit (1877-1959) gained public notoriety by writing about her experiences of working undercover as a jam-dolloper, and of her struggles to find decent housing and food on a salary of five dollars a week. She chose the name Videre as, in her own words, ‘I went “to see” the land’ (168).⁹ Only a few days into her employment at a Toronto biscuit factory, Videre comments on how ‘you soon begin to work mechanically. Most of the workers seem inclined to sing while working, though singing is against the rules. I found myself contracting a habit of ceaseless humming. Fortunately my weird melodies were drowned by the whirl of the machinery’ (Ibid 169). Thus, within a few days Videre finds herself not only adopting her fellow workers’ rituals, but also feeling the oppressive noise and rigour of the factory itself. In a column submitted just a few days later Videre comments on the quick turnaround of female employees in such positions: ‘[t]here seems to be a continued shifting in these occupations. The workers grow tired of the monotony of their labour, and change from chocolates to lace, and from lace to gum, and from gum to feathers, and so on’ (Ibid). Videre herself quickly partakes of these shifts, moving up professionally and socially with her successful application to work in the whitewear trade.

However, with this upward momentum, Videre keenly notes how the divisions between her fellow labourers become increasingly distinct: ‘[t]he girls who do the more skilled work do not associate very much with the girls who do the cheaper work ... It recalled a statement I once heard from a girl who sold ladies’ suits ... “The suit girls don’t have anything to do with the shirtwaist girls,” she said’ (Ibid 173). In her article on the popular labour movement the Knights of Labour, Lynne Marks reminds her readers that ‘[t]he existence of a class of people who sell their labour power to survive, a working class, does not necessarily mean that these people will identify themselves as a separate class ... when members of a class share distinct values, interests and lifestyles – what some have termed a culture – they tend more readily to identify themselves with this class’ (156). Marks’ comments here are useful in highlighting the divisions within the working class itself, and especially between particular trades and professions within these low paid, menial labour

⁹ The word ‘videre’ (lat.) is defined as ‘to see’ according to the OED online, and in Pettit’s case this might be designed to reinforce a sense of her own omniscient powers of observation over a class she did not truly belong to (‘videre’).

roles. Given the general lack of loyalty to a particular employer or trade (as Videre's comments above reinforce) the question of social status takes on especial significance, as when faced with the prospect of low wages and repetitive mechanical tasks, the potential for social mobility could ultimately hold far greater prospects for a working class employee than a few extra dollars a week ever could. For these reasons, questions of class and professional status within particular trades will need to be considered when examining the fictional representation of the urban working class in the fiction of this era, as will the extent to which these labouring heroines display any real sense of pride in their work or attachment and solidarity with their fellow workers.

This chapter will focus on the representation of the urban working class, so that the findings can be contrasted with the following chapter's focus on farm work and domestic service in rural areas. This will allow for an exploration of the interstices between representations of rural and urban working women, and for an examination of the extent to which the city was demonised and represented as a modern Babylon in Canada's popular fiction. Valverde outlines in *Age of Light, Soap, and Water* how there remained two contrasting but complimentary symbolic representations of the city throughout the early twentieth century: '[o]ne was Coketown, hard-working, ugly, and functional; the other one was Babylon, the night-time city of lights and temptations, the city of leisure – and of sex' (79). Notably, this first depiction is decidedly masculine; the latter, more perilous representation, suggestively feminine. As Valverde continues, 'Coketown and Babylon were of course the same place, but the symbolic split between them was rooted in the concrete experience of urban life insofar as it reflected the lived experience of the split between labour and leisure, day and night, duty and pleasure' (Ibid). This symbolic split is central to the negative portrayal of the urban environment in much of the popular fiction of the period, and must be interrogated to uncover if authors always chose to portray the city as a site of potential peril and degradation, or whether alternatively heroines were allowed to 'forge personal connections and local networks of support, indicating the potential for community as well as autonomy in the city' (Martin 'Visions' 46).

Perhaps surprisingly given this study's focus on female labour, there will only be passing discussion of questions of unionisation and strike action in this section, largely due to

the general absence of these movements from popular literature itself in this period.¹⁰ McMaster's study offers a detailed account of the alternating representations in the popular press of female labour activism as 'sometimes rowdy and violent, sometimes light-hearted and fun' (Ibid 144), portrayals largely reflected in the fleeting references to unionisation in novels such as Agnes Maule Machar's *Roland Graeme* (1892) and Nellie McClung's *Painted Fires* (1925) where strike action and union-based violence are largely condemned or even, in the case of McClung's novel, made to appear ludicrous. McMaster argues that

[m]ost working women of the time were young and single, but the idea that their workplace experience was a temporary stage ending with marriage also mitigated against their union involvement, for it meant that they weren't taken seriously as committed and permanent members of the workforce, and they themselves often expected (perhaps a little too optimistically) that they would leave work upon marriage, so they didn't see union membership as a priority. (Ibid 123)

This tendency for women to diminish the value of their own work as temporary, or as a 'stop-gap' between adolescence and marriage was only compounded by the fact that when women chose to take an interest in joining existing male-orientated unions they still remained largely 'relegated to "auxiliary" status and denied access to positions of real authority' (Ibid 124).

Large-scale public strike action such as the 1907 Bell Telephone Strike and even the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 drew great attention to female labour activism and questions of unequal pay and long work days, but for the most part, working women failed to organise in any real or effective manner in this period. This inability to mobilise has largely been blamed by modern historians on the tendency to restrict unions to workers whose labours were labelled "skilled," a title few female workers obtained as '[t]he work performed by women, whatever its characteristic, was usually labelled unskilled' (Prentice et al 137). In *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (1986), editors Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman argue that '[w]omen's willingness to accept terms less advantageous than men's was carefully nurtured by canny employers and encouraged, probably unconsciously, by the reluctance of male unionists to defend women on the same basis as themselves' (137).

¹⁰ A few notable exceptions to this generalisation are Mabel Burkholder's *The Course of Impatience Curningham* (1911), her short story 'The Heart of Kerry' (1907) collected in Campbell and McMullen's *New Women* (1991) and L. M. Montgomery's short story 'The Strike at Putney' collected in *Against the Odds: Tales of Achievement*, edited by Rea Wilmhurst (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993). These all deal with issues of labour unrest in a more nuanced manner, even if they still rely heavily on the *noblesse oblige* of the middle classes and social gospel themes. A more detailed discussion of these texts has been excluded from this study for reasons of space.

Expanding on her editors' arguments, Joan Sangster suggests in a corresponding article that '[t]he idealisation of women's maternal and domestic roles must have dulled the development of a truly feminist working-class consciousness which recognised women's special oppression as workers' (152).

Close attention will also be paid to the differing classification of female workers as 'working girls' and 'business women' in the novels from this period. Strange explores this distinction in *Toronto's Girl Problem* and draws particular attention to clothing as an indicator of the economic and class-based divisions between female labourers: "[b]usiness women's" crisp white blouses and tailored skirts signalled not only their class position but their adherence to a code of respectability different from that followed by factory girls, whose flashy dress styles made them notorious' (8). Indeed, this tendency to depict working class women as 'flashy,' especially in the literature of the period, was a deliberate strategy as it allowed the authors to highlight how easily such figures could fall into economic or moral ruin.

It is important to note, as McMaster does in her study, that the very act of turning the 'working girl' into a heroine and protagonist in many of the novels of this era began to problematise such clear moral and class-based distinctions as '[t]o contend, as working-girl novels did, that the working woman was indeed a figure of unquestionable virtue was to assert that she was as good as any "lady"' (73). This issue will therefore need to be considered in the novels under examination, as will the question of whether a female worker can ever really be designated a 'lady.' Significantly, in *Ladies of Labour* (1999), Enstad argues that '[w]orking women's version of ladyhood differed greatly from middle-class ideals: it challenged middle-class perceptions of labour as degrading to femininity and created a utopian language of entitlement rooted in workplace experiences' (Ibid 14). This concept of 'working ladyhood' is outlined by Enstad as a 'set of consumption-based conventions and practices through which individuals variously constructed particular subjectivities. Thus, the practice of working ladyhood created a site of multiplicity, a shifting identity which played off a range of cultural contradictions and instabilities in turn-of-the-century society' (Ibid 50). Whilst Enstad's construct would appear to offer working class heroines an unprecedented level of emancipation and personal pride in their work and leisure pursuits, we cannot ignore the fact that in the majority of the texts under examination in this thesis 'working girls' remain of largely middle-class origin, and in instances where authorial attention is drawn to their rare status as working class women, the narrative focus still

remains strongly on these women's economic and moral struggles to retain their virtues and 'ladyhood' in the face of financial hardships. It would thus appear that working women *could* use the 'cultural resources of ladyhood to construct formal political subjectivities' (Ibid 51), but the extent to which this was a reality, especially in popular fiction of the day, remains open to question and must therefore be explored in more depth throughout this chapter and the remaining study.

In a column dated June 13th *Videre* tackles the central concern that many of her readers would have held regarding the increased presence of young women in the urban marketplace: the dangers that such a public presence placed on their propriety and cultural values. She reassures her readers that '[w]hen a girl is working from 7.45 a.m. to 5.30 or 6 p.m. at, say, a power machine, there is not much danger to any question of "morals" obtruding itself. Of alleged conditions as portrayed by melodrama, where the villain is a wicked foreman or employee, I found absolutely no hint' (174). In *Toronto's Girl Problem*, Strange explores the historical and sociological roots of such public concern over working girls' 'morals' in this era, focusing on the predominant suspicion that 'working girls seemed altogether too interested in men' (10). Indeed, Strange argues that this cultural myth was so pervasive that '[l]urking beneath the surface of every report on women and work was a subtext (or perhaps the metatext) of prostitution' (Ibid). Prostitution was considered the 'social evil' of Canadian society well into the twentieth century, with many reformers and social investigators portraying the day-to-day existence of the working girl as one step from this fall into depravity and ruin. McClintock has argued that the reason prostitutes came to hold such a notorious status in Anglophone society was due in large part to their problematic market status: '[i]nhabiting, as they did, the threshold of marriage and market, private and public, prostitutes flagrantly demanded money for services middle-class men expected for free. Prostitutes visibly transgressed the middle-class boundary between private and public, paid work and unpaid work' (56). Whilst I would agree with McClintock's arguments here over the subversive potential of the prostitute to break down these public/private divisions in middle-class society, this chapter will demonstrate that the prostitute's real disruptive power rested in her rhetorical and symbolic power to corrupt female propriety and endanger the exalted institution of heterosexual marriage.

One of the most prominent ways in which this anxiety was explored in the literature of the era was through the white slave narrative. Largely propagated by social purity campaigners to ward young men and women of the dangers of sexual vice, these narratives

dramatised the popular belief that ‘an organised traffic in women, and not merely the practice of isolated procurers, threatened the moral foundation of city life’ (Strange 96). These narratives, due to the prevalence of public fears surrounding miscegenation in this era, usually centred round a predatory oriental man seeking to corrupt and kidnap vulnerable young, white girls working in the city, leading them into lives of forced prostitution and drug dependency.¹¹ Such tales were largely reactionary, warning young women that if they moved to the city in search of work they would likely find themselves victims of moral and sexual depravities that they were ill-equipped to defend themselves against. These stories were impressively pervasive throughout the early twentieth century, acting as a funnel for a variety of social fears: ‘[t]he melodramatic/journalistic form, the stock characters, and the descriptions of the seamy side of urban life for the voyeuristic pleasure of a middle-class churchgoing audience were literary elements constituting a very successful genre, pioneered by W T Stead and continuing in today’s news accounts of crime and vice in the city’ (Valverde 98).

However, in *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (1987) Michael Denning argues that ‘[u]nlike the seduction novels that occasionally occur in middle-class fiction, which focus on the fallen woman ... [working girl dime novels] are tales of the woman who does not fall, despite drugs, false marriage, physical violence, and disguise. Against middle-class sympathy for the fallen is set working-class virtue’ (192). As previously discussed, although none of the novels examined in this thesis could be considered dime novels, I would argue that their emphasis on the plight of the working girl and their frequent use of melodrama and sentiment share many similarities with the fiction that Denning examines in his study. This idea of ‘working-class virtue’ is also explored by Enstad who examines how ‘working women used popular culture as a resource to lay claim to dignified identities as workers, sometimes from the very terms used by others to degrade them’ (13).

As both Denning and Enstad argue, such novels focused on asserting the working girl’s virtue and refusal to play the victim in narratives of their potential corruption or fall.

¹¹ Strange has refuted the claim that these narratives were based on real incidents of Chinese men kidnapping young women in Canadian cities: ‘[r]emarkably, no charges of sexual assault were filed against Chinese men in the late nineteenth century or early twentieth century in Toronto. The myth of Chinese men drugging and seducing white women into sexual slavery was fuelled by scandal-mongering journalism, not by court reports’ (155).

The working girl heroine of such tales thus remained a figure who was ‘never successfully seduced,’ and whose vulnerability was paired with her ‘exceptional heroism’ (Ibid 37). It is important to note that the formula outlined by Denning and Enstad here can be more readily applied to the middle class heroines of the novels explored later in this thesis. In these novels, female characters ultimately achieve social mobility and escape the working world to settle down and start families. However, for the working class figures portrayed in the novels examined in this chapter, such realities are depicted as less obtainable, many of them ‘falling’ and taking on the cultural stigmas that such actions entailed. Nevertheless, some of the working class characters depicted in these novels do escape such clichéd endings, proving their ‘working class virtue,’ and obtaining their own limited degree of social mobility through successful marriages. This statement rings particularly true for the working class heroines in the following chapter on farming and rural domestic service, and also will be discussed extensively there.

The rising unpopularity of domestic service

In her article dated July 2nd Videre chooses to focus on the issue of domestic service – a highly contested issue in this era as demand continually outstripped supply. Asking her co-workers why they chose factory work over service, the replies all follow a similar vein: ‘[y]ou are not thought as much of ... You have to work harder at it ... It is every night in the week but one, and Sundays too’ (Pettit 178). Another worker admits ‘I don’t like being bossed much ... At the factory, when your work’s done, your time’s your own. You can go where you like’ (Ibid). Videre thus informs her readers that ‘there is a lure about the factory ... The girls like to be where there is “something doing,” where things happen, where the joke is being bandied and the bit of gossip, good- or ill-natured, whichever it may be, passed along. The kitchen looks a lonely place down behind the board fences and between the brick walls’ (Ibid). Indeed, perhaps most telling of all for Videre is the ‘mating instinct’ which she argues is severely hindered when a woman enters domestic service. As she outlines:

[t]he girl in the factory has ‘bows’ in her hair and ‘beaux’ in her train. The girl in the kitchen is shut away from these lords of creation ... Besides, when John calls on your servant girl, he has to go in by the back gate ... A month later, when she has taken a place at the factory, he can call at the front door of the boarding house and ask for ‘Miss Samson Johnson,’ or whatever it is. They both feel that she now had a different standing in the world. (Ibid)

In her short article Videre succinctly outlines the main deterrents that women in search of work felt towards domestic service. It is significant that they nearly all concern issues of status, isolation and the increasing desire for women to be ‘at liberty’ to use their time as they see fit – whether for courting or for social events with fellow female workers – something that the traditional structure of domestic service severely hindered. However, Videre is keen to stress in her article that ‘[a]bove all, it is this loss of caste, this social slur that women themselves have put upon housework, that accounts for the unwillingness of our girls to do it’ (Ibid).

In *The Age of Capital* (1977), Hobsbawm claims that the ‘widest definition of the middle class ... was that of keeping domestic servants’ (286). Domestic servants thus acted as a clear symbol of middle-class status and authority in an era when the constant attempts of the working- and lower-middle classes to achieve social mobility and improve their lot sought to undermine the previously well-defined class boundaries. However, despite the inherent value of domestic servants to a household’s social standing, the wages offered for such service remained markedly low. This was largely due to the assumption that if a servant ‘boarded’ with their family, they had already received a large portion of their wage, the remainder acting more as ‘pin money’ than as a subsistence wage. However, this tradition overlooks the fact that many domestic servants did indeed have dependents who were heavily reliant on the meagre wages of daughters employed in middle-class households, and such families suffered greatly as a result of these cultural assumptions.

In *Imperial Leather* McClintock argues that ‘[t]he housewife’s labour of *leisure* found its counterpart in the servant’s labour of *invisibility*’ (163). As she argues:

[t]he wife’s labour of leisure and the servant’s labour of invisibility served to disavow and conceal within the middle-class formation the economic value of women’s work. Female servants thus became the embodiment of a central contradiction within the modern industrial formation. The separation of the private from the public was achieved only by paying working-class women for domestic work that wives were supposed to perform for free. (Ibid 164)

Therefore, whilst the domestic servant acted as a status symbol whose presence underscored the class stature of their clients, all traces of their actual labour were required to be carried out silently and ‘invisibly,’ or else they risked undermining the middle class housewife’s assumed domestic prowess and social standing within the imperial ‘cult of domesticity.’

Accordingly, McClintock argues that ‘the figure of the paid female servant constantly imperilled the “natural” separation of private home and public market’ (164). The liminal status of the domestic or maid is also commented on by Jane Gallop who argues that this woman remains firmly ““at the door” inasmuch as she is a threshold figure: existing between “within the family” and “outside the family”” (146). Given this contradictory status – wherein she remained both insider and outsider – it is perhaps unsurprising that so many of Videre’s fellow workers found domestic labour too isolating to consider as a profession. Indeed, as new industries began opening up to women in more ‘white collar’ industries such as stenography, or in occupations such as nursing and teaching, along with the growing cultural acceptance of women’s employment inside factories and department stores, the sheer variety and choice open to young women willing to work began to heavily impinge on the ability of the static, convention-bound field of domestic service. Domestic service therefore began to be increasingly viewed as a ‘female employment ghetto’ which ‘drew increasingly on immigrants, who were seen as the least likely to contest the low wages and the poor work conditions that did not change’ (Bradbury 167).

One example of this conception of a ‘female employment ghetto’ is the stereotype of the Irish domestic servant, whose increasing presence in Canadian society was largely mirrored in her regular appearance in fiction of the early twentieth century. In *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada* (1991), Marilyn Barber claims that ‘[b]y 1845 women formed almost half the total of Irish emigrants and after the famine they were frequently in the majority, although there seems to have been a higher proportion of women going to the United States than to Canada’ (5). Barber finds this predominance of female immigrants striking as the majority of the emigration movements of the nineteenth century were dominated by men. However, Barber states that this gender imbalance can be largely explained by the fact that ‘women were more certain than men to obtain employment in North America because the need for domestic servants never ceased whereas the demand for male labourers fluctuated considerably’ (Ibid).

The prominent presence of these Irish women in Canadian middle-class households was, unsurprisingly, replicated in the fiction of the period, helping to both propagate and interrogate existing cultural stereotypes of the Irish domestic servant. Barber outlines how ‘[t]he Irish immigrant servant without [previous experience] was handicapped by the poverty of her background. She was portrayed as personally untidy, careless, inept, ignorant and lacking moral sense. At the same time, she was praised as chaste, moral, warm-hearted and

faithful' (Ibid 6). Indeed, it is important to stress that in this era the Irish still remained slightly marred by the Victorian era's iconography of 'domestic degeneracy,' which had classed the Irish alongside Jews, prostitutes, and the working class more generally, as 'white negroes' (McClintock 53). Clair Wills even argues that the difficulty that imperial, Anglophone society had in categorising the Irish within the structural hierarchies of empire was 'compounded by the absence of the visual marker of skin colour difference which was used to legitimate domination in other colonised societies' (21). Nevertheless, for all the negative connotations that the female Irish immigrant still held from earlier imperial discourses, it is also important not to overlook the alternative view of Irish domestics which Barber describes as 'chaste, moral, warm-hearted and faithful.' The continued employment of Irish women in middle class households throughout the early twentieth century suggests that not all employers bought into these negative stereotypes or rather, if they did, that they chose to ignore them in the face of the alternative: no domestic servants at all, or the employment of a non-white, non-West-European servant (a figure who was even harder to render invisible in the Canadian middle-class household).

Writing 'in plane litters and langwidge'

Winnifred Eaton's *Diary of Delia. Being a Veracious Chronicle of the Kitchen with Some Side-lights on the Parlour* was published in 1907, and signalled a radical change in tone and theme for an author who had risen to prominence with her popular Anglo-Japanese romances. Predominantly, though not exclusively, published under her Japanese pseudonym "Onoto Watanna," the novel was an impressively hybrid creation. As Amy Ling outlines, with *Diary of Delia* 'for the first time in literary history, we have the anomaly of an Irish-American novel written by a Chinese-Anglo-Canadian published under a Japanese name' (55). This chapter will contribute a new perspective on Eaton's work by concentrating on the fluctuating class- and labour-relations that underpin Eaton's narrative of a young Irish maid as she navigates her relationships with both her upper-middle class employers and her potential suitors.

Winnifred Eaton Babcock Reeve¹² (1875-1954) is known best today as one of the first Asian-North Americans to publish a novel in English (*Miss Numè of Japan*, 1899). Born in Montreal, to an English businessman-turned-artist, Edward Eaton, and his Chinese missionary wife Grace Trefusis, Winnifred Eaton grew up with an acute awareness of her

¹² Hereafter referred to as 'Winnifred Eaton' due the critical tendency to privilege her maiden name over her married names in analyses of her work.

difficult social and ethnic status as Chinese-Canadian (Doyle 51). Whilst this heritage encouraged one of her sisters, Edith, to campaign for improved rights for Asian-Americans, Winnifred took a different road, denying her Chinese ancestry and instead using her ambiguous ethnicity to reinvent herself as the half-Japanese authoress, Onoto Watanna. Often compared unfavourably with her more politically active sister Edith, Winnifred Eaton is often referred to as the ‘less capable writer’ of the two sisters, her fiction ‘too obviously dependent on predictable formulas of sentimental fiction’ (Ibid 57). More recently, scholarship on Eaton’s work has focused on her earlier novels (written under her Japanese pseudonym) and her fictional autobiographies focusing on her “trickster-like” ability to characterise the experience of the miscegenated subject within highly popular and sentimental novels.¹³ However, this has led critics such as Gerson to argue that Eaton criticism has become ‘overdetermined by race’ (*Canadian Women* 190). I have thus chosen to focus on the ‘less capable’ Eaton sister’s fiction to draw attention to her ability to work within popular sentimental forms to explore the evolving representations of women’s work (both inside and outside the home) across the early twentieth century, suggesting that Eaton’s work can hold great value beyond the critical framework of race-relations and early Asian-North American canon building.

Diary of Delia has received limited critical attention, with the majority of modern critics still privileging Eaton’s oriental romances and autobiographical works over her more mainstream Anglo-North American novels. However, Dominika Ferens has recently applied the critical lens of ‘ethnography’ traditionally used to explore Eaton’s Japanese narratives to *Diary*, suggesting that after an extensive focus overseas, Eaton ‘turned her ethnographic eye on the customs and manners of the (racially unmarked) white middle class.’ Thus, in order ‘to create a cultural distance from which to view her subjects, she used a working-class Irish narrator’ (171). Jean Lee Cole takes a similar approach, suggesting that by ‘speaking in the brogue of an Irish immigrant, she [Eaton] reveals the contradictions inherent in the seemingly progressive aspects of domestic science and new womanhood. By recasting domestic ideology from the perspective of an immigrant domestic, she reveals the deeply racialised nature of the American home’ (*Literary Voices* 12). The extent to which Eaton’s narrative, and her choice of a working-class Irish narrator allows for, or indeed actively *enables*, a critique of upper-middle class privilege will form a central thread of this discussion.

¹³ For a detailed discussion of Eaton’s authorial “tricksterism” see Yuko Matsukawa’s ‘Cross-Dressing and Cross-Naming: Decoding Onoto Watanna.’ *Tricksterism in Turn of the Century American Literature*. eds. Elizabeth Ammons and Annette White-Parks. Hanover: New England University Press, 1994. 106-25.

Nevertheless, the comedic and satirical elements of Eaton's novel must also be navigated in order to determine the extent to which we as readers are invited to laugh *at* Delia as well as alongside her.

Diary of Delia offers the reader a first-person account of young Delia O'Malley's employment as housekeeper and maid for the well-to-do Wolley family. Set in the United States, the novel opens with Delia submitting her resignation due to her frustration over the sheer amount of work she is expected to undertake. However, the Wolleys' daughter Claire is soon sent to beg Delia to return when they cannot find a worthy replacement. Claire pleads 'we've tuk a place in the cuntry. We *must* have a girl. Its dredful to think of being widout one. O Delia, *do please* cum wid us' (Eaton *Diary* 35). Relenting out of loyalty to the Wolleys, she returns to her service, and the Wolleys – now aware of the realities of life *without* Delia – are much more willing to take on various duties themselves to ease the maid's workload. A large portion of the novel's comedy stems from the Wolleys' failed attempts to fulfil their new domestic roles and also from the increasingly implausible romantic liaisons that soon spring up following their relocation to the country. As Delia bemoans in a letter to fellow maid Minnie Carvanan, 'this do be a straynge bit of coountry wid ivery body in lov wid aich uther' (Ibid 103). After many misunderstandings and much subterfuge on the part of Delia herself (who acts as emissary and chaperone to one of the novel's more star-crossed romantic pairings), the Wolley children all end up married off to appropriate partners, and Delia herself – after much concern over 'for chune hoonting' men (Ibid 186) – makes a match with fellow Irishman Larry Mulvaney, leaving domestic service forever, with a tidy sum saved, ready to begin a new chapter in her life.

As will be apparent from these short extracts, just as the speech in her earlier novels was written in a form of pidgin English to replicate Japanese English-speaking characters, this novel is narrated entirely in Eaton's own version of an Irish brogue. Given the novel's status as a diary, this ensures that the entire narrative is mediated through Delia's first-person perspective. Ferens suggests 'Delia's voice ... [has] the unexpected result of levelling all the characters, whatever their class ... she is not only in control of the story, which would in itself be significant, but also pokes fun at "proper" speech' (176). Continuing this point, Ferens argues that 'Delia may not be able to spell such words as *boon* or *humanity*, but she has no trouble understanding what they mean and rendering them in her "diary" with a fine sense of irony. The joke is thus never on Delia alone' (Ibid). Thus, whilst Delia's brogue may make the novel a less comfortable read at times, it also adds a new level of ethnographic

“authenticity” to the narrative and, most controversially as Ferens signals, places all characters regardless of class on the same level linguistically. Nevertheless, Cole is quick to point out in her work that ‘[t]he class levelling of Delia’s narration is not the result of any conscious criticism or attack on Delia’s part; on the contrary, she is steadfastly loyal to her employers and seemingly oblivious to their faults. But her unwittingly insightful observations and unintentionally appropriate malapropisms cleverly forward Eaton’s lampoon’ (*Literary Voices* 62).

For Cole, Eaton’s lampoon focuses largely on the ‘newfangled ideas about housekeeping’ (Ibid 63) that young Claire Wolley begins to implement following Delia’s re-employment and the family’s relocation to the country. It is Claire who insists that the family help Delia with household tasks, which is significant as she is the one who initially endorses Delia’s departure at the novel’s start: ‘Muther ... dont descend to begging Delia to remane. *Let her go. We can get on famissly widout her*’ (Eaton *Diary* 17). The language of ‘descent’ is significant here as Claire, who initially sees herself as superior to Delia due to their contrasting positions in the prevailing social hierarchy, is forced to literally beg for Delia’s return twenty pages later. As she details to her fellow family members upon successful retrieval of Delia:

‘[n]ow ... if I’m to be housekaper and we cant afford but wan girl and the works too hevvy for Delia alone and shell be laving us if –’

‘Sh!’ says her mother, ‘spake lower. Shes in the bootlers pantry, making the salad.’

‘Nonsense,’ ses Mr. James, ‘shes at the keyhole listening.’ (Ibid 47)

Through Eaton’s use of the diary mode, we as readers are aware that Delia is indeed listening at the keyhole – otherwise we would not have access to this conversation. This motif is repeated throughout the narrative; Delia’s assumed ‘invisibility’ as a domestic servant allowing her to overhear and ‘listen in’ on conversations her employers consider private. Nevertheless, James’ acknowledgement in this instance of Delia’s position ‘at the keyhole’ renders Delia *visible* allowing her to be included in discussions of her labour despite her reduced status in the household.

Claire’s ‘grand designs’ are based on her belief that ‘[i]verybody ... has got to do his indivijool share of work’ (Ibid 47). Claire assigns all her family members tasks: sons James and John will cut the lawns and raise the vegetables, Mrs. Wolley will look after the chickens, Mr. Wolley will travel the two miles to collect the post, leaving Claire to grow

flowers and oversee Delia. Even the six-year-old Willy is told he will have to carry water to those working, acting as a ‘yuniversul caddy’ (Ibid 55). The progressiveness of such a situation is quickly undermined by the fact that all the Wolleys are ultimately revealed to be shirking their duties, the majority of them employing Delia herself to fulfil their tasks, paying her extra for keeping these services secret. Eaton appears to suggest that for all their expressed enthusiasm for new forms of domestic science and new models of womanhood, the majority of middle-class households still relied on the labour of their working-class subordinates to support their leisured lifestyles. This in itself is not shameful, but in trying to hide this ‘leisure’ and reassignment of domestic tasks, the Wolleys are made laughable and open to satiric attack in Eaton’s tale.

As Ferens makes clear in her examination of *Diary of Delia*: ‘[s]tripped of Delia’s voice, the threadbare romantic intrigue that is the apparent subject of her story would not have held the reader’s attention for long. The real interest and tension in the story has more to do with the intricate master-servant relations than with the resolution of the romantic subplots’ (175). As the previous ‘at the keyhole’ passage suggests, one of the main ways these ‘master-servant relations’ are subverted in Eaton’s text is through Delia’s role in the plot as both household spy and family secret-keeper. As well as the aforementioned domestic duties she takes on for Wolleys under promise of silence, Delia also acts as the main confidant for Claire when she begins a clandestine romance with neighbour Harry Dudley (whom Mr. Wolley disapproves of due to bad blood with Harry’s father). As Delia reassures Claire, ‘[d]arlint ... all the torchures of the dummed could not unlock me lips. You sacred swatehart is secure in me bussum’ (Eaton *Diary* 66).

Later in the novel, when Claire is relating recent events to Delia she appears surprised that Delia is behind on household gossip. This is swiftly justified through Delia’s offhand quip ‘[w]hy no darling. Do you think I’m at the keyhole *all* the time?’ (Ibid 97). The manner in which Delia can joke with her own employer about such surveillance reinforces the singular nature of this ‘master-servant’ relationship, underscoring its existence in a fictional world divorced from the material realities of the North American household wherein any servant found listening at keyholes would usually be dismissed without question. However, it is through Delia’s deviation from expected domestic norms that the majority of the novel’s humour derives. For example, later in the novel, Delia is listening at the keyhole again to try and uncover crucial plot information for the reader when ‘[s]uddintly the dure flew open and I fell upon my face into the room. Mr. James seized me by the neck of me gown and hauled

me oop' (Ibid 178). Here Delia's transgression of acceptable behaviour is openly acknowledged, though once again it is largely deployed to comedic ends rather than as a site for chastisement.

In an essay titled 'The Japanese in America' (1907) published in *Eclectic Magazine* the same year that *Diary of Delia* was published, Winnifred Eaton (still feigning Japanese heritage at this point) proclaimed that '[w]e are all servants – of various sorts. I serve you, for whom I write. You serve your customers, or your clients. Shall each one of us kick at the one below us?' (104). This gesture towards cross-class solidarity is focused upon by Cole, who argues that 'Eaton directs attention to the silent (and silenced) workers who made the domestic ideal possible for most well-to-do American women. Although the popular press raged with ideas about managing this labour, few made any real effort to see the situation from their perspective' (*Literary Voices* 73). Thus, Eaton's choice to write from the point of view of the servant and ironise upper-middle-class lifestyles was subversive, even though her underlying identification with that class can be seen in Delia's refusal to condemn the Wolleys openly. As Cole articulates, '[t]he passivity of working-class women, especially domestics, and their reluctance or inability to express their views on the servant problem and on their lives in general is reflected in the scarcity of their writings' (Ibid 75). Nevertheless, despite her decision to privilege the working-class voice of Delia over that of Wolleys in the narrative, Eaton's own middle-class priorities and cultural stereotypes are reflected in her characterisation of her heroine, leading us to question Eaton's ability to 'authentically' illustrate working-class subjectivities and priorities. Given Eaton's own status as a married middle-class woman writing and living in America, she always had to be careful not to castigate her own contemporaries too viciously for fear of social ostracism.

Ferens suggests that Delia 'herself is the novel's true ethnographic subject, for it is her difference that the reader studies intently and compares with some preconceived Irish immigrant norm' (173). Indeed, a review of the novel in the *Philadelphia Enquirer* (June 17, 1907) characterised Eaton's heroine as 'a rather typical Irish girl, with all the humour of her race, all of its shrewdness and some of its temper' (qtd Ferens 173). This 'shrewdness' manifests itself in Delia's unusually assertive behaviour upon her return to the Wolley household:

I tuk a bit of paper from Mr. John's desk, and I penned the follering warning in plane litters and langwidge:

BRIKFUST SARVED
AT 8 OANLEY
NO BRIKFUST
SARVED LATER. (Eaton *Diary* 45)

In choosing to phrase what amounts essentially to a household ultimatum in ‘plane litters and langwidge’ Delia forces the Wolleys to recognise that her labour will be supplied on her own terms, not at their convenience. The fact that the diary details no fallout resulting from this proclamation suggests an unprecedented level of freedom is being awarded to Delia, though once again I would suggest this scene functions more to satirise the waywardness of the leisured Wolleys, rather than to actively endorse such behaviour as acceptable for aspiring domestic servants. Similarly, I would argue that statements such as the following are used to illustrate the ‘temper’ characteristic of a racialised representation of Irish working class identity rather than an open call for greater antagonism between employer and employee: ‘[e]f Mr. James ... has anny crittersickem to be after making on a poor loan hardwoking girl he’d better spake to me’ (Ibid 140). For all her grand gestures of authority and assertiveness, Delia’s dominant characteristic remains her unfailing loyalty to her employer’s family, taking on the role of confidant or motherly figure as and when required by said member of the Wolley clan: ‘[s]tay miss? ... Why darlint you cuddent roon me out wid a steem roller’ (Ibid 198).

If the assertive ‘shrewdness’ of Delia is made non-threatening to class and social hierarchies through her persistent loyalty and affection for the Wolleys, the character of Minnie Carvanan suggests a far more troublesome version of these racialised ‘Irish’ traits. Upon announcing her resignation to the Wolleys at the start of the novel, Delia visits her friend Minnie who is decidedly unsympathetic to Delia’s plight:

‘[i]ts a fool you be Delia O’Mally. The Idear of you doing all the wark in a family of 6. Its no more sinse you seem to have than an eediot. Delia ses she, it’s the gurls that’s been here long that’s foolish like yusilf. They get stuck wid wan family who hangs on to thim for deer life. The new wans – green from the auld cuntry arent hiring out to do ginerall housewark. Its cooking in a family of 1 or 2 theyre looking for and getting. Its lite chamberwark or waiting on a table or the like. Theres never a one so green as to hire out to do the hole wark of a family. Your auld fashuned and saft,’ ses she. (Ibid 9-10)

Minnie appears to suggest here that Delia’s labours exceed those undertaken by modern domestic servants, the implication that only someone ‘green’ or ‘saft’ would expect to be

asked to carry out so much work on her own. Here the middle-class traits of leisure and minimal exertion that are made humorous in the middle-class Wolleys become mercurial and potentially dangerous in Minnie's determination to only undertake more specialised, less-labour intensive house work. Minnie fills Delia's head with aspirational, unrealistic notions of the money she could make if she found a job through 'The Alluyance' (an agency that matched maids to well-to-do families in need of domestic servants): '[i]ts thruth I'm telling you. Why I heard the uther day that Mrs. Vanderfool do be paying he cook \$20,000 a year ... I wont misguide you Delia. \$20 is the wages of a green girl who niver saw a Frinch pertater fried on airth and who broils a stake in a sorspan covered snug wid water' (Ibid 13). Minnie thus acts as a direct foil to Delia within the text, epitomising all the negative traits associated with the temporary female worker who, hoping her domestic service was only transitory in her quest for marriage and social mobility, thought above her station, lacking the humbleness and loyalty that ultimately made a figure such as Delia so appealing to early twentieth-century readers.

In Delia's search for a new position (before her return to the Wolleys), Minnie is a constantly at her side, interrupting Delia to exaggerate her experience and references, as she is interviewed for new positions at 'the Alluyance.' This is justified in Minnie's eyes through her admission that every girl in need of work does the same: '[i]ts dun ivery day. They no it. Delia theres twinty ladies for ivery wan girl. Your safe fom anny blacklist darlint' (Ibid 26). Minnie's assurance that there is constant demand for household maids leads to one of the most surreal and potentially subversive passages in the whole novel:

Minnie and I interviewed the follering ladies in regard to a position.

Mrs. Spunk. She offered me \$20 for cooking – 2 in family. The wages were too small. I refused it wid contimpt.

Mrs. Drool. \$25 cook and londress. Minnie told her londry work wud spyle my hands.

Ms. Lambkin – 8 in family – Cooking. \$30. Minnie sed Id be after waring the souls of my feet off rooning oop and down from the 8 of thim.

Mrs. Colebin: \$30. Cooking and waiting on table. Minnie sed no cook cud be expected to wate on table orslo. Me arms wud be aking wid passing the hivvy dishes around.

Mrs. Sesick \$40. Minnie sed we was above warking for sporting ladies at any price. Any lady, ses Minnie, who paints her hair and eyes and mouth and cheeks, and pads oop her natchurall hooman body isnt a lady at all, but a plane sporting woman. (Ibid 29-30)

In a clear reversal of roles, Minnie and Delia are characterised as the ‘interviewers’ rather than the applicants, placing the power of refusal solely in the hands of the working-class girl. The ease with which Delia (under Minnie’s tutelage) refuses positions and rates of pay, many of which would have been considered competitive in this era, subverts reader and class expectations. Nevertheless, Delia’s willingness to buy into Minnie’s unrealistic aspirations is used by Eaton to make the pair appear ludicrous. Minnie’s encouragement of Delia to turn down multiple competitive employment offers increasingly appears dangerous and unhealthy to her future ability to obtain a new position. Indeed, Minnie’s status as a villainous influence is finally cemented halfway through the novel when she comes to visit Delia at the Wolleys’ country home, imposing on Delia’s limited hospitality and threatening the Wolley marriage through her meddling in romantic relations ‘above her station’: ‘[i]ts been a week of sorrer and disthress since Minnie Carnavan cam to visit me ... She do be the most obstepurus crachure in the warld, shsticking her auld nose into ivvrywan’s thrubbles and ristliss and onhappy widout shes making mischiff’ (Ibid 121).

Cole inadvertently identifies the essential difference between the characters of Minnie and Delia; two young women ostensibly in the same social position as working-class Irish girls in need of employment: ‘[a]lthough the voice of Eaton’s actual Irish servant is obviously filtered through Eaton’s authorial consciousness, it is a consciousness that does not pity her ... but rather joins her in her demand for common human courtesy and consideration. This, in the end, is worth far more to Delia than social advancement’ (*Literary Voices* 76). Thus whilst Minnie continually plots and contrives to ‘improve her lot,’ Delia is depicted as being content in her social standing and position as a house maid, demanding only the rights and courtesy accorded to any citizen making her way in the New World, regardless of their class or social standing. Intriguingly, Cole and Gretchen Murphy have both argued that Delia’s status as an Irish immigrant domestic places her in a less upwardly-mobile position regarding marriage prospects than Eaton’s more exotic and ‘alien’ Anglo-Japanese characters that featured so heavily in her earlier novels. As Cole outlines, in *Diary of Delia* ‘[e]ach character marries someone of similar ethnic background within his or her class, thus providing a marked contrast to the Japanese romances, whose heroines moved freely between and among groups’ (Ibid 62). In ‘How the Irish Became Japanese,’ Murphy builds on Cole’s analysis to explore how

the upstairs-downstairs distinction between master and servant remains securely intact. While the middle-class and fashionably socialist Wolleys learn to see beyond class difference when

one of them marries an upper-class neighbour, Delia's class status remains fixed, no matter how much money she saves, because it is bound up with the idea of her racial difference. In this narrative, both class and race prevent Delia's romantic involvement with an Anglo-American character, a limit that is never marked for Japanese female characters in Eaton's other works. Delia's suitors are Irish and French immigrants; had Eaton made Delia a Japanese maid, her chance of entering Anglo-American society through marriage would have risen considerably. (45)

Did the limited 'exoticism' of the Irish immigrant female limit her potential for social mobility in Eaton's eyes? Or does this aspect of the plot merely reinforce the more socially realist (albeit highly satirical) thread of Eaton's narrative in *Diary of Delia* compared to the more romanticised and melodramatic form of her earlier Japanese works?

For the majority of the novel's action, twenty year-old-Delia O'Malley is seen to lack romantic ambitions, gaining her sense of security and affection through her care of the Wolley family. Nevertheless, just as young Claire begins her secret courtship of Harry Dudley, Delia becomes aware of 'two bold lads' over at the Dudley house, both of whom show a decided interest in the arrival of a young, capable working-class girl to their country locale. As Delia outlines in her diary, '[w]an is very fine and ijicated. He's Frinch – a expert shoffer as he ses. It's the hite of his ambition so he told me a few days sinse whin I be hanging out me clothes to own a small coountry shop for ortermobiles' (Eaton *Diary* 103); whilst the other, Irishman Larry Mulvaney is first described by Delia as 'a grate rude spalpeen, and he's after being in charge of the Dudley stables, so he tells me, ilbowing the perlite Frinchman aside' (Ibid 104). Both men are depicted as having employment aspirations desirable to a working-girl seeking an upwardly-mobile husband, but once Delia admits that she has significant savings of her own – 'Its \$700 Iv've poot away in the bank for me auld age' (Ibid) – she becomes increasingly worried that these men are pursuing her for her relative wealth rather than for more romantic purposes.

Much of the romantic comedy of the novel centres round Delia's suspicion of her two suitors, particularly her fellow Irishman Mulvaney who manages to trick her into giving him a kiss in exchange for a love letter addressed to Claire Wolley from her lover Dudley. Here, Mulvaney manipulates Delia's acknowledged loyalty to her employing family in an attempt to seduce the romantically-conflicted heroine, though such actions only reinforce her belief that '[i]ts plane to see ... whare you hale frum. Its ashamed I am to acnolege you a coountryman of me own, and its lissons in foine mannes ye mite be taking ... from the fine

cortsheeis yung gintleman wid hoom ye have the dayly honour of assoshyating' (Ibid 144). Here Mulvaney's ethnicity – his 'Irishness' – makes him unsuitable for marriage, with Delia's adoption of the prejudices surrounding the low-status of the Irish in North America clearly colouring her willingness or lack thereof to believe in the nobility of Mulvaney's intentions. This leads her to bemoan towards the novel's close that '[t]here be no troo Nites abownding in this sad and loansum country, for the Nites are an avarashus lot. Since the news wint abroard that I'm having me little bit of forchune in the bank, I've been pestered wid the dummed forchune hoonter till I begin to look wid soopischun on ivery dummed man that speak to me at all' (Ibid 201). Ultimately, Delia decides to 'tist' the lads by giving her savings away to young eloping couple Harry Dudley and Claire Wolley (though Dudley assures her he will return her savings 'ten times its size' (Ibid 217) once they are married and settled). Mulvaney's persistence following this act of selfless charity reassures both Delia and the reader that it is with her fellow countryman that she has the best chance at domestic felicity: '[b]esides ... Delia there made a hyer bid for me sarvisses. All the welth in the wald ... cudent bye me frum me pinnyless darlint' (Ibid 226). Although the gesture of taking a 'pinnyless' Delia is undermined by Mulvaney's awareness of the plan to return Delia's money to her (with interest), for Eaton's romantic narrative purposes, Mulvaney's gesture proves enough to justify Delia leaving her beloved Wolley family to begin to build her own with her newly acquired, racially and socially appropriate, partner.

Eaton's *Diary of Delia* is thus an amusing, if at times frustrating, upstairs-downstairs tale. Cole argues that 'if *The Diary of Delia* is not the novel of class mobility that readers today might find more palatable, neither is it a novel of class containment. The strength of Delia's character and the stridency of her voice overwhelm all the others ... She subjects them all – and their misguided, if progressive, ideas and attitudes – to her own "langwidge"' (*Literary Voices* 76-7). Nevertheless, Eaton's decision to render her text in Delia's 'langwidge' remains a particularly intriguing authorial decision. Even working-class Irish authors writing in this period would rarely have gone to the labour Eaton does in her novel to render all their characters' speech phonetically in an Irish brogue, usually relying on a Standard English-speaking narrator whose discourse would surround the Irish characters' dialect. It could thus be argued that through her decision to rely so heavily on dialect writing (used to a much more limited degree in the work of J. G. Sime), Eaton actually distances her novel from Delia, making the reader continually aware that her voice is mediated though that of an author trying (perhaps too hard) to sound authentic.

Regardless, by positioning Delia as both the narrator and central heroine of the novel, *Diary of Delia* still offers a rare attempt by a middle-class author to create an, albeit at times stereotypical, portrait of a young Irish immigrant servant. Despite its ambiguously ‘American’ setting – undeniably a deliberate ploy to attract and flatter her newfound homeland and its more profitable publishing market – Eaton’s novel can still be reclaimed as an example of the decidedly ‘North American’ preoccupation with the new opportunities for economic and social mobility that were opening up for women at the turn of the century. Through Delia’s employment *inside* the private sphere of the home, Eaton is thus able to explore the problematic position the domestic servant held in contemporary households. As the novel exemplifies, the domestic servant could either be considered part of the family and a source of confidence and support, or else a potentially dangerous onlooker (as epitomised in the figure of Minnie Carnavan) given unprecedented access to undermine and destabilise the sanctity of the private sphere of the home.

‘Those poor girls!’ Female philanthropy and the plight of the factory girl

In an 1879 essay on ‘The New Ideal of Womanhood’ for *Rose-Belford’s Canadian Monthly and National Review*, Agnes Maule Machar proclaimed that at the end of the nineteenth century “Woman” was now given ‘a right to share in the world’s work, whether in what has been rightly considered her more especial sphere, or in any other for which she is fitted’ (661). Praised by Janice Fiamengo as a ‘Christian Radical’ blessed with ‘a rhetorical power few of her contemporaries could match’ (*Woman’s* 29, 39), Machar is of particular interest in this study for the rhetorical strategies she deployed to advocate for female workers’ rights and equality whilst ensuring she dismissed ‘neither women’s particular duties as wives and mothers ... nor the feminine qualities that made the home their special place’ (Ibid 3). Machar’s social gospel novel *Roland Graeme: Knight* (1892) will be discussed here in some depth as it offers one of the few sustained engagements from this era with questions of philanthropy, labour disputes and strike action, focusing specifically on interactions *between* the upper-middle and working classes. *Roland Graeme* is also notable for its status as ‘one of the few Canadian novels of the nineteenth-century to acknowledge the existence and debilitating effects of industrialisation’ (Gerson *Three Writers*). The extent to which this novel attempts to provide an accurate portrayal of early industrial Canada will thus be considered in order to uncover the degree to which Machar’s novel could be classified as an early Canadian example of the social problem novel, a mode which had been prevalent in Britain since the mid-nineteenth century.

Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927) was a prominent author and intellectual throughout the Victorian era in Canada. She was born in Kingston to Scottish parents, and her father worked as a minister before acting as the principal of Queen's University for the years 1846-1854. Unsurprisingly, Machar thus grew up in an educated and cultured environment; she studied Greek and Latin before the age of ten, and could speak French and German by 15 (Gerson 'Agnes Maule' 45). For all her success in both journalistic and literary circles, Machar was always keen to avoid publicity, working under a series of pseudonyms that included "A. M. M.," "Canadensis," and most regularly, "Fidelis." This last pseudonym was favoured due to her contention that '[f]aithfulness is the quality I most value and care most to possess' (qtd Wetherald 300). For the most part these were transparent pseudonyms, as Machar's family's prominence in intellectual circles through their involvement at Queen's ensured that she met and argued with many of the era's most exceptional intellectuals, contributing a wealth of articles to the male-dominated journalistic debates of the day on issues ranging from religion to labour and social reform (Gerson 'Introduction' ix-x). Machar never married, and wrote throughout her lifetime, although the majority of her fiction has since been sidelined by critics who deem her work too didactic and morally earnest. Nevertheless, I would agree with Gerson that '[d]uring the nineteenth century ... she was at the centre of Canadian intellectual life, and sometimes considerably to the left of centre' (*Three Writers*).

Roland Graeme relates the experiences of a young, idealistic Canadian Knight of Labour and his experiences in the fictional American mill town of Minton. During his time in the local community, he inspires many of the local residents, most notably the philanthropic Nora Blanchard, to take a greater interest in questions of labour reform and factory working conditions. Through a series of public lectures and speeches presented by Roland and Reverend Alden, Machar's novel engages with many of the debates of the day regarding Canada's industrialisation and the rising political consciousness of the working class. After falling in love with Alden's daughter (who sadly contracts a fatal illness and dies before the two can profess their feelings for one another) and rallying striking workers to help put out a fire at the local factory, Roland relocates to the progressive town of Rockland where he realises his true feelings for fellow reformer Nora, settling down with her and making plans to start a cooperative factory.

Early reviews of *Roland Graeme* were decidedly mixed. A review from Boston's *The Dial* by William Morton Payne classed the novel as 'too obtrusively didactic to rank as a

work of art' (310), whilst a reviewer from the *Queen's College Journal* considered *Roland Graeme* 'a clear, forcible and entertaining exposition of the doctrines of Christian Socialism of to-day' and one of 'the most valuable works Canada has yet produced' (E. J. M. 74-5). Whilst such comments are clearly high praise, Machar's own ties to Queen's College make the second reviewer's abundant enthusiasm slightly suspect. A less biased outlook may be found in the following anonymous comments from *The Week*: 'Miss Machar is not a realist ... she does not dwell on the haunts of sin and poverty ... [rather she] passes through them ... [showing that] there is a nobility of soul in the poorest classes of society that cannot be surpassed by any deeds of those in a higher station ... [she succeeds] in painting life as it is' ('*Roland*' 826-7). The question of Machar's realism is particularly intriguing in this passage as whilst the reviewer swiftly writes off the author's potential status as a realist, they nevertheless dwell on the way that her fictional surveys of the lower classes and their living conditions allows her to succeed in 'painting life as it is.' This question of Machar's 'realism' will form a central focus of these analyses, especially in her depiction of the realities of working class existence in this era.

Machar's work has been largely dismissed by more modern literary critics due to her 'earnest didacticism' (Gerson 'Introduction' xx). Even critics such as Gerson, a consistent champion of Machar's value and significance to early Canadian fiction, admits in one study that '[a] comparison of her handling of labour relations in *Roland Graeme* with Dickens' treatment of the same topic in *Hard Times* reveals her evasion of any implicit or explicit analysis of class and industrial structures which could jeopardise the security of her middle-class liberalism' (*Three Writers*). However, Vipond, whose work on Machar has focused largely on her fiction's social gospel elements, asserts that for all these failings, Machar's work remains significant for the fact that she 'did at least attempt to grapple with contemporary problems ... [and] did discuss some of the imperfections of prevailing conditions and attitudes ... [enabling her to] speak sympathetically of certain reform ideas' ('Blessed' 42).

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labour (hereafter simply 'Knights of Labour' or 'Knights') was founded in Philadelphia in 1869, and appeared in Canada around 1875 with the founding of the first Canadian Local Assembly (LA) in Hamilton, Ontario (Kealey and Palmer *Dreaming* 66). The movement organised over 450 LAs across Canada, making it 'far and away the largest labour organisation in nineteenth-century Canada' (Ibid 57). At the height of its popularity, the movement totalled between 700,000-1,000,000 North

American members in 1886, with at least 22,000 members in Ontario alone (Gerson Introduction xiv). Indeed, as Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer argue, ‘the weakness of the Canadian nation state in the 1880s made the natural flow of workers and labour organisation and reform thought not east-west but rather north-south’ (16). Kealey and Palmer relate the sudden emergence and immense popularity of the movement in the late nineteenth century to the ‘manufacturing condition’ and rise of industrialisation in Canada throughout this period, also crediting the Knights with creating ‘for the first time ... a movement culture of alternative, opposition, and potential’ (Ibid 16, 17). Largely falling from public favour due to the depression of the 1890s and various crises of leadership, the movement remains significant today for its focus on improving workers’ conditions and rights, largely without the use of strike action (which it found problematic and mostly unproductive (Ibid 365)).

One of the central precepts of the Knights was ‘to uphold the dignity of labour, to affirm the nobility of all who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow ...’ (qtd Ibid 285), and its leaders asserted that ‘[a]ll members, whether they hold positions or not, occupy the same level ... This is to indicate that there are no degrees of rank, no upper or lower class – all men are admitted on an equal footing ... all branches of honourable toil are regarded in the same light by the Order of the Knights of Labour’ (Powderly 434-5). Such philosophies would no doubt have held great appeal for a social reformer such as Machar, especially given the Knights’ religious rhetoric and their willingness to enlist female members as readily as men. However, despite this assumed equality – there was no position a woman could not hold in the movement – the Knights still placed great emphasis (much as Machar herself did) on the value of family and feminine virtues. As one commentator in the *Palladium of Labour* (19 June 1886) makes clear ‘[u]pon motherhood we base brotherhood, and in our family circle we pledge ourselves to defend the fair name and reputation of an innocent sister even with our lives. If there is any pre-eminence given either sex in our order, it is given to women’ (qtd Kealey and Palmer *Dreaming* 318). The Knights’ treatment of women was thus highly paradoxical, as whilst their chivalric ideals reverted nostalgically to a past in which women were idealised and protected, the actual practices of the Knights acknowledged women as equal participants in the labour marketplace and within the movement itself. Thus, the Knights’ significance in Canadian society at this time period cannot be ignored, not only in their ability to draw attention to issues of working class struggle and labour reform, but also for their simple act of enlisting women into the labour movement in a socially-acceptable

manner – an act which would have greater significance following the turn of the century and the rise of woman suffrage.

Machar's eponymous hero Roland Graeme is an unusual figure in Canadian literature. Whilst his status as a Knight of Labour gives his character a certain degree of romance and chivalry, his function in the text remains largely to comment on labour reform issues of the era that Machar herself would doubtless have engaged with in her own journalistic career. For example, in an early meeting with the novel's heroine Nora Blanchard, Roland finds himself telling her about his latest paper for *The Brotherhood* (a small labour-driven publication he runs with fellow activists):

[t]his is the prospectus of a paper which I propose to issue in the interest of our common humanity. It is designed to promote the brotherhood of man, to secure a better feeling between class and class, employer and employed,—a fairer scale of wages and hours for the operative, fuller cooperation between employer and *employés* and mutual consideration for each other's interests; in short, to propagate ... [a] spirit of Christian socialism. (Machar *Roland* 10)

Such language is clearly not natural for casual conversation and reveals the novel's underlying didactic function to inform the reader as well as entertain them. However, the strategies Machar employs in order to ensure her "message" is heard often impinge on the novel's narrative progression and may help explain why it has been largely overlooked in studies of early Canadian fiction.

Another reason for *Roland Graeme's* perilous status in the early Canadian canon is its setting in the fictional town of Minton, USA. Indeed, even an enthusiastic critic such as Vipond notes that '[I]ittle about the novel was uniquely Canadian' ('Blessed 35). Gerson argues that Machar's choice of an American setting was a 'canny decision' as

Canadians may have been more willing to seriously consider a radical analysis if their country were not first tarnished by being described as a location of tensions and misdeeds, whereas Americans, who represented an audience and market ten times that of Canada, would have been more likely to respond to a situation (and buy a book) that they recognised as American. ('Introduction' xiv)

Conversely, Ruth Compton Brouwer has argued that this decision highlights Machar's 'emotional continentalism' (102), a fact that is reinforced in Brouwer's eyes by the author's decision to dedicate the novel to a prominent leader of the American social gospel movement

in this era. Given the ‘continentalism’ of both the Knights of Labour and this period’s ‘North American’ publishing market I would argue the novel’s setting should not exclude it from a canon of early Canadian labour fiction, especially when Machar assures the reader that ‘Roland Graeme was, by birth, a Canadian’ (Machar *Roland* 46).

When we are first introduced to the novel’s heroine, Nora Blanchard, we find her deep in discussion with a group of women about the merits of occupations for women. Nora’s friend Kitty relates the tale of her cousin Jane Spencer who has recently made the bold decision to become a nurse at the local hospital, Saint Karnabas. Kitty explains how this decision was sparked by a sermon on the merits of self-sacrifice which ‘made her feel so selfish, and as if she had no object in life but enjoying herself, and so, she said, she couldn’t rest in her mind till she set to work to do something for other people ... and she always did have a fancy for nursing’ (Machar *Roland* 25). Later in the novel, Nora gets a chance to meet Jane and cannot resist asking:

‘[w]ell, how do you like your work?’ asked Nora, eagerly.

“‘*Like*’ isn’t the word!’ was the reply. ‘It’s intensely interesting. You get so absorbed in the interest of it that you never take time to think whether you like it or not! Of course, there are things you can’t like in themselves, but you forget that, when you know that you are doing what is of real consequence. And then I think I always was cut out for a nurse. Ever since I was a child, I liked nothing so well as caring for sick people.’ (Ibid 75)

Thus, from very early in the novel, the nursing impulse is emphasised as one of the noblest and most productive uses of a young woman’s time and energies. Indeed, even Nora is depicted as relishing the chance to provide nursing care for a local woman suffering from bronchitis when her doctor brother is unavailable. The fact that this interaction is also responsible for Nora’s first meeting with Roland is also doubtless significant as it reinforces to the reader Nora’s sense of moral and social responsibility as well as her innate maternalism, both ideal attributes for a potential wife.

In the course of her discussion with Jane Spencer regarding nursing, Nora also comments, ‘[o]h dear! ... this is a very puzzling world. Well, it’s nice to be you, and to have found out just the work you are fitted for, and how you can best help other people’ (Ibid 76). Nora’s eagerness to find a purpose is a constant source of frustration to her socialite mother who bemoans ‘I *wish* you weren’t *quite* so philanthropic’ (Ibid 30). However, Reverend

Alden, the novel's undisputed moral and religious centre, explains Nora's behaviour to Roland in more positive terms:

[s]he's an uncommon type, and has been brought up in a very different atmosphere from Minton society. A quiet, refined country home, time and training for thought and study, good literature to grow up among, a wide-minded, philosophical father of the old school, and an aunt with the soul of a saint and the active benevolence of a Sister of Charity; it is no wonder that Nora Blanchard is a sort of *rara avis* among girls. (Ibid 40)

It is perhaps inevitable that Nora's future romantic interest, Roland, is the first to draw her attention to the novel's central themes of worker oppression and the need for labour reforms. As they pass one of Pomeroy & Company's silk and woollen mills Roland comments to Nora that 'there's a place where too many things are done, contrary to all sound principles of justice and humanity. The operatives are made simply working-machines, obliged to work more hours than any young woman should be allowed to do; miserably paid, and exposed to petty tyrannies enough to take out of their life any little comfort they might have in it' (Ibid 35). Witnessing the exhausted faces of these female 'working-machines,' Nora is suitably horrified and convinced that if the mills' owners (close friends of her mother) knew of the conditions they would be outraged. Roland rationally replies that '[t]hey probably then don't try to know ... That's the great trouble. The heads of such places are so fully occupied with the business part of their concerns, that they have no time to think of the people by whom the business is made' (Ibid 36). Thus, for Machar the necessity to look beyond the larger institutions and structures brought about by industrialisation – to remain focused on the people who keep such businesses running – was a key concern and a theme she returns to throughout her narrative. After seeing these women, and even tending one (the local woman suffering from bronchitis is a factory worker as well), Nora's philanthropic impulses come once more to the fore and she pronounces '[t]hose poor girls! ... How little real interest or pleasure there must be in their lives! How it makes one wish that we, who have so many pleasant things in ours, could do something to brighten theirs!' (Ibid 36).

Nora's aspirations are decidedly narrow in scope: she yearns to 'brighten' these lives of the factory workers, rather than radically overturn any existing labour systems of inequality. Such properly progressive and more definitive solutions are instead left to Knight of Labour, Roland. As Nora's affection for Roland grows she increasingly turns to him for information on the burgeoning "labour question" that was slowly coming to dominate public debate towards the end of the century. 'The subject seems to be "in the air,"' she explains.

‘Everything I’ve heard or read lately seems to bring it up. And I know so little about it, really, that I want to learn’ (Ibid 123). Roland thus acts as a “teacher” for Nora, educating her in new labour theories and the value of social responsibility, just as Reverend Alden acts as the novel’s main source of knowledge on spiritual and moral responsibility. Indeed, Alden often checks Roland’s clearly boundless enthusiasm for economic and social reform:

‘[b]ut, anyhow, if we can’t wake up the rich, why mayn’t we wake up the poor?’

‘Let the horrors of the French Revolution answer that question, once for all!’ returned Mr. Alden. ““That boy Ignorance,” you know, can be a real devil when he is roused, and though a thunder-storm may sometimes have to come, we don’t want to play tricks to bring it down. There is enough to wake up the poor to, in regard to their own shortcomings. Let us try to wake each class up as to what lies in its own power to reform!’ (Ibid 148)

This passage has been used by many modern day critics as a prime example of the text’s shortcomings when considering its value as a social problem or labour novel. In the *Literary History of Canada* (1967), Frank Watt argues against *Roland Graeme*’s potential as protest literature on the grounds that it is ‘essentially a romantic story of high society ... [which] preaches not social or political revolution but *noblesse oblige*’ (461). The philosophy of *noblesse oblige* (privilege entails responsibility) was not uncommon in agitation literature of this period, however, as most representations of the labour movement in both Canadian and American fiction tended to approach the topic from a middle-class standpoint. Given her own status as an upper-middle class, yet highly civic-minded intellectual, Machar’s perspective is perhaps unsurprising, as she was unlikely to support any action which would jeopardise her own role within existing class structures. As Gerson succinctly summarises, Machar’s solutions to issues of social injustice focus instead on the need ‘to correct inequities within the structure, not the tamper with the structure itself’ (‘Introduction’ xv).

Indeed, even Gerson appears disappointed with the lack of real working-class struggle and resistance in the novel: ‘Machar sidestepped the threat of working-class power by preaching brotherly cooperation ... and presenting a change of heart as the simple fictional solution to complex real life problems’ (Ibid xvi). Nevertheless, despite the discouraging way Machar ‘overlooks the ability of the labouring classes to analyse their plight and act on their own behalf’ (Ibid), I would have to agree with Gerson that *Roland Graeme* remains a fascinating novel for those interested in early Canadian labour fiction as ‘[b]y couching her discussion of labour reform in the language of chivalry, Machar creates a rhetorical alternative to the Marxist terminology of struggle and revolution that entered reformist

discourse in the later decades of the nineteenth century' ('Introduction' xv). This "chivalry" – already signposted in Roland's status as a Knight of Labour – can also be found in the language he uses when describing the plight of workers:

[i]t is very simple. I felt, as I think no entirely unprejudiced person can help feeling nowadays, that our working-classes do not get fair play in the great struggle going on about us; that here the 'battle' is emphatically 'to the strong,' and that the weaker are being, perforce, driven to the wall, — crushed beneath the great iron wheels of Progress, Capital, Combination, and Protection. And I always had an instinctive sympathy with the 'under dog in the fight.' (Machar *Roland* 124)

It is thus interesting that this supposed alternative to the Marxist rhetoric of struggle remains largely couched in language of 'struggle' and 'battles.' However, by focusing on an 'instinctive sympathy' for the 'underdog,' the paternalistic nature of the Knight's chivalry is reinforced, which contrasts strongly with more Marxist notions that each class remains loyal to its own interests alone.

One of the reasons this novel is useful for this survey of women's work is due to Machar's decision to focus in extensive detail on the plight of the working class: especially on the struggles of female workers. Machar's philanthropic heroine becomes acquainted with local factory girl Lizzie Mason whilst nursing her bronchitis patient. Nora hears Lizzie's story 'told in a very matter-of-fact, uncomplaining way,' and 'involuntary tears of indignant sympathy started to the listener's thoughtful eyes at the unconscious revelation of hard, unremitting, monotonous toil for eleven, twelve, and sometimes thirteen hours a day, as the pressure of work required, and that under conditions unhealthy enough to depress the most vigorous young life' (Ibid 66). Nora suggests domestic service as an example of 'some healthier as well as pleasanter work' as 'there is nothing in serving others to lower any right self-respect ... and who it was who said that He came not to be ministered to but to minister' (Ibid 66). Lizzie proves her innate Christian goodness by reassuring Nora that she has heard Alden speak of such things in church and that she would love to be in a 'good, quiet house' where she wouldn't 'have to go out in the dark, all sorts of mornings, and have to be on the go all day!' (Ibid), but explains how her responsibility to her dependents (an aging mother and an alcoholic brother) make factory work her only option. McMaster has argued that Lizzie's function in the novel is 'to awaken our pity and moral indignation, and it is significant that for her to hold this function, her work in the mill had to be represented as a necessity, not a choice ... Only once Lizzie had been cleared of this choice can she assume

the mantle of innocence and go on to represent working-class victimisation under capitalism' (61). This representation of factory work as a "necessity" or "last resort" was prevalent in this period where the respectability of women working in such conditions, in close proximity to men and hyper-masculine machinery was still considered highly problematic. As we will see with J. G. Sime, it was not until well into the twentieth century that the practice of choosing factory work over domestic service became socially acceptable (and even then it was still considered morally suspect).

One of the most vivid scenes in the novel can be found shortly after Nora's first meeting with Lizzie when, after spending the night tending to the bronchitic factory worker and conversing with Lizzie about her employment, she returns to her own 'daintily-appointed room' to rest and finds that 'visions rose before her of droning wheels and flashing shuttles, of long arrays of frames, such as she had seen in the factory some time before; and the thought of the girls with feelings and nerves like her own, tending, through so many weary hours, these senseless and relentless machines, oppressed her quick sensibilities like a nightmare' (Machar *Roland* 69). The use of 'tending' here is significant and perhaps suggests that Machar saw women's 'natural' duties as being perverted through the rising industrialisation of her period, as these women are forced to tend machines rather than children or the sick (a more feminine task) in order to make their living. Indeed, this language recurs in a troubling dream Nora experiences when she finally drifts off:

she dreamed that she was following someone through mile after mile of endless corridors, all lined with that inexorable, never-ceasing machinery, tended by armies of pale, slender girls, many of them children. And whenever she desired to sit down to rest, her conductor kept beckoning her onward, and she seemed compelled to follow, on—on—would it never end! ... And, just then, Eddie, stealing on tip-toe into the room to see if 'Auntie were awake yet,' dispersed the illusion, and she awoke to a glad consciousness of liberty and restfulness, yet with a strange sense of latent pain behind it. (Ibid 69-70)

Once again, although the imagery used is far from original, it still remains interesting for the way workers are once again described in the rhetoric of struggle as 'armies,' as well as for the repeated images of children forced to carry out the 'tending' of the machines, rather than being tended themselves by their families. The final passage is worth noting, as it seems to suggest that relation of working class narratives can be used to reinforce middle class 'consciousness of liberty and restfulness.' However, the fact that a sense of 'latent pain' remains for a figure as philanthropically-minded as Nora suggests Machar was keen to stress

that such realities should not be accepted as they were, but used to help realise the need for change and reform.

The character of Nelly Grove is deployed as a clear foil to the innocent victim Lizzie Mason. When describing her to Nora, Lizzie defends her brother's romantic interest: '[s]he's not a bad-hearted little thing, but she's awful flighty and fond of pleasure. She's an orphan, too, an' her friends live in the country, so she hasn't any one to look after her here. I think she'd be good enough to Jim, if she was let alone, but there's a gentleman ... as turns her head with compliments an' attentions' (Ibid 67). This raises the question of whether Machar was indicting the young Mr Pomeroy for giving Nelly aspirations beyond her station, rather than wholly blaming working-class girls like Nelly for their own mistakes. Nevertheless, the destructiveness of Nelly's behaviour is reinforced to the reader when Lizzie is forced to use her savings collected for 'warm winter clothing' in order to bail out Jim after he gets caught for drunk and disorderly conduct following 'Nelly's flightiness' (Ibid 87).

However, it is through this situation – which leads our heroine to gift Lizzie one of her mother's old coats – that Nora finally gets to meet the infamous Nelly, who is described on her first appearance in the narrative as being 'very much "got up" for a Sunday walk, and looking prettier and more pert than ever' (Ibid 114). Through the course of their short interview, Nora tries her best to 'get at the girl's real self — talked to her patiently and gently, overlooking the pertness that offended her fastidious sense of the fitness of things' (Ibid). Despite Nelly's apparent 'pertness,' Machar's narrator suggests that unbeknownst to Nora her presence has a great impact on Nelly: '[w]e are not, as a rule, ready to show outwardly when our self-satisfaction has been upset, and more than half of the elevating influences of life arise out of mere contact of the higher with the lower; far more out of what we *are*, than out of what we say' (Ibid 115). Whilst this might again appear to be an example of the *noblesse oblige* that so many critics of the novel find problematic, Machar is keen to show that such 'elevating influences' entail a certain degree of responsibility to ensure that this "interest" is followed through to a positive outcome – something Nora ultimately fails to accomplish in this narrative.

Indeed, the fate of Nelly is one of the most problematic elements of this novel, as whilst she is clearly able to appreciate the superior moral respectability of a figure like Nora Blanchard, the novel itself seems to offer her few chances to act upon this reverence and improve her lot. With the exception of the club the middle class female protagonists organise

for the factory girls (which shall be discussed shortly in more depth), the working class women in the novel are figured as the real losers in a newly-industrialising society. Even Nora, staunch defender of these working class women, ends up agreeing to keep the secret of the young Pomeroy's flirtations with Nelly from his intended fiancé only if he promises to stop seeing her, a decision which ultimately leads to her descent into prostitution. As Roland relates to Nora when he visits her in Rockland at the novel's close, 'I met that poor Nelly, the other day, very much overdressed. I don't think she works in the mill, now' (Ibid 283).

The decision to form a "club" and provide a meeting place for the local factory girls begins with Nora, who suggests the idea to Roland and Alden, describing it as 'a place where they could spend the evenings when they chose, where they could have books or music, or anything else they liked. Don't you think that would brighten up their lives a little?' (Ibid 158-9). However, both Roland and Lizzie raise reservations about the usefulness of such a club as, in Lizzie's own words, 'I'm afraid you'll be disappointed if you expect the girls to go there a great deal. You see, we're so tired out, often, we don't care to go anywheres, and them as do, likes to go to something lively. But maybe they'll get into the way of going, after a while' (Ibid 175). These warnings do little to deter the eager Nora, and her decision to enlist the help of the young Miss Clara Pomeroy, an industrialist's daughter in need of a purpose, provides the impetus for some of the novel's biggest reforms in the working conditions for Minton's labouring population, especially its female workers.

Early in the story, Clara is described as a girl 'of some mind and character, who had grown heartily sick of the inane and monotonously luxurious life she lived, and did not feel much interest in the meetings her mother was perpetually attending. She was glad, therefore, of any new sensation that seemed to offer a little unusual excitement' (Ibid 163). Unsurprisingly, these traits make her an ideal partner for Nora in her plans to open a meeting space for the working girls, a fact that the narrator emphasises during an account of one of Roland and Reverend Alden's public lectures:

Miss Pomeroy had been one of the most attentive listeners to the lecture, which had suggested many new ideas to a mind that was craving some new and strong interest. Miss Pomeroy was decidedly clever — had had every advantage of education that wealth could supply — had been abroad 'everywhere,' and could talk French and German, as well as Browning. But she wanted *purpose* in her life, and was discontented, and a little *blasèe* for lack of it. 'Self-culture,' for no definite end, had palled upon her, as generally happens. (Ibid 172)

One senses that Machar could well have been describing her own early life before the development of her career as an author and political and economic intellectual. This desperation to be of use is reinforced to the reader in Clara's eagerness to join Nora's proposed venture: '[i]ndeed, I'll do all I can to help! ... I'm just *sick* of having nothing useful to do! I don't care for the meetings mother likes. There seems too much *talk* for all they *do*. But if I could do something to make any *one* person a little better or happier, I really should be glad to do it' (Ibid 172-3).

Thus, with the support of Miss Pomeroy, a leading figure of local society who quickly enlists more female helpers, the women are able to open their club and invite the factory girls to partake of the respectable leisure facilities of a reading and meeting room. As the novel's narrator happily relates, '[o]n the whole, notwithstanding a little awkwardness in the attempts of entertainers and entertained to be friendly and sociable, the evening passed off very pleasantly; even Nelly, for once, seeming a little subdued, but evidently very well entertained' (Ibid 177). However, Clara's initial excitement is swiftly dampened by Lizzie's caution that the young factory workers would have limited use for such facilities due to exhaustion from their labours:

[t]he difficulty she had expressed was one that had never occurred to a young lady so differently situated, and she was genuinely surprised, when she at last realized their long hours of steady, monotonous work. She had never before thought about it, or inquired into such matters. And her own life had always been such an easy, self-indulgent one, that this unremitting toil seemed the more formidable to her, in comparison. (Ibid 177)

Scenes such as this have been used by critics to highlight the flawed nature of Machar's female philanthropists' reforming efforts. However, the fact that Machar's narrator draws attention to the limited effectiveness of such projects *in the text* shows that Machar herself could see beyond such endeavours to the larger issues at work in her contemporary society, even if they are not directly articulated in her novel. It could thus be argued that Machar suggests such middle-class projects not as a panacea or solution, but rather as a much-needed first step towards reform, designed to raise the public consciousness to the struggles and conditions of the working class.

However, Gerson argues that, '[c]osmetic rather than radical, the efforts of middle-class do-gooders fail to address the roots of the economic and social ills that allow factory girls like Nelly Grove to slip into prostitution' ('Introduction' xviii). Whilst I would agree

with Gerson that Machar's narrative fails to address the larger social issues that face these working class characters, it would be hard to classify the changes that Clara Pomeroy manages to bring about (through clever manipulation of her own father) as merely "cosmetic." For example, following her first meeting with the factory girls, Clara immediately returns home and challenges her father, who owns the local mill, over his decision to make his female employees work such long hours. Pomeroy is unsurprisingly shocked by this outburst:

Mr. Pomeroy was rather surprised when his daughter challenged him on the subject. He had never, so to speak, thought of his daughter and his *employés*, 'on the same day.' He laughed a little at her earnestness, told her somewhat irrelevantly that she was growing fanciful, that she didn't understand these matters, or comprehend differing conditions of life. However, seeing that this matter was a real trouble to her, he promised her that he would see what he could do about it. And it was not very long before Nora heard from Lizzie, with great pleasure, that half an hour had been taken off their time, without any further reduction in their pay. So now, she said, she did not mind the lower wages so much, 'that one half-hour did make such a difference!' (Machar *Roland* 178)

The fact that 'such a difference' to the lives of these factory girls is accomplished merely by a young woman taking an interest in local women's welfare and pressing her advantage as an industrialist's daughter is perhaps telling of Machar's larger project in the narrative. Once again the ability to enact change is seen to rest with the paternalistic favour of the middle class rather than with the working class itself, however it nevertheless stresses the new opportunities open to middle-class women in this era to achieve newfound agency and enact real change through an active engagement with the labour issues of the day. Thus, whilst Clara's position is perhaps unique – few women taking with a reforming spirit are luckily *en famille* with those in a position to execute change, the fact that it is the *women* in this narrative who achieve material change to the social and economic welfare of Minton's workers is clearly significant. As McMaster states, 'the middle-class women, albeit by pestering their men, are the primary agents of social change' (55), a feat which should not be overlooked when considering this text's novelty in early Canadian fiction.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it is through Lizzie's positioning as a victim of working class oppression that the sceptical Mrs. Pomeroy is finally brought to see the wisdom of her daughter's philanthropic endeavours. Due to increased financial difficulty Lizzie is led to take on a more highly-paid, yet potentially dangerous task at the mill: '[i]t was that of

spinning silk which had to be kept constantly wet by a spray of water, which, of course, kept the garments of the spinner more or less wet also. The obvious precaution of providing a water-proof suit, for this work, had not been deemed necessary by Mr. Willett [the factory manager]; and Lizzie could not think of affording the outlay' (Ibid 249). Lizzie, inevitably, contracts pneumonia from these unhealthy conditions and finds herself severely weakened and unable to work. When Mrs. Pomeroy hears this tale, the narrator informs the reader of her alarm: '[o]nly to think that such things should happen at her own door! She had been pitying the poor women on the other side of the globe, and here were girls in their own mill sacrificed like this! If she had only thought of looking into things a little more! Well, such a thing would never happen again, if she could help it!' (Ibid 250). Indeed, by the novel's close when Roland comes to visit Nora in Rockland, she is delighted to hear that '[s]he has begun to take quite a motherly charge of them. She is very anxious that Lizzie Mason should recover; indeed she feels most unhappy about it' (Ibid 275). Nevertheless, for all the positive effects that Mrs. Pomeroy's newly found maternalistic care for the factory girls of the mill will presumably bring in the future, the fate of Lizzie herself is left suitably bleak. Relocated with her family to a cottage in Rockland near Nora, Lizzie is depicted as being happy for the change of scene and of a chance to rest, but nevertheless it remains 'only too evident that she was in a settled decline, and would not, probably, see another summer' (Ibid 280).

McMaster argues in her analysis of *Roland Graeme* in *Working Girls in the West* that 'the only working-class characters figured in any prominence [in the novel] are the working girls,' who therefore 'stand in for the whole working class, as their exploitation is the most visible and the most likely to elicit middle-class moral indignation' (55). Certainly, Machar's female workers are the most visible – due largely no doubt to Machar's own interests in improving their lot and the issues of propriety that would have plagued a figure such as Nora Blanchard spending time with working class males unchaperoned. Yet McMaster's reading ignores the importance of figures such as Lizzie's brother Jim and the men who work with Roland to help save the mill when it catches fire at the novel's climax. Indeed, given that the final destinies of the novel's leading working class female characters end with death and prostitution, the fact that Jim is depicted as leaving his life of idleness and alcoholism behind is necessary to prevent the novel from collapsing entirely into the tragic mode. However, Machar was clearly aware of the differing fates she offers her working class figures in a scene where Roland is proudly detailing Jim's redemption and new lease of life.

To this news – largely led by his decision to no longer pursue Nelly – Nora can't help but ask '[w]ell, perhaps it's the best thing for *him!* ... But what of Nelly?' (Machar *Roland* 274).

Therefore, although Machar's narrative does not appear to offer positive alternative destinies for her female workers, her novel still works to draw attention to and raise 'moral indignation' for the plight of such women. Through the gradual reform of various dissenting characters across the narrative the need for increased public awareness of these labour issues is repeatedly reinforced. The conversion of the previously sceptical Mrs. Pomeroy perhaps proves most significant at the novel's close, as she serves to epitomise the maternal care Machar's narrative appears to so actively endorse through her promise to oversee the conditions and treatment of the female employees in her husband's factory. However, it cannot be ignored that in advocating for a heavily paternalistic (or maternalistic) middle-class centred approach to improving the conditions of the working class *on their behalf*, this very paternalism nevertheless works to defuse the potential threat of any real working-class organisation. Machar's labour novel thus remains rather limited in its reforming spirit with regard to the working class itself. Nevertheless, through her extended focus on the abilities of middle-class women to use their innately maternal traits to act philanthropically and improve the lot of those less fortunate than themselves, Machar's novel reinforces the new employment opportunities open to this emerging class of leisured middle class women, even if the choices open to those working class women they aimed to help still remained severely restricted.

'Earning money to be free with': Sexuality and the urban working girl

In a letter dated the 10th June, 1913, J. G. Sime can be found bemoaning the state of the contemporary novel as 'utterly useless and unreal' in its anachronistic determination to depict 'a past state of things as if it were existing today' (qtd K. J. Watt 'Introduction' *Our* x). Given this frustration it is perhaps unsurprising that Sime's own early novels chose to focus on realistic – if at times rather sentimental – depictions of the 'hardy, shrewd, worldly, nurturing lower-class women of Montreal, native and immigrant alike' (McMullen and Campbell "'Munitions!'" 324). As K. Jane Watt has argued in her extensive work on Sime, Sime's writing was 'about "saying something," about moving literature away from a decadent artfulness into an engagement with contemporary society through an exploration of individual situations' ('Introduction' *Our* x). Indeed, in Watt's doctoral thesis, which argues for Sime's literary recuperation, she suggests that 'critical imperatives of form upon which

texts are valued were often, in Sime's time (and later), underpinned by notions of content, by critical advocacy against those subversive or unwholesome topics *not talked about* in valuable discourses of nation' (*Passing* 198-9).

However, I would argue that Sime's fiction has remained largely obscure until her recuperation in the 1990s by critics such as Sandra Campbell and Watt, not only due to her fiction's 'unwholesome topics' (her stories regularly feature incidents of adultery, divorce, and unwed pregnancy), but also due to her fiction's emphasis on feminine sentiment and sensibility, most prominently women's desire to nurture and subsume themselves in not only their children, but also their men. In an illuminating article on the process of Canadian canonisation, Peggy Kelly has argued that the canonisation of Canadian modernist authors has largely been predicated upon 'the marginalization and exclusion of feminine, emotional, domestic art forms, and the idealization and centralization of masculine, abstract, public art forms' (78). This analysis will therefore explore not only what made Sime's representation of working class labourers 'unwholesome' and distasteful to her contemporaries, but also the extent to which her emphasis on the pre-eminence of maternalism and romantic love has hindered her previous canonisation as one of Canada's earliest authors of urban realism and modernity.

Jessie Georgina Sime (1868-1958) was born in Hamilton, Lanark, Scotland, and spent her childhood in London, where she quickly adopted editing and writing skills so that she could support her parents, both of whom were writers, in their literary endeavours. Largely educated from home, she attended Queen's College, London, and spent a year learning Voice in Berlin when she was 17, before travelling around France and Italy. She found work as a reader for Nelson and Company and began submitting her own stories to periodicals, and undertaking translation work, often under the pseudonym Jacob Salviris (New 'Jessie Georgina Sime' 357). In 1895 she moved to Edinburgh where she began a relationship with a married Canadian physician, Walter William Chipman, who was studying at the University of Edinburgh. Chipman returned to Canada in 1897, but Sime, who was responsible for her mother's care, remained in Scotland until 1907, when on the eve of her 40th birthday, she moved to Montreal and began working for Chipman as his secretary. During her time in Montreal she produced several notable works including *Canada Chaps* (1917), *Sister Woman* (1919), *Our Little Life* (1921) and *In a Canadian Shack* (1937). A prominent literary figure, she served as Quebec vice-president of the Canadian Women's Press Club, president of the Montreal branch of the Canadian Author's Association, and secretary of the Montreal P.E.N.

among many other posts. She continued to produce work right up until the mid-1950s, when she is assumed to have returned to England where she eventually died, though her death certificate still listed her permanent address as Mount Royal Hotel, Montreal (Ibid).

Due to her extended residence in Montreal Sime began to describe herself as ‘near Canadian’ (‘Canadian Women’ 31), writing extensively on the city of Montreal and its female inhabitants, many of them working women. Campbell has speculated that ‘Sime’s own marginalisation in her romantic life gave her increased empathy with women who were socially marginalised or socially isolated in other ways – unwed mothers, prostitutes, immigrants, and the poor, all staple characters in *Sister Woman*’ (‘Introduction: Biocritical’ 212). Whilst the real extent of Sime and Chipman’s relationship remains largely unknown, Sime undeniably showed a great interest in the marginalised, predominantly working-class, female inhabitants of her adopted home, fictionalising their struggles and their triumphs in the short story collection *Sister Woman*. Many of these short stories also deal with issues of pregnancy, illegitimacy, venereal disease and female fatigue, all issues which, Campbell argues, suggest a ‘rich cross-fertilisation of ideas’ between the pair given Chipman’s role as a health professional (‘Gently’ 42).

Sime’s short story cycle *Sister Woman* relates a collection of ‘storiettes’ (Sime *Orpheus* 44) narrated by a woman to her male companion who opens the Prologue stating ‘[y]ou women don’t know what you want’ (Sime *Sister* 7). When they begin to debate, he then asks her to be ‘articulate,’ and ‘[s]tate your grievance, madam!’ (Ibid 8), which the narrator obligingly does, taking to her typewriter to relate the tales which make up the novel’s 28 short stories, all mediated through the fictional female narrator to the man (and by extension the reader.) According to Watt, sales of the book in Canada totalled less than 250 copies by June 1920 (‘Introduction’ *Our* xviii), yet *Sister Woman* was widely reviewed upon its initial release. Peter Donovan of *Saturday Night* was largely positive about the collection, explaining to his readers how ‘[t]he central figures of the tales are nearly always working women, studied from the point of view of their instinctive longing for a happiness beyond their circumstances’ (9). Deeming it an ‘attractive and clever book,’ he nevertheless admits to a ‘certain monotony’ in its structure, reassuring readers, ‘[b]ut one doesn’t need to read them all at once’ (Ibid). This viewpoint is still shared by modern critics, Gerald Lynch admitting ‘[t]here are simply too many short stories’ (237).

However, some critics have viewed Sime's decision to divide the text into so many stories as a deliberate gesture, designed to mirror the disjointed, multifaceted nature of the female, urban experience. Sime herself later commented that '[l]ife in the cities of the New World is fluid, restless, like a kaleidoscope to which someone is perpetually giving a shake' (*Orpheus* 37-8). I would argue that *Sister Woman's* structure can be read as a literary example of such a 'shaking' motion as whilst the short stories are interchangeable and need not be read in a specific order, when compiled they still combine to form a cohesive, 'kaleidoscopic' narrative of female experience in early twentieth century Montreal. Indeed, Sime often claimed that her residence in anglophone French Canada had inspired both this collection's structure, and the resulting style of much of her later work: 'one feels in the cities [of Quebec], I think, the potential of quite another kind of art — disjointed, disconnected art that finds its expression in thumb nail sketches, short stories, one-act scrappy plays and the like' (Ibid 19).

However, an anonymous reviewer for the *Canadian Bookman* was more reluctant to claim the novel as distinctly 'Canadian,' explaining how '[t]here are qualities about the collection of short sketches ... which make us hesitate to describe it as belonging to Canadian literature. Nevertheless, the author is and has been for a good many years a resident of Montreal; most of the characters and episodes of the book belong to Montreal; one feels that Montreal has to do with the shaping of the author's attitude toward life' ('A Montreal' 57). Despite this admission of its Canadian setting, the author remains cautious, stating 'it is not a book for a young country. It is lacking in sentimentality and optimism, which we seem to demand from purveyors of fiction on this North American continent' (Ibid). That the stories under examination were considered to be lacking in 'sentimentality' is intriguing given that these stories' excessive emphasis on the largely feminised sentiments of maternalism and romantic love are largely believed by modern critics to be the reason for this collection's prior critical obscurity. As Watt outlines in her introduction to a collection of Sime's short fiction and plays, Sime's writing

skates between the radical and the conservative in dealing with the socio-cultural projects of the heart and home – the sensational and mundane acts of loving, lovemaking, and home-making that, until recently have not only been deemed second rate as literature, but also not worthy of recovery, a demonization that Clark describes in *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* as 'the obscenity of the sentimental' (2). ('Introduction' "A Place" 5)

Nevertheless, despite their conflicting reasons for Sime's previous critical obscurity, both Watt and the anonymous reviewer agree that Sime's writing dealt with issues that her contemporaries (and even some modern critics) found unsettling and incompatible with the rhetoric of early Canadian nation-building.

Writing in the mid-1930s, Sime famously stated that 'whatever we [women] say and however feminist we become, it is woman's nature to serve, and I think we are never happier than doing so' (*Canadian* 206). Statements such as these cause problems for critics who attempt to incorporate Sime into the emerging feminist tradition of the early twentieth century. Dean, in her study of the Canadian 'New Woman' novels (a moniker which she attaches to Sime to despite the fact that *Sister Woman* was published well into the twentieth century), argues that '[w]hile these texts refer to practices which are in many ways feminist, they construct such practices as ephemerality in evolutionary time and signify as "real" a radically conservative view of the feminine inner self' (*Sister* 233). Dean ties the excessive emphasis on issues of maternity and male/female relations to the growing concerns over degeneration at the turn of the century and the need to reassert the biological destiny of women as wives and mothers first, reformers and career women second. Similarly, in her analyses of Sime, Watt explores how more radical, outwardly feminist gestures in these stories are 'tempered and complicated by the deep commitment of her characters to the escapist possibilities of romantic love, to the moral superiority of maternity, and to the sublimation of the self in the stewardship of men' ('Introduction' "*A Place*" 5-6). Nevertheless, whilst I would agree that these stories are heavily focused on the 'feminine inner self' and the 'moral superiority of maternity,' I would remain reluctant to label these texts 'conservative' or 'antifeminist' given their persistent focus on the value of female community and solidarity, and the financial and social freedoms open to women through persistent hard work and personal struggles. Indeed, I am more prone to agree with Lynch in his assertion that '[t]he radical aspect of Sime's feminism rests in ... [her] prioritizing of the maternal over the spousal role, as well as in her refusal of the happy, compromising endings of New Woman novels' (236). The rest of this section will engage with these existing critical debates through an examination of the representation of working women in four of Sime's *Sister Woman* stories. The selection of these stories is based on their focus on representing female labour, but also on the independence and social freedoms enabled by such employments, and how women chose to utilise their newly acquired self-sufficiency. The analysis will also explore the extent to which Sime was able to realistically convey the

experience of working class women in industrial Montreal in these narratives by focusing on her use of language and the function of the mediating figure of her female narrator.

In *Rethinking Canada* (1997), the volume's editors explain how '[b]y 1881, the sewing industry, in which women predominated, was the leading employment sector in the city [of Montreal], yet in some cases there were ten women sewing garments at home for every one person cutting out garments in a factory' (154). Although we traditionally associate industrialisation with the movement of the garment industry from detailed handwork to mechanised factory labour, in many Canadian cities 'women's dresses and outer clothing continued to be produced either at home or by small-scale seamstresses well into the twentieth century' (Bradbury 160). Obligated to create their own client base through a process of house calls and piece work for larger clothing firms, seamstresses who worked from home or were 'on call' were incredibly isolated, lacking the sense of a trade community found in many of the more industrialised professions of this era. As Christine Stansell argues:

[t]he confinement of women workers to their households gave rise to a specific psychology of female subordination in their relations with employers as well as to a particular organisation of labour. The outside system masked women's involvement in wage labour; they appeared to be peripheral to industrial production and their identity as workers seemed secondary to their roles as wives and mothers. (95)

Due to the large supply of seamstresses willing to work from home – many married women taking on piecework to supplement their family incomes – wages were consistently low, payment 'by the piece' ensuring that quality was inevitably compromised for speed and quantity. Ruth A. Frager and Carmela Patrias claim that such practices caused female sewing abilities to become demeaned: '[s]ewing skills they had learned from their mothers and performed in their own homes were seen as simply natural to them and evaluated in a context where women's household skills and household labour were generally undervalued' (35). Seamstressing thus became viewed less as a career or trade in its own right and more as a way for women to supplement their income, a chance to earn 'pin money' rather than a living wage.

However, as the fictional seamstresses represented in Sime's *Sister Woman* starkly highlight, well into the twentieth century many of Montreal's poorest women were still attempting to earn a livelihood through this increasingly devalued trade. 'Alexine' (39-45) details a conversation between the narrator and her seamstress Alexine, a young French

woman who, '[j]ust like any other immigrant, ... came to Canada – to make money' (Sime *Sister* 39). The narrator continues soberly: 'I wish I could say she had succeeded' (Ibid). Alexine's entire livelihood is reduced to the status of her hands, the narrator bemoaning how 'the hands and nails together can do pretty well anything they want – poor little Alexine, her hands are all the fortune she is ever likely to have this side of the grave, and all they can manage to bring in, as I said before, is a dollar and a half a day' (Ibid 41). The limitations placed on this seamstress's existence are reinforced to the reader through the revelation that Alexine had once tried to demand \$2 a day for her service, yet 'Alexine, who only formed an inefficient Trade Union of one, was obliged to climb down' (Ibid 40). This image of a 'Trade Union of one,' thus asserts both the isolated nature of such a profession, and how these women were forced to accept such low pay posts. Sime's narrator illustrates Alexine's willingness to accept such conditions through the image of a piece of bread (surely a nod to the ability to 'earn one's bread') by explaining how Alexine 'is one of those who know not only the buttered side of life but also how life tastes without any butter at all' (Ibid 40).

The main focus of this storiote, however, centres not on issues of unfair pay but on Alexine's outside perspective of Canadian society due to her status as a French immigrant. As she carries out her needlework for the narrator she proclaims 'in your New World – there *is* no man ... He stays at his business – works – makes the money. The woman spends the money. Bon! They spend their lives apart ... Their lives are separate – and why, madame? Because your New World woman no longer knows the preoccupation that I speak of. She had loosed her hold – let go – her man is lost to her' (Ibid 42-3). Here the 'New World woman' is clearly intended to symbolise the growing ranks of leisured, middle class housewives, who would appear too busy socialising and shopping to provide the care and support their husbands need. As Alexine cautions: '[i]f she stands there and merely watches him – if she is preoccupied with her own life and herself – he goes. He leaves her – wanders' (Ibid 43). Such neglect of one's primary wifely duties are unthinkable to the Frenchwoman, who symbolises an older, more traditional perspective on womanly duties, a viewpoint unpolluted by modern 'New World' philosophies and ideas. As Alexine asks the narrator in closing, '[w]hat worth, madame, have children if you have not preoccupation with the man you bear them to?' (Ibid 44).

Whilst Alexine is dismayed with Canadian women and their lack of appreciation from their men, she retains her looks and the chance to find her own man and settle down. 'The Damned Old Maid' (Sime *Sister* 129-32) offers an alternative representation of the struggling

seamstress. Here, the protagonist Miss M'Guire has reached middle-age, rejecting her only suitor long ago for his alcohol dependency and violent behaviour, a decision she finds herself second-guessing when she is reunited with him many years later. She relates her tale to the narrator as she works on a gown, occasionally pausing her tale to sew with 'unnecessary energy' (Ibid 129). The man in question, Charlie MacBryan, calls Miss M'Guire a 'damned Old Maid,' the seamstress explaining that '[i]t wouldn't matter ... if it wasn't true, but is it is. It's just what I am, God help me! And him to be tellin' me that!' (Ibid). Indeed, the relation of these events upsets the aging woman so much that whilst she continues 'sewing with unnecessary energy, ... something more that was bright and shining fell on the stuff of my [the narrator's] gown' (Ibid 130).

Miss M'Guire outlines how if she had changed her decision, if she had married Charlie, even with all his faults: '[i]t's a wife I'd have been this day, and it's children I'd have had by my side. I'd have known what it is nurse the child at the breast. I'd have known the sorrows of marriage' (Ibid 131). The phrase 'sorrows of marriage' is used without irony by Miss M'Guire, who continues '[i]t's right he is ... A woman's not a woman if she's had no man. I'm no woman to-day. I'm a damned Old Maid sittin' here, knowin' nothin' of life save be hearsay. And what's hearsay ... when ye want to *know*?' (Ibid). Here, Sime's narrator begins to touch on the seamier, 'unwholesome' side of *Sister Woman*, the respectable, moral and proper middle-aged woman admitting '[t]here's times, God forgive me ... when I've envied the bad women. They've known!' (Ibid). Such an admission of envy of those women deemed 'bad' and immoral by popular society was no doubt shocking to her contemporary readers, though perhaps less uncomfortable than the following admission is to modern readers of Sime's fiction: '[w]hat if he did get soused? What if he did turn and beat me as they say he beats his wife this day? Isn't it better to be sore and live with a man than to live safe and sound with yer past behind ye and no future to come? What's life?' (Ibid). In *Passing Out of Memory*, Watt argues that this short story acts as a precursor for Sime's extensive engagement with the figure of the aging spinster in her novel *Our Little Life*, whose protagonist Katie McGee shares much of Miss M'Guire's backstory with regard to alcoholic suitors and failed romance. As Watt outlines:

[f]or readers of our era, this passage with its casual reference to domestic violence is a difficult one. But like much of Sime's work, it raises questions about that which can be talked about, those topics safe for fiction ... The only course left was to wait, to live stigmatized as spinsters and to hope that more suitable suitors would arrive on the scene. They never did;

thus, McGuire and McGee have lived out their lives sewing, ghettoized by norms – of the maternal and the useful – and denied the kinds of contact – specifically sexual, and by extension maternal – that they deem valuable. (*Passing* 189)

Denied the chance to experience both maternal and sexual fulfilment through her refusal of her suitor, Miss M'Guire is thus portrayed in Sime's short story as a lost soul, ghettoised from traditional female knowledge and experience through her continued abstinence. She is forced to take solace in her work, a task she finds emotionally unrewarding, but without which she would be left with nothing to strive for, nothing to motivate her. The narrator describes how '[s]he sewed. She sewed as if her life depended on her getting to the end of her seam before the hour was out' (Sime *Sister* 131).

Two far less traditional representations of the working woman are offered in Sime's short stories 'A Woman of Business' (141-44), and 'The Bachelor Girl' (191-7). The first story relates the narrator's brief encounter with an Eastern European woman, Madame Sloyovska who has successfully prostituted herself to various men over the years so that she can retire with enough money to support her daughter (who she sent off to a convent) and ensure that her own daughter does not suffer the same moral degradations that she has suffered. The brief and fleeting nature of this encounter with the collection's narrator is conveyed to the reader through the way, 'Madame Sloyovska gave me her story in snatches, under the glare of the electric light. We were standing together in the hallway, with a minute or two to spare, and something unlocked her tongue' (Ibid 141). The piecemeal nature of her narrative as well as the 'glare' of the electric light reinforce the illicitness of Madame Sloyovska's testimony, suggesting that an extended interview with such a woman would have been considered inappropriate for a woman of the narrator's social standing. Nevertheless, the narrator's desire to accurately capture the real life of working women in Montreal overrides her sense of propriety, as does her desire to reveal a truth long-hidden: '[a] woman is as good a secret-keeper as a man – till the strain is over; and then she talks and talks and it isn't a secret any more. So it was with Madame Sloyovska as we stood together last night under the glare of the electric light in the hallway' (Ibid).

Madame Sloyovska herself is described as an 'old woman,' though the narrator quickly explains how '[w]e mean by that, not age, but that a woman is past her definitely womanly cycle of existence. Madame Sloyovska was just passing into the epoch when she would be a woman no longer – but just a human creature. And she knew it' (Ibid). Madame

Sloyovska is thus depicted as not only beyond the veil of moral propriety but also soon to be beyond the stage in her life when her innate femaleness allowed her to influence and flatter men. Nevertheless, Madame is not worried by such changes in her impending inability to woo and hoodwink men due to the fact that she had ‘managed to do what so few women of business do manage to do – she had made money. And now, with her money solidly invested and bringing her in good interest, she was *re-tiring*, as she said’ (Ibid). She relates to the narrator, without a hint of shame, how various ‘gen’leman friends’ provided her with a house, stocks, diamonds and money, leading the narrator to comment on how ‘[t]here was no confusion in Madame’s variety of Pasts. She has had many lovers and she had made them all pay – according to their means; and I dare say she has given them honest value for their money’ (Ibid 142-3). The use of the phrase ‘honest value’ is particularly loaded, especially when used by a middle-class woman in reference to the trade of sexual services for material wealth. In her introduction to *Sister Woman* Campbell argues that this short story shares many similarities with George Bernard Shaw’s *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* (1893) which relates the tale of a madam who raises a daughter innocent of her mother’s real profession. The difference between these two tales stems from their social critiques, as Campbell argues, ‘[u]nlike Shaw ... Sime keeps her criticism of the exploiters themselves implicit rather than explicit in these stories. She invokes compassion and the sisterhood of women rather than advocating direct political action’ (‘Introduction: Biocritical’ 218). How Sime is able to create feelings of compassion and sisterhood between a prostitute and a middle-class woman will therefore form the next section of this analysis, focusing on the way in which Sime uses Madame Sloyovska’s innate maternalism to soften her character’s potential for moral censure.

Early in their brief interview, Madame informs the narrator that ‘I haf a daughter. She ees mine. For her I vorked’ (Sime *Sister* 142). As soon as she begins to speak of her daughter, Dilli, of whom she is fiercely possessive – ‘[s]he ees mine’ – her whole demeanour appears to undergo a transformation: ‘[w]hen Madame Sloyovska spoke of he daughter she changed. All the hardness died out of her face, her eyes beamed with a very beautiful light, her mouth softened into a smile’ (Ibid). Indeed, Sime’s narrative suggests that it is the intensity of this woman’s desire to keep her own daughter pure and free from moral degradation that has allowed her to attain such financial success in this socially bankrupt profession: ‘I vorked always viz my daughter in my heart. Ven my friend he gif me money, I say, “Zat ees for Dilli”’ (Ibid 143). Indeed, her work is made morally righteous, if still ethically and socially

suspect, through this emphasis on her maternal instinct to protect her offspring from potential corruption and contamination. Sime's narrator relates to her audience: 'I felt no rancour against Madame Sloyovska as she told me – things. I felt even that no special blame attached to her' (Ibid). The stigmatisation of such acts remains implicit in the narrator's refusal to detail the 'things' that this prostitute relates to her, choosing instead to focus on how different the mother and daughter's economic situation would have been had her mother not made such drastic sacrifices of her own morality: '[i]f Madame had led what we call an honest life, earning a sparse livelihood, say with her needle, then Dilli would have had but a poor chance of virtue ... As it was – Madame had sold over and over again the only thing she had to sell – her body' (Ibid 144). Ultimately Sime leaves the question of whether or not to censure Madame Sloyovska's actions up to her readers, her narrator closing the tale by stressing that '[i]f she sinned she knew she sinned, and she knew why she sinned too. And when she gets to the next world I think she will find a place prepared for her – but which of us shall say where?' (Ibid).

Finally, the heroine of 'The Bachelor Girl' arguably breaks from convention and traditional ideas of family almost as much as the protagonist of 'A Woman of Business,' though in this case the female lead does not sacrifice her body, but her affection for men and marriage altogether. In this storiette, Tryphena Harris, a masseuse who only serves female patients (thus maintaining her propriety), informs the narrator during the course of a massage that she has finally earned enough money to 'buy' a baby and provide it with a comfortable life. In her analysis of these same two stories, Ann Martin relates how Tryphena becomes depicted as the 'the less positive figure' of the pair due to the way she 'regards her baby as a commodity to be shopped for in magazines' ('Mapping' 281). However, as I will demonstrate, the radicalness of this decision stems less from her desire to 'purchase' a child than from her decision to undertake the task of raising and supporting said child without the influence and support of a man.

The narrative opens with a satirical celebration of the figure of the 'bachelor girl' – '[w]hat visions of cigarettes and latch-keys – and liberty!' (Sime *Sister* 191) – yet Sime's narrator tempers such celebratory rhetoric with the pragmatic assertion that a bachelor girl's liberty remains 'restricted by the necessity to go on earning money to be free with. Be a professional woman and stop earning money – and where are you? In a hole' (Ibid). Typhena's 'liberty' has thus been earned through the labour of her hands and her dedication to hard work: '[s]he is a masseuse, and arms and legs she rubs sometimes from seven-thirty

in the morning on till midnight. She knows her work – she is popular. Women like her quiet ways, her calmness, her self-possession, her neatness, her little flow of peaceful talk. And they admire her too – Tryphena is emphatically a woman’s woman’ (Ibid 192). However, whilst her female patients clearly admire Tryphena for her ‘womanly’ traits, her labours have also enabled her to adopt a decidedly unwomanly character trait: ‘[t]he liberty to look past men’ (Ibid). Whilst the narrator justifies such a decision as an almost inevitable consequence of Tryphena’s upbringing – educated in a convent from an early age following the death of her parents, choosing to specialise in a profession where all her clients must be female in order to maintain social proprieties – the general tone of the narrative remains sceptical of the moral righteousness of Tryphena’s decision to raise a child alone, free from all male influence.

In *Working Girls in the West* McMaster argues that ‘[f]or this character, the ability to support herself and live on her own has made possible a way of life and perception of reality that renders traditional gender relations completely obsolete’ (86). This can be evidenced when Tryphena reveals to her reader that something wonderful has occurred and the narrator automatically assumes that she has become engaged:

‘[o]h *no*,’ she said. ‘Not that.’

She looked at me reproachfully.

‘How *could* you think,’ she said, ‘I’d ever marry!’ (Ibid 193)

The level of scorn in Tryphena’s pronouncement reinforces her separation from existing gender expectations, choosing to instead focus all her energies on her maternal instincts and yearning desire to have a baby. However, by choosing to ‘look past men,’ Tryphena is forced to resort to the urban marketplace to try and find a baby in need of her love. Her excitement is palpable when she gleefully informs the narrator ‘[y]es ... I’ve bought a baby. Think of it! A real – live – Baby! I’ve been saving up for years and years ... and now I’ve got it’ (Ibid 194). She reassures the concerned narrator that she has been saving for years for such a moment, explaining how, ‘I wouldn’t take a baby ... not if I hadn’t money so I could keep it comfortable – start it. I done well. I’ve made my little pile. I’ve worked all right – I got my pension coming on’ (Ibid). The pragmatism of such a statement is undermined by her sheer enthusiasm, Sime’s bewildered female narrator shocked by the change in her masseuse’s usually calm and collected demeanour: ‘[a]nd now here was another woman – not calm –

hardly self-respecting – lost to everything – triumphant – another Tryphena altogether. A thing I didn't know existed had burst its sheath and was in flower before me' (Ibid 195).

These hidden maternal instincts, now in full bloom, nevertheless raise concerns in the storiette's narrator who questions how Tryphena will be able to house a baby in her tiny bachelor flat. Such practicalities deflate some of the energetic masseuse's enthusiasm when she is forced to admit that '[t]here's money yet to earn. I can't have her yet – to keep' (Ibid 196). It is then revealed that Tryphena's daughter – whom she has named Tryphosa – is staying with the sisters of a convent until Tryphena can earn enough to house the child herself. This admission thus reinforces to the reader how Tryphena has made the adoption of a child far more difficult for herself through her decision to take on both the maternal and financial burden of motherhood and childrearing without the support (both financial and emotional) of a partner or husband. Tryphena's decision to name her daughter (she laughs down the suggestion she would ever adopt a boy) has been commented on by McMaster, who believes that these names are a deliberate reference by Sime to the twins Tryphena and Tryphosa found in the New Testament. McMaster proposes that '[t]he reference is perhaps a suggestion that Tryphena will raise the child in her own image, relishing sisterly female bonds while dismissing heterosexual convention' (86). Whilst McMaster's reading of the text offers modern readers a subversive interpretation that reinforces the increasing opportunities open to women in this era to begin raising their own families free from male influence, I would argue that the text itself works to undermine the positivity of such newfound maternal possibilities for early twentieth century women. In a particularly tense moment in the story, the narrator asks Tryphena

'[w]here,' I said, 'is your baby's mother?'

Tryphena clouded over. Something dark and threatening seemed to emanate from her.

'She's dead,' she said. 'The baby's mine.' (Ibid 196)

Here Tryphena's possessiveness takes on a decidedly darker tone. Tryphena appears keen to assert to the narrator (and thus the reader) that this child has no other family ties, that she is *hers* alone. This possessiveness mirrors the imagery of consumption that Martin finds so troubling in the text, Tryphena claiming ownership of the child as readily as one would claim any other commodity available in the Canadian marketplace. Indeed, the narrator's sympathy at this tale's close almost appears to lie more with Tryphosa's dead mother, than with the masseuse who has finally fulfilled her maternal destiny and gained the money to 'buy' her

own daughter. The final line of the storiette considers the child's mother who takes on an almost spectral presence behind the text, notable for her absence from both her child's life and Tryphena's story of her baby's acquisition. Hearing Tryphena refer to Tryphosa as 'my baby,' the narrator considers: 'I wonder if the dead mother heard Tryphena say it – and if she felt a pang' (Sime *Sister* 197)

In her analysis of Sime's short story cycle, McMaster argues that '[a]lthough many of Sime's stories address unconventional relationships of various kinds,' 'The Bachelor Girl' remains the only tale that suggests 'the possibility of rejecting heterosexuality outright, and it is striking how explicit the link is – almost cause and effect – between earning your living and "this liberty to look past men"' (86). Indeed, Madame Sloyovska is only able to 'look past men' and relinquish her employment as a prostitute when she has earned enough money to support herself and her daughter in a new life elsewhere. Even then, however, Madame Sloyovska suggests that she will settle down with a man in her new life, if only to provide the appropriate environment in which to raise her daughter: 'I begin again. I find a husband. Dilli shall be goot' (Sime *Sister* 144). I would therefore disagree with McMaster's assessment to a degree as, with the exception of 'Bachelor Girl,' all the working women in these stories are ultimately depicted as feeling incomplete – regardless of their employment status and ability to earn their own living – if they are unable to settle down and undertake the most-honourable female profession of all: that of wife (or at least, lover) and mother.

In *Toronto's Girl Problem*, Strange argues that 'bourgeois sympathy for the working girl's plight rested on a romanticisation of her economic marginality and an identification with her ladylike devotion to feminine propriety' (122). Thus, in order for a fictional representation of the working-class working girl to remain sympathetic, the realities of her living and working conditions could never be accurately portrayed. Well into the twentieth century, the popular definition of 'realism' was used to describe a novel's content rather than its particular style or narrative approach. Indeed, if an author chose to write about poverty, dirt and vice (all realities of the urban working woman's daily experience) they ran the risk of being labelled distastefully 'realist' and thus losing the sympathy of their audience.

Accordingly, with the possible exception of J. G. Sime's 'unwholesome' working women in *Sister Woman*, when working class figures are portrayed in the novels examined in

this thesis, their economic marginality remains largely romanticised or left unexplored in order to ensure these women remain figures of sympathy and pity, rather than of scorn or disdain. Indeed, in the case of Irish domestic servant Delia, her positioning within an upstairs-downstairs tale of romance and light satire, makes any serious discussion of the realities of her economic hardships not only distasteful, but inappropriate for both the novel's genre and its narrative trajectories: her successful marriage to a fellow Irishman and impending social mobility through her well-earned savings. Similarly, whilst the working class figures in Machar's *Roland Graeme* exist largely to evoke sympathy and pity in the novel's predominantly middle-class readership, such emotions are only instilled through Machar's adherence to the stereotypes of the innocent drudge whose health is sacrificed to support her family (Lizzie) and the selfish, materialistic young woman (Nelly) who must inevitably fall; both figures who ultimately exist to serve as cautionary tales for others in the narrative.

Nevertheless, Enstad has argued that working class women's version of "ladyhood" 'differed greatly from middle-class ideals: it challenged middle-class perceptions of labour as degrading to femininity and created a utopian language of entitlement rooted in workplace experiences' (14). This conception of working class ladyhood thus remains intrinsically tied to Strange's aforementioned 'ladylike devotion to feminine propriety,' but according to Enstad, can be applied to novels of this era to highlight the ways female labour is heralded in these texts for its ability to offer these novels' heroines new avenues for autonomy and self-expression. This newly acquired sense of working-class ladyhood can be seen in the character of Delia who, despite her servant status in the narrative is proven to be essential to both her employers' continued standard of living, but also perhaps more significantly, to their own personal happiness, through her active role as confidant and accomplice in many of her employers' romantic endeavours. Such active participation in the lives of her employers is defused of potential subversiveness and made appropriate through constant reinforcement to the reader of Delia's superior sense of moral uprightness and, even more importantly, her maternal sense of affection for the family she serves.

Nearly every female character depicted in Sime's *Sister Woman* is revealed to be engaged in some form of employment in their assigned 'storiette.' Whilst the majority of the tales focus on these women and their struggles to reconcile their new urban lifestyle and its economic freedoms with their desires to find contentment through the love of man and the joys of motherhood, they nevertheless draw unprecedented attention to the increased presence

of working women in Canada's urban centres, and how such labours liberated and encouraged new female subjectivities and alternative fictional destinies. However, I would strongly agree with McMaster's assessment that these new modes of fictional representation of the working girl continue to demonstrate that 'in narratives of working-class womanhood, class identity and sexual purity are inextricably intertwined' (73). The problematic nature of Sime's working women in *Sister Woman* therefore hinges largely on their willingness to step outside the bounds of respectable femininity: by engaging in affairs, seeking divorce, raising children without men, and even selling their own bodies for personal gain. By questioning and probing the boundaries of 'respectable' womanhood, Sime's text therefore works to undermine the cultural expectations associated with working class 'ladyhood,' drawing attention to the more distasteful and 'realist' conditions these women lived and worked in, and perhaps even suggesting that these women, for all their apparent flaws, had an equal right to be considered heroines in their own tales of working-class struggle and achievement.

Farm Work and Domestic Labour

In *A Woman in Canada* (1910), Marion Cran proclaims that ‘Englishwomen have never realised the *room* in Canada. There is a wonderful lot of room – room to live in, to be lost in, to make money in; room to learn the wild ways of the world in, room to cast the fetters of civilisation, and room to work – most splendid of all, room to work!’(141). Although Cran’s study was commissioned by Dominion government officials and thus reinforces many of the stereotypes of settlement propaganda of this era, it still provides valuable insight into the ways in which women – both foreign and domestic – were encouraged to move ‘out west’¹⁴ to find employment free from ‘the fetters of civilisation.’ Significantly, this ‘employment’ frequently referred to both women’s paid labour as domestic servants or farmhands and their (arguably) ‘nobler’ call to work as wives and mothers. This section will thus explore fictional representations of Canadian farm women – as farm wives, homesteaders, and domestic servants or hired farm-hands – in order to determine the extent to which women’s work on the farm was seen as something empowering that allowed them to work on the land alongside their husbands (or even on their own), or whether it was instead portrayed as peripheral to women’s reproductive labour and responsibilities within the homestead. This study will also investigate the extent to which farm work was depicted as drudgery or even (in some extreme cases) as exploitation of women by their husbands and fathers, and how such representations may have been deployed by authors to help agitate for social and economic change.

In their introduction to *A Harvest Yet to Reap* (1976), Linda Rasmussen et al. outline how ‘[o]f the 900,000 people who moved West between 1900 and 1911 (the period of greatest immigration), almost two-thirds were men. By the end of the decade, unmarried men between the ages of 20 and 24 outnumbered eligible women by 2 to 1 in Manitoba and by 4 to 1 in Saskatchewan and Alberta. For the 25 to 34 age group, the ratios were 3 to 1 in Manitoba and 8 to 1 further west!’ (13). This shortfall of women encouraged government officials and the popular press to market the western provinces to Canadian women as a land of opportunity, both in terms of employment and potential husbands. As an article from the

¹⁴ Whilst many women worked on farms in the eastern Canadian provinces, this study will focus largely on the representation of women ‘out west’ simply because the majority of the fictional representations of farm women in this period are set in these provinces. There was clearly something about the process of moving westwards in search of prospects (both marital and economic) that caught the Canadian public’s imagination, much as it had across the border.

MacLeod Gazette in 1896 illustrates: '[d]o you know ... one of the greatest needs in the North West at the present time? It is women, simply women ... If girls could only be persuaded to go out there they would be sure of good situations, and I tell you it would not be long before they would get married' (qtd Rasmussen et al. 14). However, it is important to note that women were depicted as necessary not only for their roles as wives and mothers, but also for their 'civilising influence' on the masculine wilderness of the western provinces. Often represented as 'gentle tamers' or civilising agents in much of the settlement literature of the period, as Susan Armitage outlines, 'women did not have to *do* anything, their presence alone was seen as sufficient to tame men, to make them think of polite behaviours and building civilised institutions' (13). However, historians disagree over whether this idealisation of women's 'civilising' potential helped or hindered pioneering farm women. Julie Roy Jeffrey describes frontier women's role in reproducing a sense of "home" in foreign lands as 'an unconscious way of asserting female power and reassuring women of their sexual identity' (8), whilst Catherine Cavanaugh argues that '[c]reated in opposition to the middle-class ideal of active, conquering manhood, civilizing womanhood is made passive and disembodied, thereby guaranteeing representations of men's dominance' (497-8). Thus, whilst the subject position of 'gentle tamer' or 'civiliser' allowed women to speak from a culturally-prescribed place of authority, adherence to these tropes of Victorian femininity also limited the strict bounds within which women could offer such insight. It would seem that in many ways, the separate spheres ideology remained firmly intact despite the supposed wildness and 'freedoms' of their new surroundings.

However, it is important to note that '[d]efinitions of Victorian womanhood arose from the changing realities of an elite who did not perform productive labour and who were valued for their very economic uselessness. That ideal was far from the reality for homesteaders or for working-class women in mining towns or urban areas' (E Jameson 150). There would therefore appear to be a clear tension between the *expectations* of Victorian standards of feminine behaviour and the realities many women faced in frontier conditions. The extent to which the literature of the period engages with this tension will therefore need to be examined to determine whether authors appeared to endorse the maintenance of such strict divisions between male and female spheres of influence, or whether these novels instead interrogated or undermined such assumptions and attempted to offer subversive or empowering alternatives. It is also important to stress that although many scholars have argued for the existence of a 'farming class' through 'a shared identification with a single

mode of production which overrode class distinctions' (Saidak 135), there remain 'numerous socio-economic strata within farming itself' (Halpern 25). This study will thus pay close attention to representations of social and economic divisions between farmers and their workers and how this manifests itself through either class conflict or agrarian solidarity.

In an article for the Moose Jaw *Evening Times* in 1913, Barbara Wylie complained to readers about 'false' representations of Canada in the settlement jargon of the early twentieth century: '[w]e are told that Canada is a woman's paradise. It is nothing of the kind. A woman's life in Canada is extremely hard, and lonely, and it is because of their loneliness that the asylums there are being filled with women, who are driven mad by the loneliness. They are caged in a "shack" often miles from any populated district' (qtd Rasmussen et al. 22). This image of women's farm work as drudgery that led to isolation and potential insanity was a common thread in the literature of the period; initial excitement at pioneering out west was often tempered by the realisation of the labour and determination needed to succeed. However, as Sara Sundberg reiterates, 'the notion of universal drudgery, more than any other aspect of the help-mate image, deprives women of any possibility of joy or fulfilment in the process of pioneering' (104), and as the literature under examination makes clear, there were many opportunities for women to find autonomy and purpose through farm work despite the harsh labour it often required.

Indeed, as Nellie McClung outlines in her political treatise *In Times Like These* (1915):

I do not believe that farmers' wives are a down trodden class of women ... They have their troubles, but there are compensations. Their houses may be small, but there is plenty of room outside; they may not have much spending money, but the rent is always paid; they are saved from the many disagreeable things that are incident to city life, and they have great opportunity for developing their resources. (109)

However, whilst McClung was keen to stress the 'compensations' open to those women who chose to become farmers' wives, she remained acutely conscious of their limitations, and the 'double-burden' that farm wives faced in carrying out both farm labouring duties and traditional housekeeping and childrearing tasks. As she stresses later in *In Times*:

[i]f men had to bear the pain and weariness of childbearing, in addition to the unending labours of house work and caring for children, for one year, at the end of that time there would be a perfect system of cooperation and labour-saving devices in operation, for men

have not the genius for martyrdom that women have; and they know the value of cooperative labour. No man tries to do everything the way women do. (Ibid 115)

McClung spent much of her career (both political and literary) raising public awareness of the struggles women faced in carrying out their domestic duties, especially when many of these women were forced to take on extra employments – on the farm or in the local community carrying out seamstressing or laundering – to help make ends meet and provide for their families.

In *And On That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (2001), Monda Halpern explores how ‘the distinction between public and private, tenuous in any case, is especially dubious for farm women. For them, home was the site of both public and private life: of production and reproduction, of farm work and housework, of farm owner and husband, of farmhands and boarders, of workers and children, and of livelihood and leisure’ (7). The realities of life on a farm thus worked to undermine the strict boundaries of the separate spheres, ensuring that ‘because the patriarchal farm as livelihood and as household are so inextricably connected, the farm marriage, and the farm family, may be understood as a locus of feminist struggle’ (Ibid 14). However, Sheila McManus has argued that because many women ‘regularly left the “feminine” space of the home to enter the “masculine” space of the fields ... their construction of gender had to find some way to accommodate, or reject, this tension’ (130). For McManus, this tension is largely resolved by farm wives’ tendency to render their crucial role in ‘outside’ farm labouring largely invisible. Indeed, when they chose to talk about their daily lives in the agrarian press, the majority of farm women focused on their duties ‘inside’ the homestead which, McManus argues, ‘reinforced the theme of “separate but equal” by maintaining the centrality of inside work to the survival of the farm enterprise’ (Ibid 133). This chapter will therefore explore the extent to which the popular novels of the period repeat this pattern by emphasising the value and necessity of women’s domestic ‘inside’ labours or whether conversely, authors used their fiction to draw attention – to render *visible* – the valuable labour women provided ‘outside’ the homestead, working the farm itself alongside their husbands and farmhands.

Following the Homestead Act of 1862, women resident in the United States were able to apply for homestead land as long as they were ‘twenty-one years old, single, widowed, divorced, or head of a household’ (Smith 163). For women who felt stunted by the prospects available to women in urban areas, this legislation offered them a chance to start fresh out

west and make their own livelihood free from male interference (if they so desired). However, women living in Canada were not afforded the same opportunities for solo homesteading. As Carter explains:

[i]n Western Canada persons who were heads of families or males over 18 could make an entry for a homestead of 160 acres upon payment of an entry fee of \$10. After fulfilling certain duties of residence and cultivation during a three-year 'proving up' period, the entrant could receive patent to this land (or ownership in fee simple). Unmarried women could not apply for homestead land, nor could married women. (53)

Unsurprisingly given the plethora of opportunities available to women across the border, many single women emigrated to States. The system in Canada ensured that only women who were well-off enough to buy the land outright were able to homestead as single women. Therefore, these more upper-class, wealthy women usually employed hired hands to limit their participation in the more hands-on exertions of farming.

One Englishwoman who did just this was Georgina Binnie-Clark. Despite her comparatively privileged position, Binnie-Clark nevertheless wrote exhaustively on the positive benefits of homesteading for single women of all economic backgrounds, her book *Wheat and Woman* (also published in 1914) outlining not only the inequalities of the existing homesteading legislation, but also the feeling of solidarity she felt with her neighbours and the farming community as a whole during her time spent in Saskatchewan. In her earlier work, *A Summer on the Canadian Prairie* (1910), Binnie-Clark explains how '[i]n England I used to think that men worked whilst women gossiped. On a prairie settlement, the women work and it isn't the men who gossip: I owe one debt to my life on the prairie, and that is a fair appreciation of my own sex' (278). Thus, whilst Binnie-Clark may not have actively taken part in much of day-to-day drudgery of homesteading, her newfound respect for the work these women undertook and the limited opportunities open to them in return for such endeavours, helped open up a space for debate on these issues and allowed many to call for change. This resulted in a "Homesteads-For-Women" campaign (in which Binnie-Clark was a leading figure), which gained real momentum in the years leading up to the First World War (Carter 54). This spirit of dissatisfaction and desire for change is mirrored in much of the literature of the period: many of the female protagonists of the novels under study remain trapped in loveless marriages out of convenience or forced into domestic service due to their inability to start a farm and make their own living off the land.

Finally, it should be noted that due to the even greater demand for domestic servants in rural areas, the profession took on especial cultural significance in this era. In a three-part piece for the *Imperial Colonist* titled 'Are Educated Women Wanted in Canada' (1910), Binnie-Clark suggests that

[n]o woman of refinement need hesitate to take up domestic service in Canada because of its circumstance, since there class distinctions are not, and rich and poor, gentle and simple, Canadian or immigrant, we are all of us working women, but one does need to consider domestic service most conscientiously from the point of their own efficiency, since the Canadian woman's definition of a good housewife or home-help is that she must know the way of every detail of the daily round. (163)

Nevertheless, despite Binnie-Clark's reassurances that educated women were suited to such positions – provided they were willing to put in the work – the majority of women in search of domestic servants in Canada's more rural areas rarely employed these educated women when a cheaper, more efficient working-class or immigrant servant could be obtained. Similarly, many of these middle class women, when faced with the realities of colonial domestic service chose instead to gravitate towards the cities in search of more 'professional' work as teachers, secretaries or nurses.

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that by 1911 60 per cent of immigrant domestics were of non-British origin (Kinnear *Female* 110). This was due not only to the rising numbers of occupations open to women in the cities and their attendant potential for social mobility, but also due to the economically precarious nature of rural and farm-based domestic itself. As their labour remained dependent on the financial well-being of the farm, and the fact that their services were considered non-essential to the household's economic survival, rural domestic servants 'were frequently victims of the "last hired, first fired" cycle of low-status, low-paying service occupations during the periods of economic fluctuation' (Milton 214). Indeed, many domestics had their wages cut significantly during the winter months when there was less work to be done. This trend was largely accepted because it was considered preferable to unemployment and still provided these young women with housing and a meagre wage. As Norma Milton outlines, '[t]he immigrant domestic's role in Canadian society was to assist the overworked farm wife ... and eventually to become mistresses of their own homes. They were not economically essential until they became housewives themselves' (Ibid). With such precarious employment positions, it is perhaps unsurprising that the majority of this labour was taken up by immigrant workers who would have

struggled to gain a footing in the more secure, socially-mobile positions opening up to women in urban areas, though these conditions nevertheless led to a lack of any real loyalty or attachment to one's employer in domestic servants, as will be explored in some depth in Arthur Stringer's *Prairie* trilogy.

'Sermons in disguise': Nellie McClung's didactic maternal feminism

Writing in her autobiography, *The Stream Runs Fast* (1945), Nellie McClung proudly asserts that 'I hope I have been a crusader, and I would be very proud to think that I had even remotely approached the grandeur of a Sunday school hymn. I have never worried about my art. I have written as clearly as I could, never idly or dishonestly, and if some of my stories are ... sermons in disguise, my earnest hope is that the disguise did not obscure the sermon' (69). For the longest time, the unabashedly didactic intent of Nellie McClung's fiction worked to help reinforce its relative critical obscurity. Although her political treatise *In Times Like These* and her autobiographies initially received much early critical attention for their value as 'historical documents' of the first wave feminism movement in Canada, even these began to be viewed with apprehension as '[l]ike her religion and her literary style, McClung's feminism [increasingly] came to be seen as old-fashioned and irrelevant' (Warne *Literature* 191). Indeed, when discussing the continuing aversion to McClung's work on the grounds of its 'sermonising' didacticism, Marilyn Davis urges modern day feminists to 'call this [fiction] *consciousness raising*, and ... relegate the contemptuous term *didactic* to the dustbin' (Introduction 5). Although I feel Davis' campaign is perhaps futile as McClung's fiction seems like it will forever remain tarred with the brush of didacticism, much like Devereux who has worked extensively in recent years to reintroduce McClung's fiction into the canon of Canadian fiction, I agree that McClung's novels need to be read *as fiction*. As Devereux outlines in *Growing a Race: Nellie L. McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* (2005):

[McClung's] skills as a writer have been regularly denigrated, and her fiction discussed in terms of what it conveys about its own context ... its value has tended to inhere in what it 'tells' us about its period and about the politics of its author ... But McClung's writing *is* fiction: it is engaged with a set of literary conventions, and functions within a particular tradition of settler narrative. It is evident ... that McClung saw fiction as the most important tool for social reform; it is also clear that she saw herself as a political *artist*, producing social change through her work. (60)

In this section of the thesis I will therefore explore McClung's novels in the light of their status as pieces of literary fiction, much like Devereux does in her own study, exploring the

conventions McClung uses to help characterise and represent the value and necessity of women's labour 'out West,' but nevertheless remaining cognisant of their didactic potential as 'sermons in disguise,' designed to agitate and inspire her readers to reform and new ways of valuing their own status within Canadian society.

In *Literature as Pulpit: The Christian Social Activism of Nellie L. McClung* (1993), Randi Warne argues that McClung's fictional 'sermons in disguise' often contain 'a blueprint for transformation, both personal and social, presented in such a manner as to inspire its achievement. While this is not strictly "realism" it can be extremely effective politically, as indeed was McClung's avowed intent, and any adequate assessment of her literature must be cognizant of that fact' (51). As Warne argues earlier in her study, McClung's skills as a storyteller were far more prodigious than recent critical examinations suggest as 'in her struggle to have women's work recognised and rewarded, she attempted to infuse her readers with a feminist and religious vision which would empower them to the work of social change. That she was able to do so in a humorous and witty way stands as further testimony to her art' (Ibid 4). Indeed, many critics have tended to ignore the valuable ways McClung uses satire and irony within her fiction to reinforce her attacks and lampooning of the emerging cultural trends that she found to be largely selfish and self-serving or else tied to issues of personal greed and acquisition at the expense of local community and social reform. As Warne reminds her readers, the value of religion is central to any analysis of McClung's work as 'religion emerge[s] as a consistent and harmonising theme integrating McClung's feminism and social activism in the service of building a better world' (Ibid 7).

This study has also been greatly influenced by Fiamengo's 'A Legacy of Ambivalence: Responses to Nellie McClung' (2002). In this article Fiamengo calls for future work on McClung to be directed

towards a careful tracing of the relationship between her conscious protest against injustice and what Janet Smarr calls 'unconscious entanglement in cultural values.' (9) While a single, totalising history of McClung is not necessary, an emphasis on the complex relationships between McClung's radicalism and her conservatism helps us to think usefully about the messy, halting, and imperfect ways that progressive social change often occurs. (154)

The conflicting nature of McClung's maternal feminism (sometimes radical, often conservative) has remained one of the main stumbling blocks to her easy insertion into the canon of early twentieth century Canadian feminism. Fiamengo outlines how 'maternal

ideology was, for McClung, simultaneously enabling and limiting' (Ibid 154), a statement that I would argue could be applied more broadly to many of the texts under examination in this thesis. Whilst maternalism offered many authors a socially acceptable way of arguing for change and reform, the need for this change to always be couched in the rhetorical terms of motherhood and feminine nurturance often proved limiting to authors keen to argue for real social change. In my analyses of McClung's fiction I will thus strive to explore the 'rhetorical complexity, situational diversity, and figurative multiplicity' (Ibid 158) that Fiamengo argues make McClung's texts so worthy of continued critical study.

Nellie McClung (1873-1951) was a prominent political activist and author for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Born in Chatsworth, Ontario, to Scots-Irish parents, McClung was raised on a homestead in Manitoba, her domestic responsibilities on the farm preventing her from attending school before the age of 10. Nevertheless, by 1889 McClung had graduated from the Winnipeg Normal School with a teaching certificate, an achievement which allowed her the freedom to work in several small country schools until she married her husband Wesley McClung, a local drugstore owner, in 1896. She began to start writing fiction while she raised her five children, her first novel *Sowing Seeds in Danny* achieving publication in 1908. The novel was a national bestseller and its success allowed her to continue writing novels and short stories for the next few decades. However, it was with her family's decision to move to Winnipeg in 1911 that her political activism came to the fore, where she took a central role in the Canadian woman suffrage and prohibition movements. She even sat as a Liberal for the Alberta Legislature from 1921-25, playing a key role in the landmark "Persons Case" of 1929, that won women 'the right to be recognised as legal "persons" under the British North America Act, a judgement that opened senatorial and other legislative appointments to women' (McMullen and Campbell "'Live Wire'" 244). Retiring to Vancouver Island in 1935, she nevertheless continued to play a prominent role in Canadian public life, even appearing as a delegate for Canada at the 1938 session of the League of Nations.

However, before turning attention to McClung's fiction itself, it is important to explore how her writing has been adopted in recent years by two specific emerging branches of Canadian critical enquiry that will inform my own analyses of her work: the eugenic feminist novel and the poverty narrative. In *Growing a Race*, Devereux explores how from our modern twenty-first century perspective much of McClung's fiction would appear to 'represent a history of racial prejudice and repressive ideas of a "white Canada."' However,

as Devereux continues, we need to remember that from her contemporary perspective, McClung's rhetoric would largely have been read as 'progressive ... [her] activism for women and for social reform ... [placing her] at the forefront of workers for what is still represented as "progress" in the early twentieth century' (11). Devereux therefore argues that in this era's emerging rhetoric of imperial degeneration

McClung narrativises the model mother's work as she brings other women to "think" and thus influences the condition of the community as a national and imperial locus for race-based expansionist growth. Indeed, there is very little of McClung's fiction that is *not* concerned with the representation of the mothers of the race who would save "Saxondom" from degeneration by leading the way to renewal. (Ibid 50)

Given what Devereux sees as McClung's intense focus on imperial, eugenic values, she therefore argues for McClung's central role in the creation of a distinctly Canadian brand of eugenic feminist fiction in this period. Whilst McClung's fiction deals with many of the 'social problems' that form a central focus of much of the social gospel and reform literature of the time (alcoholism, immigration, disease, social purity), Devereux thus argues that McClung's fiction distinguishes itself from these novels through her decision to place a 'maternal feminist New Woman' at the centre of these debates (Ibid 61). In my analyses of McClung's early Pearl Watson novels *Sowing Seeds in Danny* and *The Second Chance* (1910), as well as her last novel *Painted Fires* (1925), I therefore hope to interrogate and explore Devereux's fictional construct and the extent to which these eugenic imperatives can be found in McClung's characterisation of her heroines and their labours.

My analysis will also focus on the portrayal of rural poverty in McClung's fiction, especially in the impact this had on limiting female opportunities for employment outside the homestead. Rimstead has argued that many of 'McClung's best-selling fictional works have been pushed outside the margins of Canadian literature partly because they interpellate readers who are rural, poor, and feminist and are regarded as popular rather than high culture' (73-4). Indeed, nearly all of McClung's fiction deals with impoverished, working class or lower-middle class rural communities, and in her novels she goes to great lengths to replicate the language of these people and their backward-looking, stalled gender expectations (when compared to the rapid changes underway in urban areas in the same period). Rimstead also argues that McClung's novels are largely populist rather than elitist and that this has also contributed to her critical marginality:

targeted for accessibility, the flavour of her idiom was both rural and feminised, the register of her language would appeal to those who valued plain speaking rather than ornate or elevated language, her feminist heroines struggled successfully against sexual exploitation and economic insecurity, and her plots often functioned as inspirational trajectory for the poor and workers who were ordinarily excluded from high culture. (Ibid 74)

However, whilst Rimstead appears largely to praise McClung's fiction for its focus on rural, poor working characters, she nevertheless denounces McClung's tendency to characterise poverty as something that must be risen *above* or escaped from through the application of hard work: 'poverty appears framed by an ideology of hard work and the rewards of entrepreneurship and as a step towards something better in this world or the next' (Ibid 73). Poverty is ultimately depicted as something to be escaped from in these texts, though I would argue that McClung still goes to great lengths in her fiction to argue that her heroines' humble beginnings are integral to their ability to overcome the many melodramas and plot twists McClung's narrator chooses to place before them.

'A child with a woman's responsibility': A daughter's duty and the necessity of 'active care'

Sowing Seeds in Danny was arguably McClung's most popular novel. It had sold 21,000 copies by December 1911, and when McClung died in 1951, it was in its seventeenth edition, having earned an estimated \$25,000 (Karr 54). It tells the story of twelve-year-old Pearl Watson, and her interactions with her family and her local community. Half way through the novel Pearl agrees to work on the Motherwell farm for three months to pay off her father's debts (paying back the cost of a caboose lent to her father on the assumption he would swiftly perish after a farming accident), proving her mettle in not only by being separated from mother and siblings – for whom she acts as a 'second mother' (McClung *Sowing* 294) – but also by excelling in her work on the Motherwell farm. She also helps to reform the morals of the Motherwell family, and even acts as an impromptu nurse to an English labourer when the need arises, before returning to her family at the novel's close with a sum of money from the Englishman's grateful family (as he is revealed to have secretly been a gentleman all along). As Warne succinctly summarises: '*Sowing Seeds in Danny* is an extended, though humorous, sermon on the role of kindness in cementing the human community, and the disruption and dissension brought by selfishness and greed' (*Literature* 16).

In her study *Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1970* (1978), Nina Baym, perhaps controversially given this novel's Canadian setting, chooses to discuss McClung's character of Pearl Watson, arguing that from the very opening of *Sowing Seeds* Pearl 'is her own woman and requires no parent to provide her identity' (168). Indeed, when we are first introduced to our heroine she is described as 'keeping the house, as she did six days in the week' (McClung *Sowing* 11). Thus from the outset of the novel Pearl is located inside the home, and praised for her domestic skills. In fact, she is later described by Mrs. Francis, a visiting domestic scientist as 'Pearl, the housekeeper, the homemaker, a child with a woman's responsibility' (Ibid 40). Pearl's willingness to take on a 'woman's responsibility' and support her overworked mother (who takes on outside labour alongside caring for her many children), sets her apart from other children her own age in the novel. As Devereux outlines, 'when we first meet Pearl she is washing her younger siblings as she simultaneously instructs them in morality and personal cleanliness. She is, we are told repeatedly, *instinctively* maternal' ('New Woman' 182-3). Indeed, Devereux goes on to argue in a later study that this careful positioning of Pearl in the opening scenes serves to position her as 'as "naturally a guardian of the race," and someone to whom the community might – and should, if it wants to survive and prosper – look to for advice' (*Growing* 64).

Pearl gets her first real chance to prove herself and extend her moral influence beyond the bounds of the Watson home when she offers to work on the Motherwell farm to help pay off her family's debts. The Motherwell family set their sights on Pearl early in the narrative realising that '[t]he eldest Watson girl was big enough to work. They would get her. And get ten dollars' worth of work out of her if they could' (McClung *Sowing* 117). Thus, from the very start, through their decision to value Pearl's labour only for its monetary value, the Motherwells are placed at odds with the loving, collective work ethic of the Watson homestead, Pearl assuring her family 'I'll do it ... I can work. Nobody never said that none of the Watsons couldn't work. I'll stay out me time if it kills me' (Ibid 125). Self-sacrificing, maternal and unafraid of hard work and personal toil, Pearl thus exemplifies a new breed of Canadian young womanhood to McClung's readers.

Pearl soon proves her 'value' to Mrs. Motherwell through her exceptional domestic and cleaning skills. As the narrator informs us: 'Mrs. Motherwell was inclined to think well of Pearl. It was not her soft brown eyes, or her quaint speech that had won Mrs. Motherwell's heart. It was the way she scraped the frying-pan' (Ibid 151). Nevertheless, McClung's heroine is still depicted as a young adolescent, and she inevitably falls into bouts of loneliness

due to her extended separation from her family. However, as this extract from Pearl's diary illustrates to the reader, McClung's young protagonist, through her immersion in her household labours, manages to hold off such feelings and prevent them from overwhelming her:

[s]ometimes I feal like gittin' lonesum but I jist keep puttin' it of. I say to myself I won't git lonesum till I git this cow milked, and then I say o shaw I might as well do another, and then I say I won't git lonesum till I git the pails washed and the flore scrubbed, and I keep settin' it of and settin' it of till I forgit I was goin' to be.

One day I wuz jist gittin' reddy to cry. I could feel tears startin' in my hart, and my throte all hot and lumpy, thinkin' of ma and Danny an' all of them, and I noticed the teakettle just in time it neaded skourin'. You bet I put a shine on it, and, of course, I could n't dab tears on it and muss it up, so I had to wait. (Ibid 221-2)

As Warne argues in her work on McClung, passages such as these 'are "inspirational," but they likewise express the realities of prairie life in such a way that McClung's readership could be genuinely empowered by following Pearl's example – as, indeed, was McClung's express intention' (*Literature* 16).

Pearl's more openly reforming and social activist tendencies remain largely latent in *Sowing Seeds*, which focuses on her character's innate maternalism and superior work ethic, but comes to the fore in this series' second novel, *The Second Chance*. Devereux has argued that '[w]here Pearl's "home mission" work takes place on a small and intimate scale while she remains close to home in the first novel, her purifying influence operates in progressively wider circles as she moves away from home in the second and third' ('New Woman' 183). The scope of *The Second Chance* is thus much wider than in McClung's first novel, tackling social ills such as alcoholism and familial neglect, leading Warne to suggest that '*The Second Chance* has the flavour of a revival meeting, albeit one with wit and a social conscience' (*Literature* 25). However, for reasons of space, this analysis will choose to only focus on one element of Pearl's widening moral, reforming influence in the text: her attempts to educate and encourage local farm girl, Martha Perkins, 'a nice, quiet, unappearing girl' (McClung *Sowing* 199), whose worth is largely overlooked by her father who values her only for her farm labouring.

The Second Chance opens with the downtrodden Martha asking her father for two dollars to buy a magazine – a rare luxury for this simple farm girl. Her father strongly

objects, claiming that he recently spent money on a 'wallaby coat' for her to wear whilst she carries out her farm duties, leading the narrator to comment that 'Martha might have reminded him that she was watering and feeding the stock, and saving the wages of a hired man, while she was wearing the wallaby coat, but she said not a word' (McClung *Second* 4). Martha, although much older than Pearl, thus acts as her polar opposite. Unwilling to speak up for herself and demand recognition, Martha buys into her own feelings of inadequacy, assuming that she will never find marriage due to her plain features and the fact that 'the tricks of coquetry were foreign to her, unless flaky biscuits and snowy bread may be so called; and so, day by day, she went on baking, scrubbing, and sewing, taking what happiness she could out of dreams, sweet, vanishing dreams' (Ibid 10). Warne suggests that through her depiction of Martha, McClung 'accurately portrays the dangers of total self-effacement in women ... Martha knows how to do "things" but she lacks the ability to care for others actively, because she does not know how to care about herself' (*Literature* 26). It thus becomes the role of Pearl to care about Martha, on her own behalf, to illustrate how such young women who found themselves trapped in drudge farm labour were capable of changing their circumstances, but only if they could learn to 'take care' of themselves first.

Upon one of their first meetings, Pearl, imbued with the characteristic boldness of youth asks Martha if she plans to marry soon:

Martha's pale face flushed painfully, and Pearl was quick to see her mistake.

'No, I am not, Pearl,' she answered steadily.

'Not just now,' Pearl said, trying to speak carelessly; 'but, of course, you will some time. Such a clever girl as you are will be sure to get married. You're a dandy housekeeper, Martha, and when it comes to gettin' married, that's what counts'

'Oh, no, Pearl, there are other things more important than that,' Martha spoke sadly and with settled conviction. (McClung *Second* 140)

Pearl's assurances that any woman with as many domestic skills as Martha would make an ideal housewife are quickly quashed by Martha who informs Pearl that "[a] man wants his wife to be pretty and smart and bright, and what am I? ... I am old, and wrinkled, and weatherbeaten. Look at that, Pearl." She held up her hands, so cruelly lined and calloused. "That's my picture; they look like me" (141). Martha's hands appear 'ugly' to her, and she assumes that only those women who adhere to classical standards of female beauty are deemed worthy of marriage. However, I would argue that it is due to her very status as hard worker (a quality she shares with her new friend Pearl) that McClung deems her worthy of

future marriage. The remainder of Martha's narrative in *Second Chance* thus focuses on Martha's own journey of self-realisation, guided by the positive reforming influence of the young Pearl, who slowly teaches Martha to value herself and her innately maternal skills, which lead her to earn the love and respect of a suitable man.

In *Literature as Pulpit*, Warne argues that

[n]ovels such as *The Second Chance* were intended to convert women themselves, and to empower them to take responsibility for transforming the conditions of their lives. On the surface, Martha's 'beauty make-over' could be read as trivial, or 'bourgeois.' In fact, McClung is being quite radical. In demanding that women that women take care of themselves instead of totally sacrificing themselves for others, in showing that women can and ought to depend upon and help each other, and in insisting that these things have a fundamentally spiritual dimension, McClung is preaching a Christian feminism so subversive that her readers may not even have noticed its political import. (28)

For Martha, her 'conversion' begins when she persuades her father to let her keep a portion of the money she makes from churning the farm's butter, allowing her to buy the magazine she so humbly desired at the opening of the novel. As McClung's narrator relates 'when the first number came, she read it diligently and became what the magazine people would call a "good user." Pearl had inspired in her a belief in her own possibilities, and it was wonderful to see how soon she began to make the best of herself' (McClung *Second* 162). Whilst these improvements initially focus on bettering Martha's appearance and dress, all under Pearl's careful guidance, Martha's real opportunity to 'make the best of herself' comes when local Englishman Arthur (the benefactor of the first novel), falls ill with 'la grippe.' Discovering Arthur in a terrible state after he fails to show up for his farm duties, Martha takes it upon herself to nurse him back to health. She is revealed to be 'a born nurse, quiet, steady, and cheerful, and no matter how Arthur's head was aching when she came in, he always felt better just to have her near, and the touch of her hand, work-hardened though it was, on his forehead, always had the effect of soothing him' (Ibid 241). Proving her innate maternal instincts to nurture and care for others, Martha finds new purpose in her nursing duties and is suitably devastated when, after six nights of constant care and attention, Arthur's condition improves and she realises 'Arthur no longer need[s] her' (Ibid 241).

Despite their obvious affection for one another, the path to Martha and Arthur's eventual marital bliss is hindered by Arthur's well-to-do fiancé, Thursa, whom he has left

behind in England whilst he came out to Canada to build up his homestead and prepare it for their future life together. When the local women discuss Arthur's future bride they remain largely apprehensive, Aunt Kate raising concern by stressing 'I just hope this English girl of his is all he thinks she is, and not a useless tool like some of them are. I mind well one Englishwoman who lived neighbour to me down in Ontario, nice woman, too, but sakes alive, she was a dirty housekeeper. She was a cousin to the Duke of something, but she'd make a puddin' in the wash-basin just the same. I'd hate awful to see Arthur get a girl like that' (Ibid 243-4). Martha responds that '[i]t's no trick to do housework,' once again undervaluing her own prodigious domestic skills, to which Aunt Martha quickly counters '[w]ell, now, Martha, you're wrong, for it is a trick ... It's the finest thing a woman can know. A man will get tired of a pretty face, but he ain't likely to tire of good vittles and well-mended clothes; and if he came home hungry and found her playin' the piano and no dinner ready, it would make him swear, if anything would' (Ibid 244). Aunt Kate's predictions are proven true on the arrival of Arthur's fiancé, whom upon seeing the conditions she would be required to live in, and the household labours that she would be required to undertake, chooses to forsake Arthur for a local businessman she meets en route to Canada.

Devereux has argued that Arthur's imperial potential to settle out West is played out in the text through 'Pearl's manipulation of his romantic life in order to effect a desirable and eugenic marriage' (*Growing* 71). Indeed, Devereux claims that the fact the novel was remarketed to British audiences under the title *The Beauty of Martha* in 1923 (Ibid), reinforces the prominence of this union in the novel, and its value in helping mould what McClung saw as the 'desirable' future inhabitants of the western provinces. As Devereux outlines: 'Martha is Arthur's "second chance," but the opportunity she presents is regenerative; in foregrounding this quality over the other "second chances" in ... these narratives ... the renaming also positions the novel, like all of McClung's novels, as romance of reproduction, or, that is, a story of eugenical marriage with allegorical implication for the spread of "the race"' (Ibid 71-2).

Whilst the 'eugenic' potential of the union of Arthur and Martha is clearly open to debate, I would nevertheless agree that the pair are clearly meant to be depicted by McClung as a 'desirable' union, who reinforce the values of hard work and 'active care' that McClung's protagonist Pearl epitomises. Upon losing his fiancé, Arthur is suitably devastated, though the breaking of his engagement leads Aunt Kate to once again speculate on his potential future bride:

‘[o]f course Martha’ll get him!’ she said. ‘Why shouldn’t she? I never in all my life seen better hard soft soap than what she makes, and her bread is as light as a feather, you could make a meal of it; and now since she’s took to fluffin’ her hair, and dressin’ up so nice, she’s a good enough lookin’ girl. She ain’t as educated as he is, of course, but land alive! you couldn’t beat that hard soft soap of hers, no matter what education you had.’

Pearl shook her head and wished that she could share her aunt’s optimism, but she felt that something more than a knowledge of soap-making was needed for a happy married life. (McClung *Second* 288)

Once again, McClung’s heroine is seen to show a level of pragmatism beyond her years, evoking amusement in the reader, even as she shoots down Aunt Kate’s rampant enthusiasm about the value of Martha’s ‘hard soft soap’ to help effect a happy marital union. When Arthur returns to England, Martha does not succumb to sadness. Continuing her work with the ‘the same quiet cheerfulness’ imbued in her through her friendship with Pearl and her newfound sense of self-worth, she remains determined that ‘[s]urely, there was some place where a woman would not be disqualified because she was not beautiful’ (Ibid 366). Therefore, as Warne suggests, ‘[t]hrough Pearlie’s help, Martha has become a survivor, not merely a subsister ... She has become a whole person in herself, independent and patient and courageous. In fact, it is only when Martha has become so, when she has ceased being self-effacing and subservient, that her true beauty can shine through’ (*Literature* 34). Martha is, of course, ultimately reunited with Arthur who realises, ‘[y]ou’re the girl for me’ (McClung *Second* 368), but I would agree with Warne that this reunion is seen more as a reward for the personal fulfilment Martha has already achieved in the narrative, rather than a signal of her emotional fulfilment. McClung could thus be seen to argue that it is through these bonds of female sisterhood and community (that McClung’s heroine Pearl Watson actively fosters), that women of her day could rise from their status as farm drudges and achieve social and emotional fulfilment by acknowledging the value of their domestic labours and maternal desire to nurture and care for others.

In *Women’s Fiction*, Baym argues that McClung’s novels rely on a ‘didactic intention, a lesson conveyed and assented to if the work succeeds. Instruction is not at cross purposes with entertainment in this fiction, nor is entertainment the sweet-coating on a “didactic pill”’ (74). However, in her study Warne suggests that the ‘didactic intent’ of McClung’s novels is less upfront. She states that ‘[t]hrough the narrative, McClung is able to convey her feminist perspective in an unthreatening, persuasive way, winning the reader over through Pearl’s

likeable character and humorous outlook. As the story unfolds, the reader learns what it is to like to see the world through feminist eyes, long before any specific political arguments are made' (*Literature* 50). My analysis of these Pearl Watson novels thus falls between the critical perspectives of Warne and Baym. Whilst I would agree that the novels are in large part unashamedly didactic – McClung clearly did intend to inspire and inform her female readers – I would nevertheless agree with Warne that many of the techniques she employs to carry out this function are surprisingly subtle and strongly embedded in the conventions of the prairie romance or melodrama. It is thus quite likely that many of McClung's readers may have been unaware of the potential subversiveness of much of the novel, especially in its reforming of former farm drudge Martha to an independent, self-aware farm labourer.

'Work and salvation': Immigrant narratives and the merits of hard work

Nellie McClung's last novel, *Painted Fires* (1925) is in many ways her most critically divisive. Whilst it retains the earlier Pearl trilogy's didacticism, *Painted Fires* differs from McClung's previous work in both its darker, more brutal tone, and in its choice of protagonist. In contrast to the Canadian-born Pearl, McClung's heroine in this novel, Helmi Milander, is Finnish, emigrating to the States and ultimately Canada through a desire to seek her fortune. Mary Hallett and Davis consider *Painted Fires* McClung's 'last, and best, novel' dubbing it 'good literature' (269), whilst Dick Harrison's largely negative appraisal of McClung's fiction concedes that Helmi remains 'by the far the most attractive of Mrs. McClung's women' (94). Candace Savage remains similarly reserved in her praise for the novel, admitting that whilst the novel is 'much less saccharine' than its predecessors

[a]ll the same, its plot is difficult to take seriously. What can one say about a book in which the villain is stuck dead by lightning just in time to prevent the hard-pressed heroine from doing him in? And that is only one of the melodramatic coincidences which Nellie arranges to ensure that events turn tidily and justice triumphs in the end. (169)

Indeed, the melodramatic qualities of the novel are one of the main reasons this novel has largely been ignored by McClung scholars. However, for all her criticism of *Painted Fires*' ludicrous plot-twists, even Savage cannot deny that '[w]hat this novel ... does have going for it is its energy and strong female characters' (Ibid). These differing characterisations will be the main focus of this exploration of *Painted Fires*, as will McClung's representation of the strong ties between hard work, personal salvation and self-worth through her heroine Helmi.

Painted Fires tells the story of the young Helmi Milander, who moves to North America following the inspirational example of her Aunt Lili. Upon arrival in the States she finds all is not as expected, though once she proves herself a hard worker she is soon sent off to Winnipeg to work in a kitchen. She is taken in as a domestic servant by a local spinster and soon befriends decadent socialite Mrs. Eva St John who inadvertently causes Helmi to get caught up in a drug bust that lands her in a Girls' Friendly Home. Mrs. St John frees Helmi to alleviate her own feelings of guilt, sending her off to the remote settlement of Eagle Mines where she falls in love with and marries local entrepreneur Jack Doran. After a series of increasingly improbable incidents, Helmi finds herself pregnant and abandoned by her husband after her reputation is ruined by a malicious local magistrate. She recovers some sense of normality following the kindness of local Englishman Arthur Warner who takes her in and deeds her his home upon his death during the war. Finally reunited, Helmi and Jack make a new life for themselves on Warner's land which is ultimately revealed to be rich in coal, providing them at last with the much-needed financial and emotional stability required to raise their daughter, Lili, in peace.

The novel opens with Helmi's Aunt Lili visiting her family in Finland after 'making it big' out in the States. Helmi is seen to be entranced by her Aunt's newly acquired fineries and her descriptions of life across the Atlantic:

[y]ou work too hard here ... and you never play. We work in America, but we have good times, too. This country is all right for men, but what is there for women but raising children and work? When a woman here is married ten years she is old, and her life is over. It is all just giving in, and giving up for women, until at last they give out. I wouldn't live here if you gave me the whole country. I couldn't stand it now I have seen what a good time American women have! (McClung *Painted 2*)

'America' is thus already being built up by McClung's narrative as a land of 'good times' and leisure. Hard work is a prerequisite, but women are also portrayed as being offered rewards unavailable in their native land. Unsurprisingly, Helmi becomes determined to save enough to travel across to the States and replicate her Aunt's new glamorous lifestyle. As readers of such immigration stories were conditioned to expect, McClung's protagonist finds that the reality does not live up to stories that attracted her to this new country. Upon arrival in St. Paul, Minnesota, she finds Aunt Lili on her death bed, the enthusiasm that was expressed so freely only pages earlier now tempered by a heavy layer of cynicism: '[i]t's a good country, Helmi ... just like I said, only men are so bad, and it's hard for a young girl alone, and I am so

afraid for you. Men just want their own pleasure. I wanted to warn you not to get mixed up with men – they break your heart’ (Ibid 5). Undeterred by her Aunt’s warnings, and still eager to realise her fantasies of prosperity and luxury, Helmi works for her uncle in the kitchens until her dishwashing skills earn her the respect of the head cook who sends her off to Winnipeg to escape the unsavoury advances of her uncle. The fact that men are portrayed in such a negative, almost dangerous, light so early in the novel helps prepare the reader for the tale’s later events, but also appears to distance it in tone from McClung’s earlier prairie romances.

In her investigative study *A Home Help in Canada* (1912), reporter Ella Sykes informed her readers that ‘[t]he quality that spells success in Canada is *efficiency*, and if that is allied to an energetic, adaptable nature possessing some business capacity, its possessor will without fail “make good”’ (215). These are clearly the qualities McClung herself was eager to portray in her own immigrant heroine, her characterisation suggesting that Helmi possesses the necessary skills and attitude to ‘make good’ in Canada. Early in the novel, Helmi comes to blows with a fellow kitchen hand, Martha Draper, who is revealed to be inefficient at dishwashing but refuses Helmi’s offer to show her a ‘better way’ as ‘foreigners were dirty and ignorant, and certainly “could tell her no think”’ (McClung *Painted* 17). Helmi finally loses her temper and hits Martha with a tray, leading her employer Mrs. Spencer to comment ‘[a]in’t that just like a Finn, Maggie, clean and neat, but high tempered. Well, if she wasn’t a tidy girl she wouldn’t have done it’ (Ibid 19). Finally accepting Helmi’s offered expertise and helping to foster a sense of female companionship within the competitive kitchen environment, Martha becomes a better dishwasher and begins to teach Helmi English (with a cockney accent) out of gratitude. This is a defining moment for Helmi in her transition to life in Canada as it is through her access to language – which she only gains through proving her strong work ethic – that she is finally able to begin her assimilation into Canadian culture.

Early in the novel, McClung’s omniscient third-person narrator allows us a particularly telling insight into Canadian racial ideologies when head cook Maggie silently remarks ‘I’m glad I’m white ... a white skin may be harder to keep clean, but it’s worth the trouble’ (Ibid 13). Many critics have taken McClung to task for her decision to make the protagonist of her immigrant narrative of Scandinavian descent. As Rimstead outlines, ‘McClung’s choice of white, European, immigrant woman as protagonist for the narrative of individual mobility facilitates the conversion to good order on the inside of civil society by

passing over the problematics of ethnicity and race which figured prominently in McClung's own politics' (76-7). Rimstead's assertions are clearly evidenced in *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909) by J. S. Woodsworth. Woodsworth had been working as a mission worker throughout this period and used his personal experience and knowledge of workers' struggles to help argue for the need for increased state intervention to help support Canada's workforce, many of whom were still unable to earn a living wage. In this study he draws special attention to the positive attributes Scandinavians offered to Canada's growing populace:

[t]hey easily assimilate with the Anglo-Saxon peoples, and readily intermarry, so that they do not form isolated colonies as do other European immigrants [...] Taken all in all ... there is no class of immigrants that are as certain of making their way in the Canadian West as the people of the peninsula of Scandinavia. Accustomed to the rigors of a northern climate, clean-blooded, thrifty, ambitious and hard-working, they will be certain of success in this pioneer country, where the strong, not the weak, are wanted. (76, 77)

Many critics see McClung's decision to centre her novel on a woman of such 'desirable' immigrant stock as a disappointment, especially given McClung's own activism on behalf of immigrants of more 'problematic' origin in *In Times Like These*. However, Devereux sees McClung's decision to make Helmi of white, Northern European descent part of her larger eugenic nation-building rhetoric, as whilst the story 'traces the successful assimilation of Helmi Milander into Saxondom,' it also 'shows how she, like Pearl Watson, is one of the women whom McClung saw as English Canada's – and the empire's – last best hope for renewal' (*Growing* 92). Drawing special attention to McClung's repeated emphasis on Helmi's cleaning abilities, Devereux argues that 'the implication in Helmi's cleaning ... is that this Finnish girl has something valuable to bring to the nation, if she could be enabled to put her "capable hands" to the kind of imperial reform work that McClung configured as a woman-powered social and moral "housecleaning"' (Ibid 94).

Following Devereux's argument, with its focus on the potential of cleanliness to further maternal feminist agendas, it is also worthwhile to consider McClung's characterisation of Helmi within the frame of the burgeoning social purity movement of this era. As Valverde highlights in her pioneering study of this movement, '[t]he link between cleanliness and purity was ... [often] perceived as actual as well as metaphorical' (40). Dishwashing was commonly believed to have improving effects on character in this period, and its benefits were clearly endorsed by McClung herself who includes dishwashing not

only in *Painted Fires* but also in her first Pearl Watson novel, *Sowing Seeds in Danny*. In the scene in question, the young Pearl explains how she is able to turn her household chores into adventures through the application of an active imagination, allowing her to support her mother's efforts in the Watson household whilst still having 'fun': 'I play I am at the sea shore and the tide is comin' in o'er and o'er the sand and 'round and 'round the land, far as eye can see that's out of a book. I put all the dishes into the big dish pan, and I pertend the tide is risin' on them, though it's just me pourin' on the water. The cups are the boys and the saucers are the girls, the plates are the fathers and mothers and the butter chips are the babies' (McClung *Sowing* 103-4). To help modern readers understand this obsession with dishwashing and its moral benefits for young women at the turn of the century, Valverde quotes from WCTU sex hygiene book, *What a Young Girl Ought to Know* (1897):

[t]his hot water represents truth, heated by Love. The soiled dishes represent myself, with my worn-out thoughts and desires. I plunge them in the loving truth and cleanse them thoroughly, then polish them with the towel of persistence and store them away in symmetrical order to await further use. So I myself am warmed and interested, and my work is well done. (Wood-Allen 187)

Valverde goes on to explain how 'the sinner's soul ... is a dirty dish in need of purification through the combined efforts of heat, soap, and water, not to mention the "towel of persistence"' (40). Whilst such allegories may seem rather heavy-handed or ludicrous to the modern reader, it is important to remember that '[t]he particular things or acts mentioned are not as important as the practical relations that are established in the syntax of the allegories, which are carried into the work of social and moral reform as the subjectivity of the intended audience is transformed by their own receptivity to the images' (Ibid 42). By viewing McClung's novel through the lens of social purity rhetoric we can thus see how despite its reliance on popular, melodramatic tropes, McClung can still be seen to promote a specifically 'moral' message which she encouraged her readers to learn from (presumably without first having to suffer the more brutal indignities that her protagonist does).

Early in the novel, Helmi is contrasted with fellow Finn Anna Milander (no relation), a trade-unionist for whom union allegiance supersedes any bonds of race and gender. Anna announces 'she's nothing to me – merely another wage slave coming to take a job. There's too many girls now for the jobs' (McClung *Painted* 10). Explaining her outlook to Maggie she loudly proclaims that

[w]e have nothing to lose but our chains ... How long could old Spencer run this joint without us? The world belongs to the workers, but we haven't the backbone to claim it ... There's only two classes, those who work and those who live on the others' work. Some people earn and some spend. If the workers would all organise we could dictate terms. Some day we'll do it. Then a new day will come. (Ibid 10-11)

However, McClung's narrator portrays such sentiments as untenable if, like Anna, unionists refuse to connect with their fellow workers on a *personal* level based on bonds of community and female solidarity. In refusing to recognise Helmi as a partner in the female workers' struggle, Anna is shown as lacking in character, her cause made more laughable following her assault on a police officer during a strike which lands her in prison:

[s]he had struck a blow in Freedom's cause. It was all rather vague in Anna's mind. She was rather favourably disposed to policemen as a class, but having joined the Union she was determined to become 'class conscious.' Policemen were enemies; so were employers; everyone was an enemy except members of the Union. So Anna having a clear program in her mind, sat on her narrow bed in her warm cell, well content. Her picture would be in the paper; she would be praised by the speakers. She had risen from the dull, gray, dusty depths of obscurity. (Ibid 14-15)

Anna's 'class consciousness' is seen to lack a moral framework, her principals sacrificed for her desire to be noticed and draw attention. She even manages to reconceptualise her imprisonment into a form of revolution, her detention ensuring that '[i]nstead of attending to other people and carrying trays and washing dirty dishes, some one was going to do it for her' (Ibid 15). The fact that the only politically conscious figure in the novel is reduced to such a caricature is a source of much chagrin to critics such as Rimstead who deplore McClung's 'refusal to occupy a position advocating class struggle' (75). Rimstead goes on to explain how the character of Anna 'allows McClung to dissociate her heroine and her narrative voice from collective class struggle as a legitimate source of power,' ensuring that Helmi's story is constructed 'through an *individual* struggle for social mobility, her collective spirit being raised not by her class but by other women' (Ibid 75, 76). In fact, much of McClung's novel is devoted to either admiring or admonishing women for their ability or inability to come together *as women* to achieve success in a predominantly patriarchal society.

Initially, the positive aspects of feminine solidarity are evidenced in the novel through the character of Miss Abbie Moore, a middle-aged spinster who admires Helmi's work ethic and offers her a position working in her own home as a domestic servant. Miss Abbie is

overwhelmed with Helmi's efficiency and desire to work, lamenting to her neighbour Dr. St John that 'I cannot keep work ahead of her. She wanted me to let her take in washing, at least enough to keep her busy, one morning. She does ours in such a little time, and she tells me she loves it. I wanted to hire a man to dig the garden but she coaxed me so that I gave in' (McClung *Painted* 32). To this, the doctor responds quickly with the assurance '[d]on't spoil her, Abbie, let her work. Work and salvation are closely related' (Ibid), later commenting '[w]omen are queer now, Abbie, they are so restless and discontented. I believe the women who had to sew and knit and work early and late were happier. Women of this day, having little to do, do nothing' (Ibid 33). In this short conversation between two minor characters McClung outlines of the moral lessons McClung clearly designed to impart to her readers. By linking work with 'salvation,' McClung evokes the well-known parable regarding "idle hands," suggesting that whilst Helmi may aspire to the materialistic, leisured lifestyle of her Aunt and Mrs. St John, there is clearly no merit to be found in such lifestyles.

For all intents and purposes, Eva St John, the Doctor's wife, acts as the main antagonist of the novel. When Helmi is first introduced to her she cannot help but admire her decadent attire and surroundings: 'Miss Moore's house smelled of soap, clean clothes, moth-balls, and soup with onions in it, pleasant enough, too, in its common, coarse way, but the Doctor's house smelled – Helmi could not find one word to describe it' (Ibid 46). However, it is through her friendship with Mrs. St John that Helmi loses all her hard-won respectability. She unwittingly goes to collect a parcel containing drugs as a favour for Eva, and is arrested at the scene, and when she refuses to implicate Eva in the crime she is sent to a Girls' Friendly Home to facilitate her "reform." Miss Abbie finds this turn of events especially hard to comprehend: 'I never saw a girl who loved work like Helmi ... Surely a bad girl would not love work like that. But she deceived me – I cannot get over that' (Ibid 57). Here, Helmi's work ethic is clearly seen to signal her strong moral compass – her "purity" – which makes the allegations so unfathomable to onlookers such as Miss Abbie.

The fact that terrible incidents and misunderstandings such as this befall McClung's immigrant heroine in fairly steady succession throughout the novel has led many critics to comment on the novel's melodrama or lack of realism (Savage 169). However, Hallett and Davis have argued that '[i]n spite of the novel's romantic ending the story is essentially an antiromance that describes the gradual disillusionment of a romantic young emigrant from Finland' (243). They go on to explain that '[a]lthough the novel is essentially about Helmi Milander, it is also about the society that assaults, constrains, and suffocates her' (Ibid 249).

Incidents such as the drugs bust are thus designed not to emphasise Helmi's ignorance or gullibility, but rather the cultural decline in values that would lead a woman like Eva St John to take advantage of someone as pure and innocent as Helmi. However, even with this moralistic intent, as readers we cannot help but feel that compared to McClung's earlier novels with their strong sense of local community, '[b]etrayal and danger are constantly present in *Painted Fires*; almost no one can be trusted. Even "good" characters ... are subject to suspicion, doubt, and uncertainty' (Warne 'Land' 215). Warne has argued that one of the reasons McClung may have chosen to depict Canadian society in such an unflattering light, with her protagonist struggling to get ahead in an increasingly oppressive and unforgiving social landscape, was due to her disillusionment with her own contemporary society. As Warne outlines, 'the world of the 1920s was a darker, more complex, more troublesome place for a reformer like McClung. She was also in her 50s, no longer a young woman, with sons who did not follow in her abstemious ways' (Ibid 214). Having fought for women's suffrage on a platform of social purity and maternal feminism, McClung must have found the early boom of the twenties with the resulting rise of the "flapper" and consumerism particularly hard to reconcile with her earlier visions of Canada's future. Thus, despite its setting before the First World War, Warne asserts that the novel actually acts as a denunciation of the Canadian society of the 1920s.

To appease her feelings of guilt, Eva St John rescues Helmi from the Girls' Friendly Home and arranges her safe passage to the isolated town of Eagle Mines. Here Helmi swiftly finds work as a waitress. Her new employer, Mrs. McMann is depicted as a woman who moved to Canada to 'make her pile' (McClung *Painted* 118), her husband having abandoned her, leaving her the house and insurance on the condition she would not try and find him. Given such a past, it perhaps unsurprising that McMann is portrayed as a particularly bitter and cynical woman, who looks upon her employees with disdain: 'I don't know what's got into the girls nowadays – they won't work – all they want to do is primp. They can't cook – they won't learn. They'll depend on canned stuff when they get married, and starve if they lose their can-openers' (Ibid 121-2). Regrettably, McMann's outlook leads to a general apathy among her workers, fellow waitress Mrs. Turner explaining to Helmi how 'I ain't goin' to break my back tryin' to clean up the dump. Certainly no one tried to clean it for me; and if all goes well we'll soon be able to get out. You forget this stuff about cleanin' up Helmi, and we'll all like you better. We've been here longer than you, you know' (Ibid 123). In fact, Helmi's desire to work hard is viewed with suspicion and contempt by her new

employer who assumes such actions are merely a smoke-screen to help Helmi attract a man: '[s]he's got that old country idea that if you want to make a hit with the men you have to show them what a great worker you are' (Ibid 124).

Nevertheless, the fact that her efforts remain largely unappreciated by her employer and her colleagues allows McClung's heroine to gain a better understanding of her status as single working woman, eventually leading Helmi to the following revelation:

[s]he wanted to build a house – any sort of a little place that would be her own. Wasn't it provoking being a girl and not able to hit out for yourself – never able to step out and do big things, and here she was, working all day long for twenty-five dollars a month, while the poorest man in the mines had four dollars a day and only worked eight hours. It sure was the limit! (Ibid 129)

For the first time, some of McClung's former feminist ire comes to the forefront of the novel, momentarily brightening the narrator's otherwise depressing tendency to accept oppression and inequality without question. However, despite this moment of internal outrage, Helmi makes no outward attempts to change her situation or social standing, any feelings of rebellion she expresses soon quashed by her romance with local businessman, Jack Doran. Nonetheless, her marriage to Jack finally frees Helmi from her earlier, more materialistic aspirations, as she actively attempts to prevent his departure to investigate a gold claim by reassuring him that 'I usta think I wanted money, plumes on hat, and big rings and trip to Finland – now I just want you – and my nice little house to work in – and make nice. Don't go Jack – just stay with me' (Ibid 162-3). Helmi's priorities are thus seen to shift in this section of the book. She no longer yearns for material and economic rewards; instead finding emotional gratification in her new role as wife and homemaker. With this change in her priorities she thus reasserts her value in McClung's narrative and proves her worthiness to become a future Canadian mother.

However, almost as soon as Helmi's moral uprightness is asserted, McClung's heroine is tested once again by a series of increasingly unfortunate events. The local magistrate denies the validity of her marriage to Jack (he sees Helmi only as a manipulative immigrant seeking personal gain through Jack), which causes her to lose her job, her home, and her reputation in the local community. Forced to start over once again, Helmi's condition is made even worse by the revelation that she is with child: '[w]hy had a baby come to her when she had no home? ... It would be lovely to have a baby if one had a home to keep it in'

(Ibid 211). Devereux argues that these personal trials placed before Helmi can be read as McClung's attempt to rework the traditional 'immigrant story' of the era, 'significantly juxtaposing the narrative of Helmi's "uplift" with a tale whose dramatic effect derives from its appearing to show her "fall"' (*Growing* 99). Whilst Helmi is ultimately depicted as overcoming these odds and refusing to 'fall,' Devereux thus argues that Helmi's 'value' and sense of self-worth is 'underscored by a cautionary tale that works to show the future of the race to be compromised by the sexual exploitation of its future mothers' (Ibid 98). McClung's narrative therefore does not condemn Helmi for finding herself husbandless and pregnant, but rather condemns the society that would allow such a situation to come about. Mrs. Corbett, the boarding house owner who takes Helmi in laments '[w]hether she is an honest woman or not, I do not know ... but I do know this – she had been treated bad. Ain't men the limit, any way? To go off and leave a poor girl like that with no more thought and worry about it than a tomcat?' (McClung *Painted* 213).

Devereux has also commented extensively on the ways in which Helmi's adventures in *Painted Fires* repeat many of the 'stock-in-trade' motifs and tropes common to the white slave narratives of this era (Devereux *Growing* 100). As previously mentioned, many of the white slave narratives of this era centred round a predatory oriental male who was seen to seduce the white woman away from her life of moral uprightness, resulting in her eventual fall into prostitution and poverty. This prejudice against Chinese immigrants in Canada had a long history, stemming all the way back to the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration which proclaimed Chinese immigrants to be a 'non assimilable race' (Valverde 111). These opinions were propagated well into the twentieth century, Woodsworth commenting in *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909) that visible minorities such as Asians and African Americans were 'essentially non-assimilable elements' that were 'clearly detrimental to our highest national development, and hence should be vigorously excluded' (279). Indeed, the very idea of a white woman working for an Asian man was seen as so morally suspect that a 'White Woman's Labour Law' was actually enacted in Saskatchewan in 1912 to prevent such employment. The act states:

[n]o person shall employ in any capacity any white woman or girl or permit any white woman or girl to reside in or lodge or to work in, or, save as a *bona fide* customer in a public apartment thereof only, to frequent any restaurant, laundry, or other place of business or amusement owned, kept or managed by any Japanese, Chinaman, or other Oriental person. (qtd Backhouse 136)

However, it is important to note that for all the stigmas associated with Chinese employers in this era, in McClung's narrative Chinaman Sam is depicted as the only local employer willing to offer Helmi work: 'no one wanted Helmi – she was a foreigner, and she had a baby' (McClung *Painted* 233). Unable to find work through the local employment bureau Helmi takes a job working as a waitress for Sam at the Good Eats Café, assuring him 'I'll work hard if you give me a chance' (Ibid 237). However, in taking this step Helmi is assumed to have fallen beyond the veil of social propriety, leading the local magistrate to happily inform Jack on his return that '[t]his Milander girl has gone back to her old associates, the Chinese. She is in one of the all-night eating houses. I suppose you know what it means when a white girl goes into one of these places' (Ibid 251).

Nevertheless, whilst Helmi is portrayed as suffering from all the social stigmatisation associated with women who work for Chinese men, McClung is keen to remind the reader that such circumstances are the result of Canada's failure to protect and support its future mothers, rather than any personal failing on Helmi's part herself. Devereux thus argues that '[w]hat is highlighted then is not the danger of Sam's culture but the failure of Anglo-Canadian society – and especially the middle-class Anglo-Saxon women who were supposed by eugenisists and eugenic feminists to be the last real hope for the preservation of the race – to protect her' (Devereux *Growing* 108). In fact, in her treatment of Sam, McClung offers a rather subversive portrayal of an Asian character in this period, given the continued prevalence of anti-Chinese rhetoric and stereotypes well into the mid-twentieth-century. Although Sam remains morally suspect in the text (largely due to his relationship with young white woman Rose Lamb which will be discussed shortly), Sam nevertheless remains the first male figure in the text to take a chance on Helmi at the height of her 'fall.' Although she is given aid and support by Mrs. Corbett during her pregnancy, the majority of the women at the employment bureau are shown to look down on her due to her status as an immigrant and single mother, refusing her the chance to better and improve her lot through employment. Sam therefore acts as a foil to the increasing self-interest McClung saw coming to greater prominence in her lifetime, her decision to emphasise these women's failings through the generosity of a largely ostracised and morally corrupt figure such as Sam only reinforcing to her readers how far McClung felt their own society had already fallen.

Helmi's innate goodness and moral uprightness is also conveyed to McClung's readers through the character of Rose Lamb, with whom Helmi is persistently contrasted. Helmi first meets Rose whilst they are both confined at the Girls' Friendly Home. Helmi

overhears Rose relating a tale to a fellow resident and, '[s]omething inherently modest and clean in her young heart protested. She did not want to hear' (McClung *Painted* 80). Rose's immodesty thus immediately sets her apart from Helmi as her morally inferior, reinforcing Helmi's goodness and her false and improper imprisonment in such an establishment. Helmi is reunited with Rose much later in the narrative, in the midst of Helmi's employment at Sam's restaurant, where she is revealed to have married Sam in an effort to gain a new social position and hide her problematic past. Informing Helmi that they met at 'a Young Ladies' Seminary – no tradesman's daughters allowed – remember!' (Ibid 259), she then explains her reasons for settling down with Sam in period when miscegenation was still rampant and such a marriage was considered cause for social ostracism: 'Sam is safe – he'll snuff out like a gentleman. Little Rosie, all alone – think of it! – with some forty thousand bones. How's that!' (Ibid 260). Whilst Helmi is largely praised in the narrative for her willingness to lower herself socially to work for a Chinese man and provide for daughter, Rose remains an indicator of how far Helmi *could* have fallen; choosing to give up any semblance of social propriety for the promise of 'forty thousand bones' upon her Chinese husband's death. Rose thus acts as a warning of what Helmi's future could have been if she had followed her earlier drive for material wealth, rather than relinquishing these impulses in pursuit of romantic love and joys of motherhood.

When justifying her decision, Rose Lamb explains to Helmi that '[k]id, I couldn't work. I hate dishwater and I couldn't scrub – it always made my nose sore. I hate work and what could I do? If I had lots of money I'd run straight' (Ibid 260). By drawing attention to the differing work ethics of these two women, McClung's narrative therefore appears to argue that any situation could be improved upon (or even escaped from) through the application of hard work and moral uprightness. This is conveyed in the text through Helmi's swift removal from her morally suspect role as a waitress at Sam's restaurant, to her new role as a nanny. This new profession allows her to once again reinforce her superior maternal skills when she is revealed to show greater affection for the child under her care than their own self-absorbed mother does. These qualities reasserted to the reader, Helmi is shortly thereafter depicted as leaving this position to be reunited with her husband, recently returned from war, so that they can begin their new life together, living off the land left to them by Arthur Warner, free from the corrupting influence of Canadian society at large.

Rimstead has argued that '[Helmi's] sight is so fixed on work and self improvement that she flees poverty rather than inhabiting it' (76). I would argue that this reading is largely

found to be true in *Painted Fires*, as these brief incidents of destitution and poverty are ultimately revealed not to act as critiques of rural poverty, but rather to allow McClung to champion the value of hard work and moral uprightness in the face of what she saw as an increasingly materialistic, selfish Canadian society. However, I would have to agree with Warne that the novel itself acts as a larger critique by McClung of her 1920s contemporary society and her increasing fears that these values so integral to her idealised, maternal New Woman or ‘mother of the race’ were being lost or sidelined. Nevertheless, McClung’s novel acts as a compelling example of the upwardly-mobile immigrant narrative of this era, illustrating to the reader both the increased potential for corruption and moral fall women faced upon entering the labour marketplace, but also their continued opportunities to improve and better their lot in life through hard work, moral propriety, and just a little bit of luck.

‘Writing with a man’s pen’: Single woman homesteaders and female solidarity

Winnifred Eaton moved from the States to Alberta in 1917 following her second marriage to Frank Reeve, who had recently purchased a ranch near Calgary, and was eager for Eaton and her children (from her former marriage to Bertrand Babcock) to live with him and start their new life together. Eaton struggled on the farm with the pressures of motherhood and maintaining the homestead (even with domestic help), and although she soon grew sick of the ranch lifestyle, spending her winters in Calgary where she felt she had the time and space to take up writing again, her experiences on the ranch (which was finally sold in 1924) provided the materials for her first truly “Canadian” novel, *Cattle* (1923). However, before she published *Cattle*, Eaton began ‘consciously grooming her audience for her new identity as an Alberta writer’ (Gerson *Canadian Women* 191), through a series of interviews and articles distributed in various local Canadian publications.

In a 1922 interview with Elizabeth Bailey Price for *Maclean’s*, Price explained to her readers that ‘[n]ow that she [Eaton] has been reclaimed from her long residence in the States, she is desirous to be known henceforth as a Canadian’ (64). This motif of ‘reclaiming’ her Canadian heritage was a major emphasis of another article Eaton featured in the following year. Originally presented as a radio address to the Canadian Club of Calgary, her article ‘The Canadian Spirit in Our Literature,’ was published in the *Calgary Daily Herald* in March 1923, and began by boldly stating that ‘[w]ith very few exceptions, there has come out of Canada, thus far, no important literary production in which a typical Canadian spirit is

revealed' ('Canadian Spirit'). Continuing in this vein she commented '[w]ould it not be fine if a Canadian author of great talent should cunningly weave into a tale something of the fascinating glamour, the exciting spirit of adventure, the wonder and beauty and charm of this land of ours ... A strong, hot pen might unfold the epic of our grain fields' (Ibid). It would not seem a stretch to suggest that Eaton felt herself to be an author capable of taking on such a task, the reference to a 'strong, hot pen' mirroring the language she later used to relate her own experiences whilst attempting to get *Cattle* published:

[t]he first publisher to whom I sent my Alberta novel returned it to me with the statement that it was the most brutal manuscript that had ever come into his office, but that it had gripped him so that, jaded reader of fiction though he was, he had not put it down until he had read every word. Strangely enough, this verdict gave me a singular pride. I said to myself: 'Now I am writing with a man's pen. I am going back East. I am going to come back as a writer, not this time as a writer of fairy-like stories of Japan, but tales of things and people I had known.' ('You Can't')

The alleged 'brutality' of Eaton's new prose style and her move towards a more realist mode will be a strong focus of this section, as Eaton's work often falls into the realm of melodrama despite her attempts to write with a 'man's pen' and move away from the more decidedly "feminine" subjects of her earlier works. Ironically given her claims of a newfound 'maleness' in her writing, I would argue that *Cattle* is perhaps Eaton's most openly feminist novel, her focus on female strength and mere survival in the face of emotional, physical and economic hardship providing a rare representation of female community and autonomy in prairie fiction from this era.

Cattle (1923) details the rather melodramatic life of Nettie Day, a young farm girl living in the Alberta foothills and the troubles she faces once she comes to the attention of the nefarious local cattle baron Bull Langdon. Langdon "purchases" Nettie along with her father's farm machinery following his death, and she works as household help for Langdon's downtrodden wife whilst her beau Cyril works to save the money to build a farm for the two of them. Jealous of Cyril, and seeing Nettie as *his* property, Bull rapes Nettie (unwittingly leaving her pregnant) and following the death of Mrs. Langdon and the loss of her love-interest Cyril, Nettie flees to the homestead of local outcast Lady Angela Loring¹⁵ for protection. Angela and Nettie harvest Angela's crops together and raise Nettie's child, Bull

¹⁵ Various North American editions of the novel spell this character's name as "Angella," but as this study relies on the earlier British text as source material it will use the more traditional "Angela."

ultimately getting his comeuppance when he is gored by his prize bull (though not before he accidentally causes the death of his own illegitimate child), ultimately leaving Nettie free to win back Cyril, whilst Angela settles down with the local Scotch doctor.

Unsurprisingly given the marked change in tone and subject from her earlier romances, *Cattle* was initially published in Great Britain in 1923 (though in many instances still under the pseudonym “Onoto Watanna,” presumably due to Eaton’s literary notoriety). Publishers were probably keen to test such a radical departure from her earlier Japanese romances on a smaller market before publishing it to North America at large (Di Biase 4). However, the novel was eventually published in Canada and the United States to largely mixed reviews. An early review in *Saturday Night* referred to *Cattle* as ‘a strong, if somewhat crude, story of ranching, in Western Canada. It is a story of action – clear-cut and convincing ... I recommend the novel as vivid and readable, but warn you not to look for subtlety in it, or shadings or overtones, because they are not there’ (‘Vigorous’ 9). Nevertheless, Eaton’s novel did have its admirers, including popular satirist Stephen Leacock who praised the fact that ‘[a]t last, Mrs. Reeve, has give up writing for Sunday school libraries’ (Leacock); presumably a comment of the new style and mature subject matter her ‘man’s pen’ had allowed her to tackle. The novel also gained a certain deal of notoriety due to allegations that the rather unflattering portrayal of the character Bull Langdon was based on a well-known Albertan pioneer rancher of the time, though Eaton’s daughter refuted such claims in an interview given after her mother’s death (Rooney 46).

As Ferens comments in her study of the Eaton sisters, ‘[w]ith race out of the picture, Winnifred was able to concentrate on cultural constructions of difference’ (18), and it could be argued that by removing the more overt racial ‘difference’ that her earlier Eurasian heroines tackled, she could bring more focus on the struggles these characters faced *as women* (Di Biase 7). However, it is also important to note that this transition between subjects was far from smooth for Eaton, as it also required a change in writing style and tone: ‘[t]his difference often emerged through narrative disruptions and dislocations, demonstrating Eaton’s struggle to contain both her “man’s pen” and a newfound sense of freedom that she, as a writer, found on the prairie’ (Cole *Literary Voices* 105). This study will thus focus on the ‘difference’ Eaton was attempting to highlight, but also how *successful* she was in realising said difference or whether the pressure of her self-assigned task to encapsulate “the Canadian spirit” proved insurmountable.

At the turn of the twentieth century, as the movement 'out west' for new land and prosperity intensified across North America, a new genre emerged in many of the American mass-circulation magazines based around the figure of the single woman homesteader. As Dee Garceau's survey of such literature indicates, '[t]hese stories spanned desert and plains across several states yet shared a remarkable consistency of theme. They celebrated female independence, and they presented homesteading as a vehicle for transforming gender identity' ('Single Women' 2). Whilst much evidence has been found to suggest that single women homesteaders rarely ranched alone due to the costs and heavy workload involved – they usually relied on farm hands or the help of a fellow female homesteader – homesteading nevertheless became 'a compelling metaphor for female transformation' in the literature of this period (Ibid 7, 12). Garceau explains that "'proving up" on a homestead became a metaphor for proving that a woman could function competently outside traditional limits ascribed to her gender. For a New Woman, such limits might have included family authority, domesticity, or economic dependence - all of which the literary homesteader cast aside' (Ibid 16). However, these new opportunities for single woman homesteading in the States were not available to women across the border. Women in Canada could only homestead alone if they had the necessary funds to buy their homestead land outright, and such women were often loathe to work the land themselves, usually hiring farmhands to do the majority of the "heavy" farm work. Unsurprisingly many single prairie women thus moved across the border to the States in order to make land claims and start their own homesteads, resulting in a lack of single woman homesteaders in Canadian fiction across this period. Nevertheless, Garceau demonstrates in her study how '[t]he published stories of single women homesteaders created a western version of New Womanhood, with images of independent women who succeeded in the heterosocial world. This theme spoke to women throughout the country, at a time when many sought to redefine their role in increasingly individualistic, egalitarian terms' (Ibid 18). Whilst it would be a stretch to classify *Cattle* within this liberating genre of women's fiction (especially given its conservative ending), it could still be suggested that through the figure of Lady Angela Loring and her resulting partnership (both economic and emotional) with Nettie to work her land, Eaton offers a rare fictional representation of the single woman homesteader in Canada.

Angela Loring, first considered a 'sensation' upon her arrival in the valley, finds herself nicknamed "Mr. Loring" due to her extremely short hair (almost shorn to the scalp) and her tendency to dress in men's working clothes. (Eaton *Cattle* 33). As the narrator

outlines, '[s]he had met all overtures of friendship with hostility and contempt. She was on her own land. She desired no commerce with her neighbours. She needed no help. It was nobody's business but her own why she chose to dress and live in this way' (Ibid 34). As McManus explores in her study of prairie women, '[f]emale power and a certain kind of heterosexual femininity were reinforced not only through time and effort devoted to the farm house but also via the individual and collective energy spent on maintaining appropriate standards of feminine appearance and behaviour' (127). By refusing to meet these cultural standards and work within expected gender norms, it is thus unsurprising that Angela is considered an outcast by many of her neighbours. Her upbringing and lack of farming experience cause further chagrin among the locals as, '[s]he broke her own land and put in her own crop. She did it inadequately, it is true, but with a certain persistence and intensity which at first amazed and then slowly won the grudging respect and wonder of her neighbours' (Eaton *Cattle* 34). Until Nettie's appearance on her homestead later in the novel, Angela's life is portrayed as being entirely focused around work, 'even in the winter, she had little enough time for mere thoughts. Her life was crowded with work' (Ibid 141-2), accurately conveying the sheer effort required to maintain a homestead as a single woman, but nevertheless suggesting an emotional absence – a hole – in Angela's existence that Nettie and her baby later come to fill.

With her local farmers' respect grudgingly earned, Eaton's female homesteader is free to go about her business undisturbed and she remains a 'bugaboo' (Ibid 34) in the early parts of the novel until Chapter IX, which opens with the subtitle: '([p]art of Journal kept by Lady Angela Loring)' (Ibid 75). Angela's aversion to the male species is revealed in her diary chapter to derive from a broken engagement whereby her family were cheated out of money and her father lost his life from his resulting grief over the situation. Angela herself is revealed to have been suffering from tuberculosis upon arrival in Alberta, the fresh start out west implicated in literally saving her life: '[a]nd so I came to Alberta. With these two hands of mine – so soft and useless in the old land – I have cleaved out my own salvation. That is a strange way to put it; yet I believe that my physical toil has been the main factor in giving me back my life which the English physician declared was practically over' (Ibid 78). Given a new lease on life in the Canadian prairies, Eaton's heroine feels free to flaunt social conventions of appearance and dress, explaining 'I wear men's clothes, not because I admire anything about the mean race of men, against whom, in fact, I feel a deep-rooted aversion, but because it is a more practical and comfortable mode of dress, and because I wish to forget

that I am a woman' (Ibid 76). Eaton's heroine's desire to deny her womanliness is clearly linked to her earlier romantic failures, but it also reiterates Cavanaugh's findings on the 'liberation' women experienced on the prairies:

[w]hile some women saw the West as liberating them from conventional femininity, their assertions of equal status with the frontiersman had the opposite effect. By denying the differences sex difference made, women were drawn further into dominant gender conventions. Those who attempted to transcend the boundaries of middle-class femininity found themselves adopting a masculine stance, which, implicitly at least, denigrated their femaleness. (518)

Thus, Angela's decision to deny her 'femaleness' could be seen as an almost inevitable consequence of her decision to homestead alone rather than a conscious decision to deter male suitors and female companionship. Eaton's heroine just takes this necessity to adopt a 'masculine stance' to a far more extreme degree than many women in this period did.

Cole asserts that 'Alberta was a land both culturally and physically boundless and allowed for a certain deviation from both form and content' (*Literary Voices* 128). However, despite this proviso, it is Cole herself who most takes Eaton to task for her decision to include the anomalous first-person diary chapter that gives us these insights into Angela Loring's character. Cole largely attributes this decision to Eaton's unwieldy "man's pen" maintaining that 'Eaton's inappropriate shifts in tone reflect a discomfort with the new authorial voice she adopted. This uneasiness is further reflected in the abrupt shifts in point of view that occur throughout the novel' (Ibid 108). Continuing this argument, Cole highlights how 'Angella takes on a man's role – and even dresses like a man – in the same way that Eaton, in this genre writes "with a man's pen" and speaks in a male voice' (Ibid 108), further stating how 'Angella, like Eaton herself, consistently denies her past and the influence of inheritance; she "reverts" to an earlier, agrarian type that had been distilled into the English aristocracy' (Ibid 109). Whilst Cole's argument comparing Angela's "mannishness" to Eaton's own decision to write with a "man's pen" is convincing, and the intrusion of the chapter itself is jarring for the reader, it is also important to note where the chapter appears chronologically. Placed immediately after the scene of Nettie's rape, I would argue that the decision to include an excerpt from Angela's diary may in fact have been an attempt by Eaton to reassert the possibilities and intrinsic value of female autonomy after such a horrifying moment of female submission and self-effacement.

In her survey of Eaton's literary output, Diana Birchall states that '[o]nly the ambiguous figure of the "man-woman" is strong enough to stand up to Bull and threaten him with a gun. Other women are weak and passive – feeble Mrs. Langdon and Nettie, beautiful victim' (147). Whilst this study will go on to argue that the 'weak' character of Nettie later finds a sense of purpose and autonomy through her friendship with Angela Loring, it is important to dwell on these earlier scenes of female passivity and how they prepare the reader for Nettie's later personal development, as well as how they draw attention to Angela Loring's extreme deviation from the culturally expected feminine norms in this period. Nettie Day is introduced to the reader as a most unassuming heroine: 'Nettie was of that blonde type seen more often in the northern lands. She was a big girl, with milk-white skin and dead gold hair. A slow-moving, slow-thinking girl, simple and ignorant of the world outside that which bounded the narrow confines of their homestead land' (Eaton *Cattle* 14-15). Taking over childrearing duties from an early age due to the death of her mother, Nettie initially appears to fit the classic prairie girl mould, her resulting romance with young cowboy Cyril Stanley seeming to again replicate the common tropes of the prairie romance. Indeed, when she asks her suitor what he plans to build on his newly acquired homestead land, he wryly replies '[a] *home* girl!' (Ibid 29). Nettie's future seems apparent until the untimely death of her father, which bankrupts their farm and results in all her younger siblings being sent off to work as farm hands or else to orphanages. Eaton paints the auctioning off of Dan Day's farm, livestock and machinery as a particularly mercenary endeavour, Nettie herself becoming inadvertently caught up in the purchasing process:

[t]he Bull stepped forward. One big, thick forefinger went up to the auctioneer, as it had risen when he had bought head by head the stock and cattle.

'How about the gell? My wife needs a good, strong gell for the housework, and I'm willin' to take her along with her dad's old truck.' (Ibid 45)

Strongly discouraged by others from taking up Bull's offer – '[d]on't chu go with him, Nettie. He ain't no good' (Ibid) – Nettie ultimately takes the position as it will allow her to stay in close proximity to Cyril who works as a ranch hand for Bull.

Despite these warnings from local women, Nettie's initial position as domestic servant at the Langdon ranch house is seen to have a largely positive effect on both Nettie and her new employer, Mrs. Langdon. The wife of Bull Langdon is described in almost pitiful language, a woman perpetually unfulfilled due to her inability to have children: '[s]he

was an innocent, harmless creature, weak and devoted, the kind that is born to mother things. The years had given Mrs. Langdon only dreams to mother – dreams of babies that came with every year, only to be snuffed out, when on some barren homestead she fought out her agony and longing alone and unhelped’ (Ibid 10-11). Indeed, Nettie’s arrival fosters a spirit of female solidarity and friendship within a household previously downtrodden by the assertive masculine presence of Bull Langdon: ‘[b]etter than the relief from the hard labour, was the companionship of another woman in the ranch house. Only a woman who has been isolated long from her own sex can appreciate what it means when another woman comes into her life’ (Ibid 52). The knowing tone of the narrator here draws the reader in and helps create a sense of female community for the first time in the novel, ensuring that ‘[s]lowly, between the two women, something more than mere friendship grew into being’ (Ibid 53). Indeed, due to her inability to have a child of her own, Mrs. Langdon takes on an almost maternal role with regard to Nettie, eager to teach her all the skills she will require when she runs a household of her own for Cyril.

However, this initial spirit of female companionship sadly does not last long, and once Mrs. Langdon is sent away to visit a friend, the real dangers of working as a domestic servant come to the forefront of the novel. In her biography of Eaton, Birchall praises the fact that

[u]nlike many women writers of her day, she never hesitated to allow truly appalling things to happen to her characters. These tragic, unexpected occurrences can evoke a powerful response and keep the reader surprised and off balance, and they make Winnifred’s work much more interesting than a strictly formulaic writer’s work. She revelled in delivering thunderbolts of fate down onto the heads of her hapless characters. (148)

Whilst I would argue Eaton was far from unique in taking this approach (see McClung’s treatment of Helmi Milander in *Painted Fires* for another example of this style), Birchall is right to draw attention to the ‘truly appalling’ elements of the narrative for, as Cole asserts, ‘[a]lthough other prairie novels touched on the atmosphere of sexual danger that surrounded hired girls, few did so in quite such graphic detail’ (*Literary Voices* 107). After an initial incident where Bull’s advances are interrupted by Mrs. Langdon, the rape itself is described in a stark yet understandably minimalist manner: ‘[a]s the door gave way, she lost her senses, and unable to move, like some fascinated thing, she watched the approach of the Bull. She knew that she was trapped, and, hands at her throat, she tried to force to her lips the cry that would not come’ (Eaton *Cattle* 71). Nevertheless, it is the aftermath that Cole and many

others take issue with: 'Nettie's rape is only one of the many "brutal" aspects of *Cattle*. However, these incidents are sometimes so grotesque, so overwrought, that they become almost ridiculous' (*Literary Voices* 107-8). This tendency towards melodrama can be seen in the following speech made by Bull Langdon:

I ain't plannin' on sharing you with no one, do you get me? You belong to Bull Langdon. I got you at the sale, same as I got the rest of your dad's old truck, and what the Bull gets his hands on he keeps. It's up to yourself how you get treated. I'm free-handed with them that treats me right. My old woman ain't strong. She'll croak one of these days, and 'twon't be long before they'll be another Mrs. Langdon at Bar Q. You treat the Bull right, and you'll be the second Mrs. Langdon. (Eaton *Cattle* 73)

Here, Bull Langdon's villainy and excessive reliance on the language of ownership as well as the easy way he writes off his current wife seem to border on caricature, but I would argue that despite the overwrought characterisation of Bull himself, the atmosphere of fear and terror that Eaton creates throughout the exchange would still have carried great weight with readers, especially among young women working as domestic servants themselves.

In her article 'Violence Against Women: Power Dynamics in Literature of the Western Family' (1987), Melody Graulich discusses the representation of abuse and rape in western literature (though her texts are dated much later than *Cattle*'s publication in the early 1920s). Graulich praises the novels as '[t]he radical conclusion of these writers – that violence against women is the result of patriarchal definitions of gender and marriage rather than of individual pathology – anticipates the analysis of the most recent feminist scholars' (113). Although Bull Langdon's 'individual pathology' plays a large part in his mistreatment of Nettie and his wife, I would argue that given the presence of Angela in the novel and her role as a woman who struggles to escape the strictures patriarchal society attempts to place upon her, *Cattle* could be seen to 'reveal the struggles women face growing up female in a world where women are victimised and devalued' (Ibid). Graulich argues that '[i]n these books, women are the victims of individual men, but in the larger sense they are victims of social and economic institutions, of gender expectations' (Ibid). Graulich's statements could easily be applied to Eaton's representation of both Nettie and Angela, especially when she goes on to discuss how these novels of violence against women usually 'demonstrate women's recognition of their need of each other: most turn at some point to women friends and to their daughters or mothers, who are sometimes able to help' (Ibid 116). However, despite their ability to highlight the value of female support systems in the face of such

unequal power systems, it is also important to note, as Graulich does in her analysis of Meridel Le Sueur's *The Girl* (1939, published 1978), '[the author] does not envision women living without men, and, in fact, her women are obsessed with establishing relations with men and with having babies. She cannot empower women's values in a world in which male values dominate, so she cannot resolve a central issue her book raises: how to stop the abuse of women' (Ibid 121). This point could easily be applied to Eaton's *Cattle* and is one of the main issues undermining the feminist intention of the narrative, as whilst Bull is ultimately punished for his actions, and Nettie finds temporary solace working the farm for Angela, she still always yearns to return to her earlier romance with Cyril and reinsert herself into a patriarchal system where she will once again be subject to a man, albeit in a (presumably) far less abusive manner.

Unsurprisingly, Nettie loses all pleasure in her domestic labours after the assault: '[t]he joy of work and the contact with the live things of the ranch were all gone for her. She was like a machine, automatically wound up. There were certain duties daily to be done. She went about them dully and mechanically' (Eaton *Cattle* 101). Upon Mrs. Langdon's return she proclaims, 'I tell you that I ain't the same. I'm changed. You oughtn't to have gone away' (Ibid 105). Once she discovers she is pregnant, she faces the full force of public opinion (losing Cyril in the process) and the narrator relates how '[s]he thought of her friend "Angel" Loring, and her cropped hair and men's clothing, and for the first time she comprehended what might drive a woman to do as the Englishwoman had done' (Ibid 118). Despite the stigma of her illegitimate pregnancy, Nettie refuses to leave the Langdon household or admit Bull's responsibility for her condition due to her close bond with the increasingly ailing Mrs. Langdon. It is only with Mrs. Langdon's death (from the shock of discovering the truth) that Nettie is finally free to escape the clutches of Bull and find comfort and security on the homestead of Angela Loring. True to the earlier sentimental modes that brought her fame, Eaton's villain is duly punished for such ill-treatment of both Nettie and Mrs. Langdon, dramatically gored by his own prize bull after he destroys the crops of Angela and Nettie in a fit of jealous rage (his own are destroyed in a similarly fateful hailstorm): '[h]ere was a terrible justice in which the hand of a master avenger might almost have been perceived. Yet the Hereford bull had gored but the man's body, while Bull Langdon had gored a woman's soul' (Ibid 254). Thus, for all its melodrama, Eaton clearly felt it necessary to savagely punish Bull for his actions, sacrificing the more "realist" style she had been attempting to create in her bid to emphasise the true brutality of her new "man's pen."

Following her escape to Angela Loring's homestead and eager to retain some semblance of control over her life, Nettie cuts her hair short (though not quite to the scalp like Angela) in a moment of anger: '[s]eeking for some physical outlet on which to vent her pent-up feelings, she looked about her. A pair of scissors lay on Angela's dressing table, and this Nettie seized. She could not tell why, at that moment, she found herself slashing into her long hair. The big braids dropped to the floor with a soft thud' (Ibid 167). Clearly acting upon her aforementioned desire to emulate Angela and renounce both men and her femininity, Nettie is shocked by Angela's outrage at her decision:

'Nettie Day, what you have done is an act of sheer vandalism,' said the woman, who had herself cut to the scalp her own hair.

'Oh, Angel, I wanted to be like you. I didn't want no more to be like a woman—'

Angela's face blanched.

'So I'm not like a woman, then?'

'I didn't mean that, Angel. You're more like a woman in your heart than anyone I ever knew, 'cept Mrs. Langdon, and I just wanted to make myself so that – so that no one would ever want to look at me again. Just's if I was same as a man and –.' (Ibid 167-8)

Through her response to Nettie's insinuation, Angela's responses here highlight a clear transition in the novel from the character's earlier hostility to all men and signs of womanliness to a more nuanced appreciation of her sex. Men's clothing still remains 'sensible' (Ibid 168), but following her care for Nettie's child and her burgeoning attraction to Dr. McDermott she begins to see potential benefits in retaining remnants of one's femininity: '[b]ut you needn't think that because I – was fool enough to – to – make a freak of myself, that I approve of you or anyone else doing it' (Ibid).

Early in the novel, Angela is portrayed as finding her main purpose and happiness through farming her land, almost as though she is channelling any latent maternal instinct into the growth and development of her crops: '[w]hen first my own showed its green head above the earth, I suffered such exhilaration that I could have thrown myself upon the ground and kissed the good old mother earth. These tiny points of green, there on the soil that I myself had ploughed, diced, harrowed and seeded. I suffered the exquisite pang of the creator' (Ibid 79). This 'pang of the creator' is given full sway when the heavily-pregnant Nettie appears on her doorstep, the young girl's aversion to the baby (due to its violent origins) forcing Angela to take on the role of mother: "'Nettie won't touch it – says she doesn't want it – and worse. Well, I'll take it then. I'll care for it. Is there any reason why I

shouldn't have it?" she demanded with something of the jealous fierceness of a mother herself' (Ibid 145). Nettie remains unable to care for the child, refusing to hold it or show it any affection, the baby itself (who is tellingly left unnamed) showing an almost eugenic weakness that mirrors its mother's repulsion towards Bull: '[u]ndersized and weak, it nevertheless cried little, and its weird, tiny face was curiously like that of a bird's. There was something pitifully unfinished about this child of Nettie's, thought it was in no way deformed. It had simply been forced into the world before the world was ready for it ... At the end of April it weighed no more than the day it was born' (Ibid 163). When Angela scolds Nettie for her neglect of her child, Nettie explains that 'I don't want to love him! I don't want to. He's *him*, and I wish't I died before I – I – come to this' (Ibid 167).

Whether the fact that the child is male adds to her sense of aversion towards it is never made clear in the novel, but by the time Bull learns of the child's existence and comes to claim it, Nettie still remains disconnected from it, Angela facing down with Bull with a loaded pistol and demanding he get off *her* land and the child is now *hers*. As Nettie explains once Bull has been successfully deterred:

'I ain't afraid of nothing now for myself, but I don't want nothing to happen to you or my baby.'

'My baby, you mean,' corrected Angela, pretending to laugh. Nevertheless, her arm drew the little baby close to her side, and she felt a thrill that was all mother. (Ibid 196)

As the narrative makes clear, Eaton's "man-woman" is softened and re-feminised through her care for Nettie's illegitimate child, becoming protective almost to the point of jealousy when it comes to its birth mother's claims on its care. Indeed, it is only once the gruff Scotch Dr. McDermott sees Angela with the child and the effect it has on her, that he stops his open condemnation of her lifestyle and begins to look upon her romantically: '[t]he defiant look was almost gone from the bright eyes, the lips were no longer bitterly compressed; with the slight colour in her cheeks, and her soft grey hair curling about her face, Angela Loring was almost beautiful, as she cuddled the baby in her arms and murmured foolish endearments to it' (Ibid 232-3). Although the child ultimately dies in an accident following Bull's kidnapping of it (the decision not to name the child in the narrative perhaps designed to blunt the atrocity of such an outcome for the reader), Angela Loring remains irrevocably altered, leaving her receptive to Dr. McDermott's marriage proposal at the novel's close, something that would have been unthinkable given her earlier characterisation in the diary chapter.

Despite the implication that writing with a “man’s pen” would lead to a focus on Bull Langdon’s story, as this study has illustrated, the ‘narrative turns him into an antihero who is vanquished by the seemingly weak, largely silenced, but ultimately indomitable women and non-whites who halt Bull’s advance though the plains’ (Cole *Literary Voices* 113). However, it is curious to note that certain critics of the period still chose to see the novel’s predominant focus as being on Bull Langdon and his struggles to succeed on the frontier. In *Highways of Canadian Literature* (1924), Logan and French classify *Cattle* as part of the ‘New Realism’ movement that they saw as a reaction against ‘romance with its insufficiency of motivation and its lack of fidelity to real life’ (313). Viewing the novel from a starkly masculinist perspective, they applaud the novel’s ‘almost brutally realistic presentation of a man whose sole aim in life was the acquirement of cattle – as a form of wealth – whose whole outlook on life was measured in terms of cattle’ (Ibid); completely sidelining the more subversive elements of the novel’s feminist message, and even its tendency to fall into sentimentality and melodrama (the main criticism of the novel upon initial publication).

In her study of early female settlers in the States, Susan Hallgarth observes how ‘the spirit of cooperation explains the particular meaning independence held for them [single women homesteaders]. For the clever people who built their house covering the comers of each piece of land, or those who joined forces to share expertise, cooperation meant protection and encouragement as well as shared labour’ (29). This ‘spirit of cooperation’ and female solidarity is at the heart of *Cattle* and can be evidenced in the second half of the novel when Angela takes in Nettie and her son, the two of them working together to farm their homestead and taking immense pride in their successes. Angela convinces Nettie to stay and help her farm her land – and Cyril Stanley’s which he has abandoned following news of Nettie’s condition – playing into Nettie’s own desire to repent and feelings of guilt over what happened with Bull: ‘[o]h my, yes, Angel, I just wish’t you’d give me the chance. I’d love to do the work. I’ll do it alone if you’ll let me. I’ll work my fingers to the bone to – to – make up to him – and to you, Angel’ (Eaton *Cattle* 165). Nettie’s labour ultimately proves essential to Angela, reinforcing Angela’s status as an outsider not raised with intimate knowledge of a farm: ‘Nettie by this time was strong, and she knew farm work and was at home with horses, so that she was of invaluable assistance to the less experienced, if self-reliant, Angela’ (Ibid 170). Nevertheless, this work agreement ultimately proves mutually beneficial, as ‘[d]uring this period, at least, somewhat of Nettie’s cares were allayed. Labouring from five in the morning till sundown will do much to exhaust a body and mind, and intent upon doing first-

rate work, her mind was for the first time jerked from a contemplation of her troubles' (Ibid 172). In *Cattle* work not only brings these women closer but also acts as a salve and distraction from their troublesome pasts, offering them a chance to start over, or in Angela's case return to a former agrarian type her aristocratic family had lost touch with.

Eaton devotes several chapters of the novel to Nettie and Angela's farming endeavours, detailing the processes of seeding, stooking and haying at length, suggesting that Eaton felt the need to constantly reinforce the novelty of these women's labours as well as her own personal knowledge of the day-to-day tasks involved in running an Albertan homestead.¹⁶ There are multiple scenes involving the two women surveying their crop after a hard day's work:

[o]f an evening, their labour in the field done, the women who had put in that crop, would walk slowly through the grain, and the soft slush of the stalks as they made a pathway through the thick growth seemed like a whisper of peace in the quiet evening ...

They talked little, these two women; for the one was shy and reticent by nature, and the other had acquired the habit of reticence and brevity of speech. Yet each felt and understood the thought of the other, as they looked across at the moving grain. (Ibid 174-5)

...

As they stood in the twilight, looking across at the harvest field, though they did not and perhaps could not have expressed their thoughts in words, they knew that they had produced a picture out there in the sun that was a masterpiece which no mere brush could ever catch. And as this thought came, perhaps to both of the girls, their eyes met, and they smiled warmly to each other. (Ibid 179)

By tying these moments of female solidarity to their pride in a hard day's work, as well as the use of imagery that reiterates the "land of promise" propaganda that was so popular at the start of the century, Eaton (as Cole suggests) clearly *does* attempt to incorporate women into the male frontier myth. Such a detailed treatment of two women working alone and successfully tending such a large crop is rare in Canadian fiction, and although this crop is ultimately destroyed by the malicious intent of Bull Langdon, these women's sense of pride

¹⁶ It is important to note that *Cattle*'s detailed descriptions of farm processes and machinery anticipates Robert Stead's *Grain* (1925) in many ways, a novel which was seen as decidedly modern upon publication for similar descriptions of new technologies.

and, more significantly, their sense of loss on its destruction, reinforce female homesteading's ability to empower single women in this era.

In his article on 'The Epidemic as Social Event,' Evan Stark asserts that '[l]ike riots, famines, wars, fires, mass strikes, and rebellions, epidemics are stages for collective self-recognition and for the reconstruction of collective identities normally subordinated in everyday life to publicly acceptable 'roles' (687). In a novel already filled with male violence, catastrophic hailstorms and cattle stampedes, Eaton's decision to include an epidemic very similar in strength and trajectory to the catastrophic "Spanish Flu" pandemic of 1918 might seem rather excessive. However, as Stark implies, it is only through helping to nurse those affected by the epidemic in her local area that Nettie regains both a sense of purpose and her social standing within the local community. The epidemic itself is mentioned briefly in whispers and gossip in several chapters, before it finally takes centre stage in the novel following the destruction of Angela and Nettie's crops by Bull: 'Calgary, the city of sunlight and optimism, was now a place of pain and death. Scarcely a house escaped the dreaded visitor, and a curiosity of its effect upon its victims was that the young and strong were the chief sufferers. A haunting sense of disaster now brooded over the city' (Eaton *Cattle* 206). Eaton's placing of the epidemic here appears significant, as once again after a moment of female submission to the violent actions of a man (Bull's cattle stampede ruining their crops), Nettie is finally given a chance to overthrow her passive nature and be proactive in the care and recuperation of others.

When Dr. McDermott explains his plans to help tend to the victims, Nettie is quick to sign up. She has no fear of death due to the loss of her self-esteem following the Bull's subjection, safe in the knowledge Angela will look after her child if the worst should happen: 'I'm awfully strong ... and I ain't likely to catch nothing, and it don't matter if I do, far as that goes. You'll let me go, won't you, doc?' (Ibid 211-12). Despite her desire to martyr herself for the sake of others, it is through this nursing that she not only regains the respect and admiration of her peers:

Nettie was nursing the stricken farmers. She, the pariah and despised of the foothills, was going from ranch to ranch caring for those who had condemned her ... In their hours of deepest anguish and agony, they had clung to her cool, strong hands, as to an anchorage of hope.

The country people had overwhelmingly reversed their opinion and judgement of Nettie Day. Indeed, they cared little for what her past had been. She was their Nettie now. (Ibid 215)

Regaining her agency and becoming an ‘anchor’ for the local community through her maternal nursing role, Nettie’s care for others also allows her to finally connect with the repressed feelings of love she has felt for her own child, soon finding that she ‘thought ceaselessly and yearningly of her baby. Away from him, he grew into visible being in her mind, and, heedless now of his paternity, she loved him with all the passion of her warm, young heart’ (Ibid 216). However, despite this newfound affection for her child, she still chooses to put her romantic intentions first, denying herself a chance to go home and be with her child (and thus missing his subsequent kidnapping and death), so that she can tend to Cyril who she learns has been affected by the epidemic in a nearby logging camp. Although this decision is explained through her desire to remain useful, ‘I don’t want to go home – yet. I shouldn’t be happy – even with my baby. My place is where I am needed most, and you should know where that is, doc’ (Ibid 218), one can’t help but feel her affection for her child is still made secondary to her romantic desires, something that may not have sat well with more conservative readers at the time. However, the logic of the plot itself almost seems to require the death of Nettie’s ‘tainted child,’ so that the union of Nettie and Cyril is given a fresh start without a constant reminder of their troubled pasts. Thus, Nettie’s romantic desires could also be seen to represent commitment to the more conventional mode of marriage and family that Cyril offers in the narrative.

Despite the clear moments of feminist intent in the novel, as well as its strong indictment of violence against women and the value of the female companionship when conquering the male-dominated frontier, many critics find Eaton’s decision to end the novel with ‘yet another double marriage’ disappointing (Ling 55). Indeed, for the reader who has admired the resilience and stubborn resourcefulness of Angela Loring, the offhand manner with which she gifts her hard-won homestead to Nettie and Cyril is bound to feel jarring: “[w]hy build again?” said Angel softly, “[t]here’s *this* house for you, Cyril. It’s our wedding gift to you and Nettie. I’ll be going –” she smiled and blushed like a girl, but finished the words bravely – “to my husband’s house” (Eaton *Cattle* 256). However, as Cole outlines in her study, if we apply Patricia Wald’s work on “uncanny” presences in popular literature, it seems almost inevitable that a disruptive character such as Angela would need to be contained or controlled in some way through a respectable marriage (*Literary Voices* 112).

As Wald explains, disruptive “uncanny” characters in these fictions ‘must therefore be reabsorbed by the official stories they challenge.’ However, ‘the extra work required by that reabsorption threatens to expose the discontinuity it is supposed to obscure’ (Wald 10). Essentially, the fact that Eaton feels it necessary to ‘reabsorb’ Angela into the traditional prairie romance mode only brings more attention to the subversive nature of her earlier actions, reinforcing their exceptionalness. In fact, as Sheilagh Jameson outlines in her study of women on Southern Alberta plains, ‘[f]or the rancher, an attractive wife who could ride well, entertain graciously, and provide a note of refinement and charm to his house, was a distinct asset, and if she could also help move cattle, care for the garden, and drive a team on the rake when he was short-handed at haying, she was indeed a jewel without price’ (77). Thus, the skills these women were able to nurture through their shared time working on Angela’s farm ultimately allow them to function as *better* farm wives than those who might have chosen to take a more conservative, socially-approved route towards marriage.

In *Sensational Designs*, Tompkins bemoans the fact that ‘the *popularity* of novels by women has been held against them almost as much as their preoccupation with “trivial” feminine concerns’ (xiv), and as we have seen through the unfavourable comparison of Winnifred with her sister, Eaton’s commercial success has been held against her by many modern academics, who view her adherence to popular sentimental tropes as a sign of literary weakness. However, as Cole argues, ‘[w]ithout forgetting how voices are suppressed under mainstream culture and often shout against it, we also need to consider how they emerge within it’ (*Literary Voices* 157). Therefore, although she lacked the overt political agenda of her sister Edith, the fact that Eaton had ‘her finger squarely on the pulse of her time’ (Ling 55) does not need to be seen as detracting from her work. Her ability to write stories that appealed to the popular imagination enabled her to market arguably subversive ideas and female representations within a commercially successful package. Doubtless, Eaton would have realised that despite their appreciation of the occasionally radical feminist slant of the novel, the majority of her readers would still want to see these free-spirited women contained within the relative safety of the heterosexual homestead at the novel’s close.

‘I’m a wiper, a greaser, a clodhopper’: Ranch wives and prairie motherhood

In Carl Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada* (1976), Arthur Stringer is described as ‘probably [the] most fully professional of all the Canadian writers’ of the early twentieth century (Roper

et al. 339). Gordon Roper et al. ranked Stringer alongside Charles G. D. Roberts and Gilbert Parker in terms of popular appeal, and a YWCA contest from the 1920s on ‘which books best portrayed Canadian life’ ranked Stringer’s *The Prairie Wife* (1915) tenth alongside such popular novels as L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (which ranked sixth) (‘Book Contest’ 252). Given Stringer’s popularity (both commercial and critical) at the turn of the century, coupled with later claims about his ‘professionalism’ as a writer, it seems odd that he continues to appear only rarely in modern surveys of early Canadian fiction, many of his most popular novels still languishing out of print. Nevertheless, Stringer’s name does appear from time to time in surveys of Canadian prairie fiction: his *Prairie* trilogy is often referred to as an early prototype for the bleak, psychological novels of the 1930s and 40s. Critics such as Dick Harrison and Laurie Ricou are quick to emphasise the shortcomings of Stringer’s novels in comparison to their successors though, Ricou claiming that ‘[h]is novels are too shallow to provide a sense of the characters coming to terms with their own selves and with their environment. Stringer’s effective scenes are lost in the sentiment and melodrama’ (17). However, as we have already seen with authors such as Nellie McClung, modern biases against melodrama and sentiment have often blinded critics to certain subtleties and to the ways in which such novels subverted cultural expectations and opened up new avenues for female expression by allowing alternative female subjectivities to be explored.

One critic who has already attempted to bring about Stringer’s critical recovery is Clarence Karr, whose *Authors and Audiences* (2000) unearthed many archival documents that allow us to better understand both Stringer himself and his readers. Whilst Karr freely admits that given the ‘persistent pressure to produce sufficient saleable products to earn a living ... [Stringer’s] work too often fell short of artistic completeness,’ he also argues that ‘in all his works, there is a lightness of touch appreciated by both reviewers and readers. Even when confronting serious problems of modern civilisation, Stringer refused to burden his readers with earnestness or preaching’ (139). Stringer’s *Prairie* trilogy – *The Prairie Wife*, *The Prairie Mother* (1920), and *The Prairie Child* (1922) – will be examined here to provide a contrast to the more openly evangelical novels of authors such as McClung, although both authors still focus heavily on the oppressive patriarchal structures of early twentieth century society. As early as 1924, Stringer’s contemporaries were arguing that his *Prairie* trilogy seemed ‘remarkable as a study in feminine psychology and the reactions of problems of prairie life upon a feminine mind in its domestic and personal associations’ (Logan and French 312). Indeed, Stringer’s depiction of one woman’s experiences on the prairies led one

reader to write him in 1920 asking '[a]re you an honest to gosh he man, and, if so, whose heart and mind have you so intimately peeped into that you know the thoughts and feelings of the Prairie Wife and Mother?' (Jones to Stringer). The assumed 'authenticity' of Stringer's portrayal of protagonist Chaddie McKail's struggle to make a living for her husband and family out west whilst simultaneously keeping the family unit intact will be the main focus of this section. Ricou's claims of 'sentiment' and melodrama will be considered alongside Stringer's supposedly unprecedented ability to articulate the prairie woman's experiences and psyche, to uncover whether Stringer potentially offers one of the most sustained and antagonistic depictions of women's work and life on the prairies in this era.

Arthur Stringer (1874-1950) was born in Chatham, Ontario and raised in London, Ontario, studying at both the University of Toronto and Oxford University before beginning a career in journalism around the turn of the century. He worked first for the Montreal *Herald*, before heading (as many of his contemporaries did) to New York in an attempt to establish himself as an author of popular fiction. He wrote prolifically throughout his long career in fiction, poetry and non-fiction, and gained a certain level of literary celebrity due to both his novels' popular success and his first marriage to actress Jobyna Howland, the original 'Gibson Girl' (Karr 21-2). Aside from the *Prairie* trilogy which will form the basis of this study, his other notable works include *The Silver Poppy* (1903) and the crime adventure novels *The Wire Tappers* (1906) and *Phantom Wires* (1907). Later in life, Stringer longed for an 'absence from the many-tongued voices of the noisiest city in the world' ('My Work' 10), which led him to invest in the in the Turner Valley oil boom of 1914 and purchase a wheat-growing ranch in the Symonds Valley, Alberta (Karr 23). He briefly attempted to make his living grain farming, but before long he returned to the bustle of the city, ultimately settling in New Jersey.

In *Authors and Audiences*, Karr argues that the *Prairie* trilogy remains Stringer's 'most sustained and most controversial portrait of a woman' (145). Written in diary form (though ostensibly the first novel is written for an intended recipient: Matilda Anne), the series follows Chaddie's initial decision to marry rancher Duncan McKail, and their homesteading endeavours out west as they start a family, concluding with their divorce at the end of *The Prairie Child*. Whilst such tales of making a life out west were highly prevalent in this era, Stringer's decision to end the trilogy with a divorce was a particularly controversial decision given the cultural stigmas that were still attached to such a decision in this period. However, as Karr outlines, 'in presenting Chaddie and Duncan McKail as the couple who

might well have lived next door to the average North American, he touched the hearts and minds of his audience deeply. The narration of the story through Chaddie's diary adds an intimate, confessional flavour which brings the reader inside her mind and circumstances' (146). It thus seems only appropriate to begin this analysis with a discussion of the narrative form itself and how it allowed Stringer to create the 'authenticity' that engaged so many of his readers and made his novels such a commercial success. *The Prairie Wife* opens good-humouredly with a literal splash:

SPLASH! ... That's me, Matilda Anne! That's me falling plump into the pool of matrimony before I've had time to fall in love! And oh, Matilda Anne, Matilda Anne, I've *got* to talk to you! You may be six thousand miles away, but still you've got to be my safety-valve. I'd blow up and explode if I didn't express myself to someone. For it's so lonesome out here I could go and commune with the gophers. This isn't a twenty-part letter, my dear, and it isn't a diary. It's the coral ring I'm cutting my teeth of desolation on. For, every so long, I've simply got to sit down and talk to someone, or I'd go mad, clean, stark, staring mad, and bite the tops off the sweet-grass! (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 1-2)

Written in a rather hysterical and desperate tone, this opening entry already suggests an underlying sense of isolation and lack of companionship that leads Chaddie to begin writing, thus allowing Stringer to foreshadow tensions which later acts as great burdens and hardships for this diary's author. Each diary entry begins with a day of the week and a date, though no month or year is ever stated, perhaps an attempt on Stringer's part to distance his novels from the uncertainties of his contemporary society (the First World War was well underway by the time *The Prairie Wife* was published). This may also have been used to illustrate the monotony of life and work on the prairies, as is demonstrated in the second novel when, in moments of distress or frustration, Chaddie's entries are headed with 'Thursday the – I Can't Remember' (Stringer *Prairie Mother* 180) and 'Sunday the Umptieth' (Ibid 307). Chaddie's entries are also constantly littered with references to literature, music and verse, reinforcing to the reader that despite her meagre and rustic surroundings, Chaddie remains a highly educated woman, though her knowledge carries less social relevance in her current climate: '[y]et I'll wager a bushel of number one Northern winter wheat to a doughnut ring that if Ibsen had written an epilogue for *The Doll's House*, Nora would have come crawling back to her home and her kiddies, in the end' (Ibid 96). Between each novel, a number of years are intended to have passed, the decision to return to diary-writing at the start of *The Prairie Child* stemming mostly from a feeling of missed opportunities and disillusionment: '[s]o after

three long years and more of silence I'm turning back to this, the journal of one irresponsible old Chaddie McKail, who wanted so much to be happy and who has in some way missed the pot of gold that they told her was to be found at the rainbow's end' (Stringer *Prairie Child* 9). By this point in the series, a sense of resignation is palpable, yet there is still a suggestion that through expression of her thoughts, catharsis can be attained, the diary still acting as 'the safety-valve of my soul' (Ibid 10), echoing what Chaddie stated back in her very first entry in *The Prairie Wife*.

Much of the first novel, *The Prairie Wife*, is taken up with Chaddie's struggles to adapt to life on the prairies and how such a lifestyle contrasts with her upbringing as an east coast socialite. When she makes the decision to marry Duncan, Stringer appears keen to emphasise how stark the contrasts will be between Chaddie's former and future lifestyles: 'and now instead of going to embassy balls and talking world-politics like a Mrs. Humphry Ward heroine I've married a shack-owner who grows wheat up in the Canadian Northwest. And instead of wearing a tiara in the Grand Tier at the Metropolitan I'm up here a dot on the prairie and wearing an apron made of butcher's linen!' (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 12-13). Predictably, her first responses to her new homeland reinforce stereotypical assertions of newfound freedom and space, but these are swiftly reined in upon first sight of her new home:

[a]nd beyond these stretched the open prairie, limitless and beautiful in the clear morning sunshine. Above it arched a sky of robin-egg blue, melting into opal and pale gold down toward the rim of the world. I breathed in lungfuls of clear, dry, ozonic air, and I really believe it made me a little light-headed, it was so exhilarating, so champagnized with the invisible bubbles of life ... I needed that etheric eye-opener, Matilda Anne, before I calmly and critically looked about our shack. Oh, that shack, that shack! What a come down it was for your heart-sore Chaddie! (Ibid 25-6)

Such reactions would appear to be common among new brides brought to the west. In an article for *Longman's Magazine* in 1896, an Englishman identified only by the initials J. R. E. S. outlined the 'shock' many women felt on first sight of their husband's homesteads: '[i]t is to be hoped that her modest castle in the air will not tumble about her ears when she finally arrives, after her long and dusty journey, and first catches sight of her new home ... The bare and desolate appearance of everything is almost sure to give her English ideas a painful shock, accompanied, if she be of a susceptible nature, by a reaction which may startle her in its intensity' (82). Although this article refers to the transition of an Englishwoman to a new

'Canadian' lifestyle, it could be argued that the transition from east to west could cause similarly strong reactions in new prairie wives. Indeed, on being left alone in the shack to find her feet whilst Duncan goes in search of work prospects, Chaddie is portrayed as being at first overwhelmed by the task at hand, before finding solace in God, and a determination to prove herself – to *earn* her husband's love and respect:

I sat at the table, littered with its dirty dishes, wondering where to begin. And then the endless vista of it all suddenly opened up before me. I became nervously conscious of the unbroken silence about me, and I realized how different this new life must be from the old. ... But I refused to give in. I did something which startled me a little, something which I had not done for years. I got down on my knees beside that plain wooden chair and prayed to God. I asked Him to give me strength to keep me from being a piker and make me a wife worthy of the man who loved me, and lead me into the way of bringing happiness to the home that was to be ours. Then I rolled up my sleeves, tied a face towel over my head and went to work. (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 29-30)

Although such rhetoric might seem far from empowering, the tasks being endured for her husband rather than for herself, the sense of determination and willingness to face such a stark change in lifestyle would doubtless have been admired by many readers (male and female) of the period. Stringer nevertheless pokes fun at his heroine in these early passages through the hurdles she faces when trying to adapt to this new standard of living, as is evidenced in her list of 'needs' that she writes for her husband: '[t]he second thing under the heading of "Needs" was "lamp," the fifth was "bedroom rug," the thirteenth was "hens," and the next was "cow." I think he was rather amazed at the length of that list of "needs," but he says I shall have everything in reason' (Ibid 34-5). Chaddie's listing of luxuries such as lamps and rugs above such essentials as hens and cows would doubtless have amused many western readers and also highlights how much her mindset at this point in the novel is still based on eastern ideals of comfort and civilisation.

Early on in *The Prairie Wife*, Duncan makes clear that the new life the two of them begin on the prairie will be a struggle, fraught with hardships and personal sacrifice: 'Lady Bird ... this is a pretty hard life I've trapped you into. It will *have* to be hard for a year or two, but we'll win out, in the end, and I guess it'll be worth the fight!' (Ibid 35). However, it is not until the following novel, *The Prairie Mother*, when Duncan takes a job working as ranch manager for his second cousin Lady Alicia (with whom he is romantically linked), leaving Chaddie to work the land and raise her children with the help of only a few hired hands, that

the true hardship of making a living on the prairie becomes clear. Overworked, exhausted both emotionally and physically, Chaddie breaks down in a pivotal scene midway through the novel:

I sat down and stared at that neatly folded pile of baby-clothes two feet high, a layer-cake of whites and faded blues and pinks. I stared at it, and began to gulp tragically, wallowing in a wave of self-pity ... That, I told myself, was all that life could be to me, just a round of washing and ironing and meal-getting and mending, fetch and carry, work and worry, from sun-up until sun-down, and many a time until midnight. (Stringer *Prairie Mother* 124)

Here, Stringer appears to be echoing the sense of female drudgery that both McClung emphasises in their novels, Chaddie asking ‘[a]nd what, I demanded of the frying-pan on its nail above the stove-shelf, was I getting out of it? What was it leading to? And what would it eventually bring me?’ (Ibid 124). Nevertheless, at the height of her depression, she is called to the nursery to care for one of her young children and, in line with the maternal rhetoric of the era, ‘Something melted and fell from the dripping eaves of my heart, and I felt that it was a sacred and God-given and joyous life, this life of being a mother’ (Ibid 126). In this scene Chaddie is saved from her spiralling depression by this reinforcement of her role as mother and (due to Duncan’s absence) provider for her children, finding the strength to push through her despair and carry on *for the sake of her children* if not for herself.

However, it is important to note as Karr does in his study that ‘[f]or Chaddie ... playing the role of a submissive, beauty-conscious, modern housewife is not enough. As a strong-willed, occasionally rebellious, and intellectual person, she needs more’ (147). Early in *The Prairie Wife* Chaddie begins to once again assert her “needs”: ‘I told Dinky-Dunk we must get books, good books, and spend the long winter evenings reading together, to keep from going to seed’ (71). Aside from the necessity for books and a Victrola (and eventually a piano) to play music, Chaddie also receives intellectual stimulation from new neighbours and hired hands. When they receive a new tenant at the neighbouring ranch, an refined Englishman keen to try his luck out West, Chaddie is quick to admit that ‘[h]e’s *effete* and old-worldish and probably useless, out here, but he stands for something I’ve been missing, and I’ll be greatly mistaken if Percival Benson and Chaddie McKail are not pretty good friends before the winter’s over!’ (Ibid 132). Chaddie’s prediction proves true, and the two become fast friends (much to the annoyance of a mildly jealous Duncan), though their relationship takes on a strangely maternal tone as Percy proves himself ill-suited to prairie living and without the adaptability that Chaddie prides herself on:

[h]e's probably a year or two older than I am, but I am quite motherly with him. And he is shockingly incompetent, as a homesteader, from the look of his shack. But he's a gentleman, almost too 'Gentle,' I sometimes feel, a Laodicean, mentally over-refined until it leaves him unable to cope with real life. He's one of those men made for being a 'spectator,' and not an actor, in life. And there's something so absurd about his being where he is that I feel sorry for him. (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 146-7)

In spite of his incompetence in the field of homesteading, Percy still offers the conversation and culture that Chaddie lacks in her new surroundings, something she sorely misses in the second novel when Percy has left to start a family of his own. Noting this absence, Stringer provides new stimulation for Chaddie (both intellectually and, rather more disconcertingly, romantically) through the arrival of new farm hand Peter Ketley. By the second novel, with Duncan working on another farm as manager, Chaddie becomes more actively involved in farming herself, and with Peter's presence she finds a way to balance both her economic and intellectual "needs": 'it's a relief to converse about something besides summer-fallowing and breaking and seed-wheat and tractor-oil and cows' teats. And it's a stroke of luck to capture a farm-hand who can freshen you up on foreign opera at the same time that he campaigns against the domestic weed!' (Stringer *Prairie Mother* 171)

The most fully-realised depiction of women's farm work in the series can be found in *The Prairie Wife* in the character of Olga Sarristo, a Finnish farmhand whom Duncan employs after her father and brother are killed in a fire further north. From her first sight of Olga, Chaddie is in awe of the Finn's physical stature, her Scandinavian beauty and her ability to work the fields as well as her male counterparts, '[b]ut I'll never get used to having a Norse Legend standing at my elbow, for Olga is the most wonderful creature I have ever clapped eyes on. I say that without doubt, and without exaggeration' (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 199). Chaddie continually describes Olga in mythic and heroic terms: '[s]he is, however, a strapping big woman, and I don't think I ever saw such shoulders! She is Olympian, Titanic! She makes me think of the Venus de Milo; there's such a largeness and calmness and smoothness of surface about her' (Ibid 200). Whilst Chaddie spends her diary entries fearing that Duncan's attentions may wander from her in the presence of such "Olympian" beauty, Duncan instead appears more focused on her economic value, referring to her as 'a find' who 'can drive a double-seeder as well as any man in the West' (Ibid 201).

The romance between Olga and Percy is portrayed in *The Prairie Wife* as beneficial for both parties; Percy helping to "soften" Olga's more primitive traits, whilst she provides a

‘re-barbarianizing influence’ (Ibid 233) on Percy. On first noticing Percy’s attraction to the “Titanic” Olga, Chaddie is unsurprised given Olga’s appearance, but sceptical given their seemingly incongruous interests:

I couldn’t help realizing, as I sat staring at Percy, at the thin, over-sensitive face, and the high-arched, over-refined nose, and the narrow, stooping, over-delicate shoulders, what a direct opposite he was to Olga, in every way. Instead of thin china and Pater in her hand at that very moment, I remembered she’d probably have a four-tined fork or a mud-stained fence stretcher. (Ibid 224-5)

Chaddie swiftly changes her opinions though, seeing such a pairing as the clear work of Mother Nature, ‘who was so plainly propelling him toward this revitalizing, revivifying, reanimalizing, redeeming type which his pale austerities of spirit could never quite neutralize’ (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 248). Percy is thus distanced from his Old World effeminacy through the combination of prairie living and a primitive Scandinavian woman. However, in order to be a suitable wife for Percy, Olga realises she needs to learn how to run a household from Chaddie so that she can care for her future husband and children: ‘[n]ow that Olga is working altogether inside with me she is losing quite a little of her sunburn. Her skin is softer and she has acquired a little more of the Leonardo di Vinci look ... I find her a better and better companion, not only because she talks more, but because she seems in some way to be climbing up to a newer level’ (Ibid 295). Olga is thus portrayed as “softening” both emotionally and physically, maintaining her close connection to the land but through Chaddie’s civilising influence she learns the skills needed *inside* the homestead that would allow her to “rise” from farmhand to fully-fledged prairie wife.

Stringer’s novel also offers great insight into the “domestic servant problem” that plagued the west during this period. Across the three novels, Chaddie relies heavily on the aid of hired women to help her fulfil her domestic duties, just as Duncan relies on the farmhands out in the fields. Due to the scarcity of “help” on offer, Chaddie is occasionally forced to employ “half-breed” or “Indian” women who are portrayed in a stereotypically negative light across the series. Chaddie’s first interaction with one of these women occurs early in *The Prairie Wife* when Duncan is forced to leave her alone to manage the ranch whilst he attends to his timber prospects further west and thus hires ‘a young half-breed about sixteen years old’ (Ibid 153) to help out around the house. The half-breed, who calls herself “Queenie MacKenzie” (a name used by a Broadway chorus-girl of the era), is portrayed as speaking minimal English and harbouring an unhealthy love of sugar. Right from the start Chaddie is

concerned: ‘I have my suspicions of Queenie. She has certain exploratory movements which convince me she is verminous. She sleeps in the annex, I’m happy to say’ (Ibid 153). Such suspicions prove true when Queenie only lasts a few days at her post, leaving when Chaddie demands she bathes, but not before depriving Chaddie of her prized mouth-organ (Ibid 155). Surprisingly given this experience, *The Prairie Mother* opens with the McKail homestead housing yet another Native Canadian servant, this time dubbed Iroquois Annie: ‘that sullen-eyed breed servant of ours, will never have any medals pinned on her pinny for neatness. I’d love to ship her, but heaven only knows where we’d find any one to take her place. And I simply *must* have help, during the next few months’ (Stringer *Prairie Mother* 13). Chaddie’s contempt for her servant is so stark it often makes uncomfortable reading for modern readers, Chaddie at various points in the novel threatening to ‘scalp her’ (Ibid 23) and even at one point claiming that ‘if she drives me too far [through her apathy], I’m going off at half-cock and blow that breed into mince-meat’ (Ibid 84-5). After her neglect leads to toddler Dinky being lost on the prairie for several hours, and Chaddie’s exclamations that, ‘if anything has happened to that child, *I’ll kill you!* Do you understand, I’ll kill you as surely as you’re standing in those shoes!’ (Ibid 134), Annie (understandably) flees the McKail homestead. Whether Stringer himself bought into these stereotypes of First Nations women or whether he was merely pandering to the tropes that were prevalent at the time remains unclear. Regardless, these servants are clearly portrayed in a negative light to emphasise the superior skills of women such as Struthers, the domestic servant Chaddie manages to appropriate from her husband’s “cousin” Lady Alicia, Chaddie’s rival for Duncan’s affections in the second novel.

On her first encounter with Lady Alicia’s maid Chaddie is quick to notice Struthers’ suitability for her position: ‘Struthers is a submerged and self-obliterating and patient-eyed woman of nearly forty, I should say, with a face that would be both intelligent and attractive, if it weren’t so subservient’ (Ibid 70). However, despite her concern over Struthers’ excessive subordination, Chaddie predicts that the freedoms of the west will soon work their influence upon the Englishwoman, privately recounting that ‘[i]n one year’s time, I’ll wager a plugged nickel against an English sovereign, she’ll not be sedately and patiently dining at second-table and murmuring “Yes, me Lady” in that meek and obedient manner’ (Ibid). Nevertheless, when Chaddie’s premonition comes true and Struthers appears at her doorstep seeking work, Stringer realistically portrays the sense of hesitation that a woman in this era would have felt when faced with such a dilemma. As Chaddie explains, ‘rustling maids, in a

land where they're as scarce as hen's teeth, is a much graver crime than rustling cattle. Yet if Lady Allie had taken my husband away from me, I didn't see why, in the name of poetic justice, I shouldn't appropriate her hand-maid' (Ibid 182). Thus, Stringer's heroine is given the higher moral ground due to Lady Allie's inappropriate relationship with Chaddie's husband, this woman's betrayal of the sacred bonds of marriage leaving Chaddie well within her rights to break the silent rule of female etiquette that would normally make "maid rustling" an egregious personal slight.

Similarly, Stringer's representation of Struthers herself allows him to poke fun at the tendency of domestic servants to seek employment out west in order to attain future husbands. However, by allowing such jibes to come from his female protagonist, any venom is removed from such comments, instead making them a source of gentle humour and banter: '[b]ut already, I notice, she is casting sidelong glances in the direction of poor Peter, to whom, this evening at supper, she deliberately and unquestionably donated the fairest and fluffiest quarter of the lemon pie' (Ibid 183). Nevertheless, despite Struthers' intention to catch a man – eventually setting her sights on farmhand Whinstane Sandy – it is Chaddie herself who finally makes a decision in *The Prairie Child* that makes their marriage not only inevitable but a *necessity*. After spending most of the third novel estranged from her husband and working the farm and raising the children with only her hired help for assistance, Chaddie is summoned to Calgary by Duncan who writes asking her to bring the children to a their new home. At first hesitant, the return of Peter (with whom she shared a brief flirtation in the previous novel) to the prairies make the decision for her. Nonetheless, Chaddie wishes to keep Casa Grande intact and sees that the only way for this to be achieved is through the marriage of Struthers and Sandy. Rather unromantically, Sandy accedes to Chaddie's proposition, conceding '[w]eel, I'll tak' the woman, rather than see her frettin' hersel' to death!' (Stringer *Prairie Child* 280), though he privately admits to Chaddie that he had hoped to one day return to his claim up in the Klondike. Thus, the marriage of Struthers and Sandy is based more on convenience and Struthers' desire to "settle down" than any great passion or romance; however, given the tumultuous relationship between Chaddie and her husband, maybe Stringer was suggesting there was more merit to the pragmatic unions that Chaddie's hired hands represent than the literature of the period was willing to concede.

Much of the *Prairie* trilogy's critical and commercial success upon its initial release was based on readers' testimonials to Stringer's skill in providing an accurate and compelling tale of marriage and the decision to move out west and start a family *from a female*

perspective. To modern readers, many of the more sensational aspects of the plot may appear implausible, but at the core, I would argue, these novels offer a thoughtful, revealing portrayal of marriage from a female perspective that is almost unparalleled in Canadian literature of this period. Through the use of the confessional diary format, Stringer was able to tap into feelings and emotions shared by many Canadian prairie women, and perhaps even some which these women may have been unwilling to admit openly. One element that makes these novels particularly unusual in the context of popular romances of the era, is their depiction of sexual desire and, more significantly, female enjoyment of such passion. Early into the first novel (before their marital difficulties commence), Chaddie relates her feelings of elation over the return of her husband to the homestead after a short absence:

[h]ow I hugged my husband! My husband - I love to write that word. And when I got him inside we had it all over again. He was just like a big overgrown boy. And he put the table between us, so he'd have a chance to talk. But even that didn't work. He smothered my laughing in kisses, and held me up close to him and said I was wonderful. Then we'd try to get down to earth again, and talk sensibly, and then there'd be another death-clinch. Dinky-Dunk says I'm worse than he is. 'Of course it's all up with a man,' he confessed, 'when he sees you coming for him with that Australian crawl-stroke of yours!' (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 33-4)

Such open acknowledgement of the physical as well as emotional losses one feels when a partner is absent were seldom discussed in novels of this era; so-called "death-clinches" no doubt took place upon a husband's return, but were rarely detailed with such humour or fondness as Stringer outlines here in Chaddie's diary entry. The motif of the "Australian crawl-stroke" that Chaddie supposedly employs to draw her husband's attentions is repeated throughout this first novel, evidenced again in a scene where Chaddie mocks her husband's advancing age: 'I've been telling him that the ladies won't love him any more ... He says I'll have to make up for the others. So I started for him with my Australian crawl-stroke. It took me an hour to get the taste of shaving soap out of my mouth. Dinky-Dunk says I'm so full of life that I *sparkle*. All I know is that I'm happy, supremely and ridiculously happy!' (Ibid 185). Such open discussion of physical passion and enjoyment of a husband's attention in such endearing and unashamed language is extremely rare for an era where many Canadian authors were still holding on to the Victorian literary models which kept such behaviour firmly behind closed doors and rarely articulated in print.

In his study of divorce in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, James Snell outlines how ‘[i]t was a woman’s special responsibility to sustain her marriage ... Her charge was the marital home, and she alone had the obligation to make it ... happy and comfortable’ (266). Whilst Duncan’s treatment of Chaddie and the children might leave modern readers mystified as to why Chaddie remains determined to stand by her husband, we must remember the stigma that divorce still held in this period and how hard it was to actually attain. Even at the end of series when Chaddie has accepted her fate and gained a divorce she still feels it as a great burden: ‘[t]hat’s just it ... I’ll have to face that future with a clouded name. I’ll be a divorced woman. Ugh! I always thought of divorced women as something you wouldn’t quite care to sit next to at table. I hate divorce’ (Stringer *Prairie Child* 377). This sentiment can also be seen in readers’ shocked responses to Stringer’s decision to set his heroine free to pursue a new relationship at the series’ close. One reviewer in the *Family Herald* found Chaddie ‘true blue’ for rejecting Peter’s attentions in the second novel, finding them ‘healthy, bracing, and undoubtedly true to type’ (*Family Herald* 1 December 1920). However, the same paper later found the concluding novel a ‘heartbreaking kind of book’ wishing Stringer had left his heroine as she had been at the end of *Prairie Mother*, where ‘she had won back her husband by sheer good-humoured faithfulness’ (*Family Herald* 19 July 1922, 23 July 1922). However, whilst this response might reflect the general consensus, there remained a few dissenting readers who wrote to Stringer to show their disdain for Duncan’s adultery, one woman writing Stringer (before the publication of *The Prairie Child*) to demand Duncan be killed and a sequel called ‘The Prairie Widow’ be published instead. As she outlined, ‘[h]aving been a widow myself ... I can assure you the possibilities are great’ (Jones to Stringer). Nevertheless, opinions like these were rare, most admiring Chaddie’s “true blue” traits in trying to keep her marriage and family together.

Much of the tension that develops between Chaddie and her husband is triggered by their downturn in economic fortunes at the start of the second novel. The first novel ends on a high note with the promise of new development and potential oil on their land. By the start of *Prairie Mother* these aspirations have proved untenable, their economic situation so dire that Duncan considers leasing their ranch Casa Grande to his “cousin” Lady Alicia and moving his family to the smaller, undeveloped Harris Ranch, which Duncan has put in Chaddie’s name to protect it from his debt collectors. Although initially shocked by such dire circumstances, Stringer’s heroine soon adapts and makes the best of the situation, seeing it as

a chance for them to get back to their simpler, less consumer-driven roots back when they were first striking out a living on the prairies:

I was just a rancher's wife then - and I can't help feeling that all along there was something in that simple life we didn't value enough. We were just rubes and hicks and clodhoppers and hay-tossers in those days, and we weren't staying awake nights worrying about land-speculations and water-fronts and trying to make ourselves millionaires when we might have been making ourselves more at peace with our own souls. (Ibid 41)

Chaddie is portrayed as seeing adversity as a chance to reorganise her family's priorities, disorder and corruption clearly being associated with Duncan's expansionist, consumer-driven impulses and "peace" being connected to a more essentialist lifestyle based around their former employment living off the land itself. This said, Chaddie does not remain blind to the fact that such a change will have an impact on her family's social standing: 'I don't like poverty. And I don't intend to like it. And I'm not such a hypocrite as to make a pretense of liking it. But I do intend to show my Dinky-Dunk that I'm something more than a household ornament, just as I intend to show myself that I can be something more than a breeder of children' (Ibid 52).

Determined to make the best of their new situation, Chaddie (much like the female protagonists of *Cattle*) takes a much more active role in the day to day running of the ranch throughout the second and third novels, comparing herself to former farmhand Olga, and finding her earlier disdain for Olga's "peasant" qualities ill-founded:

[y]et I've been sloughing off some of my old-time finicky ideas about child-raising and reverting to the peasant-type of conduct which I once so abhorred in my Finnish Olga. And I can't say that either I or my family seem to have suffered much in the process. I feel almost uncannily well and strong now, and am a wolf for work. If nothing else happened when our apple-cart went over, it at least broke the monotony of life. (Ibid 53)

Like many of the protagonists in this study, work provides Chaddie with a new sense of purpose and allows her to feel more "at home" on the prairies, the extra work leaving her no time to dwell on her family's economic misfortune. Despite this, Chaddie still holds on to some of her middle-class pretensions, aghast when Duncan suggests working as a hired man on another farm to help supplement their income:

'[b]ut never that way, Diddums!' I cried out in dismay, as I pictured my husband bunking with a sweaty-smelling plowing-gang of Swedes and Finns and hobo-ing about the prairie

with a thrashing outfit of the Great Unwashed. He'd get cooties, or rheumatism, or a sunstroke, or a knife between his ribs some fine night - and then where'd I be? I couldn't think of it. I couldn't think of Duncan Argyll McKail, the descendant of Scottish kings and second-cousin to a title, hiring out to some old skinflint of a farmer who'd have him up at four in the morning and keep him on the go until eight at night. (Ibid 56)

Thus, despite working alongside Swedes and Finns to help bring her farm to prosperity, and her close ties to Olga, Chaddie is still portrayed as seeing such work as below her – or more importantly – below her *husband* who she feels is suited to “nobler” pursuits.

It is here that the class-based and cultural complexities of the novels become most distinct, as only ten pages after the preceding statement, Chaddie relays a negative description of Lady Alicia, denouncing her for her refined sensibilities: ‘[s]he struck me, then, as distinctly an urban product, as one of those lazy and silk-lined and limousiny sort of women who could face an upholstery endurance-test without any apparent signs of heart-failure, but might be apt to fall down on engine-performance’ (Ibid 68). However, it’s important to note here that Chaddie’s disapproval is based more on Lady Allie’s status as an “urban product” in contrast to her rural surroundings than any specifically class-based signifiers. This is indicative of Chaddie’s own journey within the novel from eastern socialite to prairie wife as she slowly comes to base her own value system and sense of selfhood on the simpler, more rural sensibilities of the prairie ranching community. This transition can be seen in the following passage where she constantly refers to how she is not “a perfect lady” (perhaps an intentional jibe at Lady Alicia):

[a]nd neither my actions nor my language, I know, are those of a perfect lady. But anyone who'd lamped me in that get-up, covered with oil and dust and dirt, would know that never again could I be a perfect lady. I'm a wiper, a greaser, a clodhopper ... And the odd part of it all is that I'm wringing a perverse sort of enjoyment out of the excitement and the novelty of the thing. I'm being something more than a mere mollusk. I'm making my power felt, and producing results. (Ibid 116)

The final sentence of this passage is especially striking and empowering to hear from an all-but-deserted single mother attempting to make a living off the land. Chaddie’s transformation in the series from a woman whose world is built around her husband’s affection to one who can feel her own power and “produce results” draws attention once again to the rejuvenative qualities of women’s work in the popular literature of this period. As Karr comments in his study, ‘[s]uch revelling in mastering the male world of decision making was relatively rare in

the first quarter of the twentieth century. Generally, those women who found themselves in charge of a farm persevered but did not necessarily enjoy the experience' (Karr 148).

Rather surprisingly given the largely negative depiction of "Indian" domestic servants in the first two novels, *The Prairie Child* sees Stringer's heroine refer to her increasing affinity for the rural landscapes of the prairie as a sign that she is becoming "Indianized." As Chaddie explains to her estranged husband:

[b]eing Indianized ... seems to carry the inference of also being barbarized. But it isn't quite that, Dinky-Dunk, for there's something almost spiritually satisfying about this prairie life if you've only got the eyes to see it ... It impresses me as life on such a sane and gigantic scale that I want to be an actual part of it, that I positively ache to have a share in its immensities. It seems so fruitful and prodigal and generous and patient. It's so open-handed in the way it produces and gives and returns our love. And there's a completeness about it that makes me feel it can't possibly be wrong. (Ibid 46)

Stringer seems to suggest that as Chaddie becomes more and more connected to the land throughout the trilogy, her sympathies with the "Indian" outlook of the prairies increase. When faced with the bright lights of the city later in the novel, Chaddie can't help but find herself connecting more with a Cree squaw she spots on the street than with anyone else she encounters in her new bustling surroundings:

[y]esterday, on our main street where the electric-cars were clanging and the limousines were throwing their exhaust incense to the gods of the future, I caught sight of a lonely and motionless figure, isolated in the midst of a newer world. It was the figure of a Cree squaw, blanketed and many-wrinkled and unmistakably dirty, blinking at the devil-wagons and the ceaseless hurry of the white man. And being somewhat Indianized, as my husband once assured me I was, I could sympathize with that stolid old lady in the blanket. (Ibid 314)

Given the earlier representations of First Nations women in the series, it is perhaps telling in relation to both Chaddie's personal journey of self-discovery and Stringer's own disillusionment with the urban social scene in the 1920s, that by this final novel, the process of becoming "Indianized" becomes something to be celebrated and cherished rather than derided.

Finally this section will focus on the representation of motherhood itself as a form of employment for Chaddie. In the first novel, where the tone remain largely light and free from the romantic uncertainties of the latter novels, Chaddie refuses to accept that she has fallen

pregnant, and her fears and unwillingness to admit her condition are made humorous: ‘I believe Dinky-Dunk suspects something. He’s just asked me to be more careful about riding Paddy. And he’s been more solemnly kind, lately. But I’ll never tell him – never – never!’ (Stringer *Prairie Wife* 219). Of course, such fears are easily allayed once the child – named Duncan (or rather Dinky-Dunk) after his father – is born. Following Dinky-Dunk’s arrival, Chaddie is depicted as once again feeling strong and filled with purpose, the reality of motherhood offering her a new way to define herself and her place on the prairie: ‘I sat there, staring down at my boy, realizing that I was a mother. My boy – bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! It’s so hard to believe! And now I am one of the mystic chain, and no longer the idle link. I am a mother’ (Ibid 264). Foreshadowing Duncan’s later discontent with Chaddie, towards the close of this first novel Chaddie is quick to reassure her husband that ‘[y]ou are my True Love and my Kaikobad and my Man-God and my Soul-Mate! And no baby is ever going to come between me and you!’ (Ibid 268). Nevertheless, by the start of the second novel – which opens with the birth of twins Pee-Wee and Poppsy – it takes Duncan eight days to visit Chaddie and his new offspring in hospital (Stringer *Prairie Mother* 8), and when Duncan’s attentions begin to wander to Lady Alicia later in the same narrative, Chaddie unsurprisingly diverts all her energies toward her children and focuses on providing a safe home and income to support them. Such actions, however, mean that by the final novel, even Chaddie is willing to admit in her diary that ‘I suppose I *have* given most of my time and attention to my children. And it’s as perilous, I suppose, to give your heart to a man and then take it even partly away again as it is to give a trellis to a rose-bush and then expect it to stand alone’ (Stringer *Prairie Child* 14). Thus, when Duncan bemoans this lack of attention towards himself and the maintenance of their marital bond, his arguments are to some degree justified:

[t]he children! That’s just the root of the whole intolerable situation. This hasn’t been a home for the last three or four years; it’s been nothing but a nursery. And about all I’ve been is a retriever for a creche, a clod-hopper to tiptoe about the sacred circle and see to it there’s enough flannel to cover their backs and enough food to put into their stomachs. I’m an accident, of course, an intruder to be faced with fortitude and borne with patience. (Ibid 19)

His wife’s inability to balance her maternal and her marital duties is used by Duncan to justify his own extra-marital affairs. Nevertheless, Stringer’s narrative does not appear to endorse such behaviour – the narrative of course emphasising Chaddie’s dismay at such an outcome – and Chaddie is frequently portrayed as recognising this fault and justifying it as a

necessary sacrifice in order to raise her children to the best of her capabilities: 'I'm merely trying to say that a mother's love for her children has to be one of the strongest and holiest things in this hard old world of ours. And it seems only natural to me that a woman should consider her children first, and plan for them, and make sacrifices for them, and fight for them if she has to' (Stringer *Prairie Child* 22-3). This viewpoint mirrors much of the maternalist discourse of the era, though Chaddie's inability to satisfy her husband's needs alongside those of her children draws attention to a rarely-discussed side-effect of making motherhood such a prominent focus of women's lives. Stringer himself clearly seemed to see the importance of finding a balance between women's duties as mothers *and* wives.

In fact, Chaddie's intense focus on the well-being of her children in the third novel is in part explained by the death of one of the twins between the events of *The Prairie Mother* and *The Prairie Child*. The fact that Pee-Wee falls ill whilst she is away in New York with Duncan haunts Chaddie, who returns in time to watch her son die (Ibid 49-50). Such harrowing circumstances would doubtless have helped rationalise her increased focus on her remaining children in the final novel for many readers. Indeed, as Chaddie herself explains later in the novel:

there's a lot of nonsense talked about motherhood softening women. It may soften them in some ways, but there are many others in which it hardens them. It draws their power of love together into a fixed point, just as the lens of a burning-glass concentrates the vague warmth of the sun into one small and fiercely illuminated area. It is a form of selfishness I suppose, but it is a selfishness nature imposes upon us. And it is sanctified by the end it serves. At every turn, now, I find that I am thinking of my children. (Ibid 155-6)

In fact, it is when Duncan's use of corporal punishment on Dinkie causes him to run away, coupled with the revelation that her husband has been carrying on an affair with another woman for several years that finally causes Chaddie to give up on her marriage, settling for the stigma of becoming a divorced woman in order to protect her son: 'I could never willingly be parted from my Dinkie. I could think of nothing to pay me up for losing him. And he needed me as I needed him. For good or bad, we'd have to stick together. Mother and son, together in some way we'd have to sink or swim!' (Ibid 194). Stringer chooses to reward his heroine for making such a horrendous choice between her child and her husband by allowing her to end her final entry in the novel on a moment of hope through the potential consummation of the slow-burning romance between herself and former farmhand Peter Ketley. Whilst many readers were divided on the appropriateness of Chaddie's flirtation with

Peter in *The Prairie Mother*, it would be hard to begrudge Chaddie such romantic attentions after the events of the final novel: '[t]here are many ranchers, out in this country, who keep what they call a blizzard-line. It's a rope that stretches in winter from their house-door to their shed or their stable, a rope that keeps them from getting lost when a blizzard is raging. Peter, I know, has been my blizzard-line. And in some way, please God, he will yet lead me back to warmth' (Ibid 356). However, despite the positive influence Peter has held throughout the novels with regard to Chaddie and her children (to whom he acts as a surrogate uncle), many readers would perhaps still have been shocked to see Chaddie contemplating romance so soon after her divorce. Perhaps this is why Stringer chooses to emphasise how their potential union would be based as much on their shared concern for the children, as for their own selfish romantic desires:

'[i]t's not *me*, Peter, I must remember now. It's my bairns. I've two bairns to bring up.'

'I've got the three of you to bring up,' maintained Peter. And that made us both sit silent for another moment or two.

'It's not that simple,' I finally said, though Peter smiled guardedly at my ghost of a smile. (Ibid 378)

Arthur Stringer's *Prairie* trilogy would thus appear to offer one of the most sustained, and forceful depiction of the emancipatory possibilities of women's work in this era. Opening the series as a woman whose whole world revolves around pleasing and supporting her husband, by the close of the trilogy Chaddie has proven her ability to run a farm independently (though still with farmhands) and raise her children respectably, free from the corrupt, capitalist influences her husband Duncan is ultimately revealed to symbolise. Her work not only provides her with the economic independence to divorce her wayward husband without fear of hardship, but is also seen to connect her more closely with her new homeland and her fellow labourers. By resisting the pull of narrative closure and leaving the romantic fate of his heroine unresolved at the series' close, Stringer is also able to reinforce Chaddie's decision to place her maternal duties and the needs of her children before her own romantic desires. Although this could be read as a form of self-effacement or self-sacrifice, it is important to remember that in this era such a decision would still have been seen as laudable, and that many women would have seen Chaddie's steadfast devotion to her children's upbringing as more rewarding than any future prairie romance could ever hope to be.

In the cultural construction of images of the American West in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the figure of the single female homesteader stands out as a rare example of female autonomy and independence amidst the male-dominated rhetoric of expansionism and conquest. Across the border in Canada, such opportunities for solo female homesteading remained almost entirely fictional, open only to those women with the necessary wealth to purchase their own land outright, a luxury few single women held in this era. Even in the literature of the early twentieth century there remain very few examples of women voluntarily choosing to run a homestead without the support of a family or husband. Indeed, in the novels under discussion in this section, only the “man-woman” Angela Loring actively chooses to farm her land alone – an endeavour that is proven to remain largely unproductive until she receives aid and additional labour from a fellow single woman seeking shelter and support after falling on hard times. Although these women are proved capable of farming the land together and raising a healthy crop, there nevertheless remains a concern in the text that successful homesteading can only be achieved through the continued cooperation and hard labour epitomised in the more traditional union of husband and wife. Consequently, when rancher’s wife Chaddie McKail is abandoned by her husband and left to support her family’s farm and raise three children on her own in the *Prairie* trilogy, such a daunting task is only made possible through her ability to hire farmhands and domestic servants. Clearly the double-burden of breadwinner and mother remained largely incompatible with the realities of early twentieth century Canada, especially when it came to these women’s representation in the fiction of this period.

In all of the novels under examination in this chapter, the novels’ heroines are ultimately revealed to settle down and marry, substituting their labours on the family farm or in their childhood home for their new roles as farm wives and mothers. However, as critics we must be careful not to see marriage as a form of ‘defeat.’ Such a reading is too simplistic and, as Natalie Dykstra argues, it implies that ‘independence was possible for women *only* outside of marriage’ (214). Indeed, in the majority of the texts under discussion in this section, the authors endeavour to illustrate to their readers how proficient these young women (Pearl, Martha, and Nettie) *already are* at the labours considered essential in a good farm wife, and how these skills make them more valuable to the male romantic leads of the novels than those women who would have been considered more traditionally attractive brides in popular romance novels. As Warne outlines, ‘country life had a special value for women, in that [t]here they are valued for their labour and not merely their sexual attractiveness’

(*Literature* 172). Indeed, the main trajectory of Stringer's admirable middle-class heroine, Chaddie, is from a position of ignorance about prairie living (nevertheless fuelled with an earnest desire to please her husband), to her newfound sense of purpose and solidarity with her fellow prairie neighbours, which leads her to take great pride in her new status as 'a wiper, a greaser, a clodhopper.' Thus, for all these female characters marriage (even an unsuccessful one like Chaddie's) acts as a proving ground which allows these admirable women a chance to achieve their narrative destinies as wives and mothers, but only if they are shown to exhibit the attributes of hard work and moral uprightness essential to successful homesteading and childrearing 'out West.'

The Professionalisation of Women's Work

In the June 1912 edition of *The Canadian Magazine*, the achievements of Mabel French, a 'woman lawyer,' were profiled by J. Sedgwick Cowper to illustrate her importance in 'forc[ing] open to women the doors of the legal profession in two provinces' (141). During the interview, French comments that

pioneer work is not confined to the wilds; ... the overcoming of physical obstacles is not the hardest task for men or women ... True, an avalanche of rock and snow and giant trees torn out by their roots is a nasty thing to face and fear. But is it harder to overcome or more to be dreaded than an avalanche of prejudice? (142)

At the turn of the twentieth century, women were slowly gaining a real presence in the Canadian workplace. However, as Wayne Roberts emphasises, despite the improvement in pay and working conditions that the 'professions' offered, 'women professionals were systematically shunted into specialised job ghettos which reaffirmed their subordination rather than autonomy in the world of work' ('Rocking' 33). This form of *dependent* professionalism could be seen in the gender segregation that took place: female professionals were usually nurses, teachers, secretaries or stenographers; male professionals were (stereotypically) doctors, lawyers and office managers.

Some women did manage to achieve positions in the 'higher' professions as doctors and lawyers (as Mabel French proves), but these women still faced many 'physical obstacles' and much prejudice from their male counterparts and society at large. Given the cultural pressure upon women to stay in more appropriately 'feminine' professions such as nursing and teaching, it is unsurprising that such roles were focused upon in the literature of the period, female protagonists rarely being depicted as 'lady-doctors' or managers. It has been suggested by historians that even when women did achieve places in the top professions (such as medicine) it was only by reinforcing their superiority and distance from their subordinates (the nurses). For example, Ehrenreich and English outline in their history of women healers that 'professionalism is – by definition – elitist and exclusive, sexist, racist and classist' (61). This chapter will interrogate this claim, investigating whether it is reinforced in the literature of the period or whether the representation of female professionalism was in fact more complex, perhaps even offering the potential for female agency or subversion of this assumed patriarchal authority. This section will thus explore whether a sense of female community and companionship in the workplace *was* in fact lost in

order to gain access to an almost exclusively male monopoly, or whether the female co-worker bond remained a vital component in the literary representation of women's work.

Returning to French's comment, the role of these women as 'pioneers' should not be overlooked, especially with regard to the representation of working women in the fiction of the period. In her study *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type*, Elizabeth Thompson makes a convincing case for the presence of the 'pioneer woman' as a prevalent, though evolving, figure in Canadian literature from the early nineteenth century to the present. Critic Virginia Rouslin has referred to nineteenth-century Canada as 'a new land which ha[d] not yet had the time to make social proscriptions as to who should do what' (328). This, she explains, is why women were able to take more active and physical roles in the early settlement project, working the farm alongside their positions as homemakers and mothers without being seen to compromise their propriety or their femininity. It is from this social environment that, Thompson argues, the character type of the 'pioneer woman' arose as 'a self-assured, confident woman, one who adapts cheerfully to adverse circumstances, one who is capable and active in an emergency, one who plays a vital role in pioneering' (4). However, by the start of the twentieth century, the physical 'frontier' no longer existed as more and more of Canada became populated and civilised, leaving the pioneer woman in need of new 'frontiers' to overcome. As Thompson outlines:

[t]he portrayal of feminists as pioneers was ... a logical step in the evolution of the perception of the pioneer woman as a feminine ideal. When the physical frontiers had been conquered, Canadian women were obliged to look elsewhere for proof of their competence or, as the case may be, their superiority. (62)

She argues that instead of tackling physical hardships female characters could show their 'pioneering' qualities through the struggle to improve social frontiers and gain access to new professions and rights. For Thompson, the 'pioneer woman' at the turn of the century was consequently 'both a "new woman" in the feminist sense of the word, and a "New World" woman, meaning ... a new type of pioneer, a woman who inhabits a far different frontier environment from that confronted by her mother, perhaps, but still recognisable as a frontier' (74). These figures of the 'pioneer woman' and the 'New World woman' will be referred to throughout this chapter when discussing the fictional representations of working women and their movement into 'professional' occupations. However, it is important to remember that these figures were not fixed or static. The *fin de siècle* was a historical moment of continual

upheaval in women's roles and societal expectations, and we must therefore explore how authors both responded to, and also helped construct, develop and even interrogate these figures.

This chapter will focus on the representation of working women in three professions of the period: nursing, teaching, and clerical work. It will examine the extent to which these representations were influenced by historical realities and the ideology of the period which still placed the highest value on women's roles as homemakers, wives, and mothers, and investigate whether, on the other hand, the working woman could act as a subversive literary figure, allowing the author the freedom to tackle 'New World' issues such as urbanisation, the rise in 'white-collar' professions, and the growing feminist movement.

Nursing

In *The Girl of the New Day* (1919), an educational guide for young women preparing to enter the workforce, Ellen Knox opens her chapter 'The Joy of Nursing' by commenting that

[i]t is curious, but all the time I am writing I know that half of you at the least have a secret hankering after nursing. And it is no wonder. Nursing touches the mother instinct, which is alive in every true woman, from the oldest and ugliest spinster driving geese over the common, to the merriest-hearted school girl playing hockey in the field. (42)

Nursing was seen by many lower- and upper-middle-class women as the ideal vocation. It offered to women eager to escape the stigma of domestic service or the unpleasant conditions of the factories a job that provided not only good pay and professional training, but also an unprecedented level of respectability. As Knox suggests in the above passage, nursing was seen as the ultimate female occupation, a profession that allowed women to engage with their natural 'mother instinct' and apply it to serve the general population, as well as providing women with suitable training for their final destiny as mothers.

However, Canadian nursing at the turn of the twentieth century was still greatly influenced by the pressure of two conflicting (yet equally oppressive) ideological forces: the cult of Victorian femininity and the lure of professionalism and its attendant status. As Judi Coburn outlines, 'the bourgeois ideology of femininity, has sought to contain women's work outside the home within the duties of homemaking; and in the case of many occupations, particularly nursing, it has sought to prescribe a complementary set of acquiescent female attributes' (155). This emphasis on the femininity of the nursing trade often led to it being undervalued and treated as an expected mode of female service. Thus, by the late nineteenth century a strong movement for the 'professionalisation' of nursing had developed; increased training and higher entry qualifications were advocated in an attempt to improve the status of nurses and the work they carried out. The desire for nursing to be seen as profession had a long history, pioneering Victorian nurse Florence Nightingale herself even explaining in the 1850s that

[t]he professional motive is the desire and perpetual effort to do the thing as well as it can be done, which exists just as much in the Nurse as in the Astronomer in search of a new star, or in the Artist completing a picture ... I have seen this professional ambition in the nurse who could hardly read or write, but who aimed just as much at perfection in her care and dressings as the surgeon did in his operation. (qtd in Gibbon and Mathewson 110)

Nevertheless, Nightingale herself was a strong advocate of the cult of femininity that her era embraced, coming out in strong opposition to the more aggressive move towards professionalism at the end of the nineteenth century. Thus, while she appeared to be in favour of nurses' professional ambitions, this was only as long as they conducted themselves in an appropriately lady-like manner that still foregrounded their *female* attributes of submissiveness, deference, and propriety. In response to the move towards nurse registration (an attempt to emphasise the superiority of nurses with formal training), Nightingale famously stated that 'nurses cannot be registered or examined any more than mothers' (qtd in Coburn 156).

Two contrasting images of nurses, then, seem to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century. One is the Nightingale-inspired nurse, whose main qualities were her strength of moral character and deference to male authority. She was ideally suited to nursing due to her status *as a woman*, relying on her innate femininity and maternal instinct to care for and serve others selflessly. The other image is complicated by the lure that professionalism offered to nurses. Professionalisation promised status, greater acknowledgement and the appearance (if not the reality) of more autonomy. This led many Canadian nursing activists of the early twentieth century, such as Ethel Johns, to argue that nursing was a lifelong commitment. Johns deplored the tendency of women to see nursing as a prelude to marriage – the argument many had originally used to promote its appropriateness as a female vocation. In an editorial addressing the graduating class of Winnipeg General Hospital's Nursing School in the June 1907 issue of the *Nurses' Alumnae Journal*, Johns advised them instead to make a clear choice between marriage and their desire to become nurses: '[d]o not hope to conciliate both. They are quite incompatible. Like iron and whisky they are both most valuable – but you cannot take them in the same glass' (3). In reality, Canadian nurses were forced to give up their jobs upon marriage, only returning in the event of their husbands' deaths or the economic need to support dependents. Many nurses were therefore forced to choose between the lure of economic independence and occupational professionalism and their desire to conform to societal values by settling down and starting a family.

This chapter will explore the central conflicts of this debate over Canadian nursing at the turn of the century and how it was depicted and interrogated in the fiction of the period. The impact of the First World War on the portrayal of nurses will be considered in detail in a subsequent chapter on women and wartime work. To what extent did the image of the selfless, morally conscious and submissive nurse continue to prosper? Did she always view

work as merely a stop-gap until she was able to fulfil her ultimate destiny as a mother? Or did she begin to exhibit a desire for the agency and autonomy that the emerging professionalism movement so strongly fought for?

Canadian Nursing at the turn of the twentieth century

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Canadian nursing was undergoing a transition from what we now term 'Old-style' nurses to their 'New-Style' successors. In England, the Old-Style nurse has been immortalised in the alcoholic, unscrupulous character of Sarah Gamp in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4). The Canadian version of this figure shared many similarities with Dickens' Gamp; historian Wayne Roberts describes early nurses as 'husky women workers ... [who] scrubbed floors, washed dishes, kept fires and healed patients with equal skill' ('Rocking' 35). They were often working class women working for meagre pay in often wretched conditions. Many were illiterate and presumed alcoholics, leading certain doctors of the period to refer to local midwives as 'untrained, unkempt, gin-soaked harridans' (Buckley 136). In an attempt to shake such a negative image, the New-Style nurse was instead modelled on the Nightingale nurses of the late nineteenth century. She was usually of middle- or working class background but the emphasis of her training was on the importance of character and morality that essentially 'constituted an imposition of upper-class values on working-class women' (Coburn 138). As Coburn explains, '[t]he "ideal lady" transplanted from home to hospital was to show wifely obedience to the doctor, motherly self-devotion to the patient and a firm mistress/servant discipline to those below the rung of nurse' (139). In order to understand this obsession with moral character, we must remember the high risks to female propriety that nursing represented. The only other figure who had such intimate knowledge of strangers' bodies was the prostitute, an association nursing instructors worked hard to dispel through their emphasis on morality and the value of physical and social purity. The dangers of flirtation with one's patients were continually referred to, Knox addressing this issue herself in her chapter on 'The Joy of Nursing':

[b]ut hardest of all is the question of purity. You and your class-mates determined when you were set free on your own resources that 'things of night at your glance should take fright,' but what are you to do if your patient is idle, and whenever you are off your guard, flatters you or says low, common things, better left unsaid. Must you give offence? Can you be true? (51)

Nursing was thus characterised as a profession requiring great moral strength and self-discipline, which may have made it more acceptable in the eyes of parents of young women. In reality, though, the opportunity to move to the city and ‘husband hunt,’ whilst remaining in a structured and respectable environment, was likely a strong attraction to the young women themselves.

The rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth century had put greater pressure on provincial governments to provide better welfare services through hospitals and schools. This, coupled with scientific advances such as the use of antiseptic and aseptic techniques, increased the demands placed upon hospitals and their staff. New aseptic procedures relied heavily on the handiwork of nurses who had to continually clean and re-dress wounds to limit the possibility of infection. Nursing thus became even more labour intensive at the same time that nurses became invaluable to doctors’ ability to ensure a patient’s recovery. As Kathryn MacPherson has noted, ‘the regimes of antiseptics and sterilisation wrought by the germ theory and Lister’s surgical techniques may [also] have captured the public and medical imaginations precisely because they spoke to social preoccupations with purity and virtue’ (85). Therefore, even as nursing became increasingly associated with scientific methods and knowledge, it still retained strong ties to the rhetoric of female purity and moral character.

Although historically Canadian nurses of this period were largely from working- and middle-class backgrounds, and seeking social mobility through a respectable profession, it is interesting to note that many of the fictional nurses of this period are from upper- or upper-middle-class backgrounds. This does not seem to fit with the historical realities of the period as most upper class women who desired to work instead chose philanthropy or aimed for the highest of female professions, the lady-doctor. However, the image of Nightingale, an upper-class woman who socially ‘lowered herself’ to care for those less fortunate than herself, cannot be underestimated, especially with regard to its impact on the cultural imagination of the period. Returning to Thompson’s ‘pioneer woman’ character type, it is also important to remember that such a figure often required the ‘union of working-class daily existence with gentility’ (16), and upheld ‘the view that a lady could remain identifiable as a lady no matter where she might be and no matter what she might be doing’ (17). Thus, even though these female characters might be seen to carry out tasks that were ‘below’ their station in life, as long their superior moral and social status as ‘ladies’ was confirmed, their location and profession were secondary. In fact, the pioneer woman prided herself on her ability to be productive and ‘useful,’ and for authors wishing to instil such virtues in their readers

(especially more didactic writers such as Nellie McClung), the image of an upper class woman choosing to nurse was a powerful image.

On a similar note, in her study *Bedside Matters*, MacPherson explains that very few nurses in this period were from ethnic minorities as

[w]hite, native-born Canadian women were expected to bring their superior sense of sexual and social behaviour to the bedside, either to act appropriately while caring for their social 'equals' or 'superiors' in private care or to serve as role models for their social 'inferiors,' such as immigrants and non-Whites. (MacPherson 17)

Thus, although there *were* in fact a small number of nurses from ethnic minorities working in this period, there were very few examples of these figures in the fiction of the time because the dominant cultural discourse remained focused upon the white, Anglo-Saxon nurse. Finally, whilst it cannot be ignored that there were three main forms of nursing dominant at the turn of the twentieth century – institutional nursing (mainly hospitals and asylums), private-duty (nursing in the patient's own home), and public-health nursing (providing local welfare services such as baby clinics, immunisation, etc.) – the fiction I have uncovered has again limited my scope, leading this chapter to focus mainly on hospital and private-duty nursing.

Untrained (natural) nursing and the obligation to care

As previously mentioned, nursing has customarily been seen as a feminine skill, the image of the female healer remaining a widely circulated stereotype. However, with the growth of the medical profession in the eighteenth century, the act of healing itself – diagnosing and prescribing (curing) – became the domain of male doctors, whilst it became the task of female nurses to provide the necessary preparation and attentions (caring) before and after the doctor's work was done. Female lay practitioners continued to practice but were largely discredited and mainly served the working classes, visiting their homes to administer treatment. However, women's role as nurses was never contested, nursing being seen as an innate domestic skill that most women possessed. A literary representation of women's latent nursing abilities can be found in Nellie McClung's *Sowing Seeds in Danny*. Towards the end of the novel, McClung's protagonist, twelve year old Pearlle Watson, helps nurse ailing Englishman Arthur Wemyss when she suspects he is suffering from appendicitis. Refusing to

leave him alone, she recalls her previous experience when her father was ill and attempts to ease Arthur's pain while she awaits the arrival of Doctor Clay:

[s]he remembered that her mother had done that when her father was sick, and that it had eased his pain. She drew a pail of fresh water from the well, and brought a basinful to him, and bathed his burning face and hands. Arthur received her attentions gratefully. (McClung *Sowing* 252-3)

Here, Pearlie exhibits all the stereotypical traits associated with the nurse of the period: selfless devotion and a maternal instinct to care for others. This leads us to question whether nursing ability is being portrayed by McClung as an innate skill (she's only twelve after all), or something that can be culturally conditioned (she has seen her mother carry out the same tasks beforehand).

This instinct to care extends not only to the patient, but also to the doctor. The nurse's primary role was still to defer to and support the doctor whenever required, and in the case of *Sowing Seeds* this support even extends to emotional reinforcement and motivation. Dr. Clay arrives at the farm distraught over the death of one of his patients, for which he feels he is to blame: 'I can't do it ... He'll die under my knife, I can't kill two men in one night. O God, be merciful to a poor, blundering, miserable wretch!' (Ibid 269). Pearlie is so shocked by his behaviour, and fearful that Arthur will die without immediate attention, that she turns to God to give the doctor the strength he requires:

'[o] God, dear God,' she prayed, beating her hard little brown hands together, 'don't go back on us, dear God. Put the gimp into Doc again; he's not scared to do it, Lord, he's just lost his grip for a minute; he's not scared Lord; it looks like it, but he isn't. You can bank on Doc, Lord, he's not scared. Bear with him, dear Lord, just a minute – just a minute – he'll do it, and he'll do it right, Amen.' (Ibid 269-70)

By having her heroine resort to prayer to show her complete faith in both God and the doctor's abilities to heal, McClung recreates the traditional image of the pious, submissive nurse that reformers such as Nightingale were so keen to propagate.

However, McClung is keen to ensure that the value of the nurse's role as a literal and emotional aide to the doctor is not overlooked. Dr. Clay successfully completes the operation with Pearlie at his side providing instruments, light, and water, making the nurse's role in helping to ensure a patient's survival clear:

‘[y]ou have saved his life, Pearl,’ the doctor said two hours later. Arthur lay sleeping easily, the flush gone from his face, and his breath coming regularly.

The doctor put his hand gently on her tumbled little brown head.

‘You saved him from death, Pearl, and me from something worse.’ (Ibid 271)

Thus in her role as nurse, Pearlie has cared for and provided essential emotional and physical support for both the doctor *and* the patient. However, Pearlie acts as McClung’s example of how women *should* act and is thus more a figure upon which the author can project her ideal female traits than one designed to inspire cultural debate. This idea that women were expected to act as nurses is central to the work of Susan Reverby, a historian who argues that ‘nursing is a form of labour shaped by the obligation to care’ (1). This ‘obligation’ is further reinforced in an institutional setting where women are providing nursing care for a wage, but also complicated by this very fact. Whilst Pearlie’s actions are motivated by her apparent selflessness and piety (she ends the novel receiving a financial reward, but the reader is expected to know she did not anticipate or require it to carry out her duty), professional nurses’ motives often lacked such clarity and innocence. As Reverby explains:

[a]t first nursing was grounded in the expectation that caring was part of a woman’s duty to her family or community. As some nursing moved out of the realm of unpaid family labour into the marketplace, the assumption that it would still be work of love, not money, remained. (2)

Even when women became professional nurses they were nevertheless faced with a higher level of expectation regarding their dedication to service and care than women in the other female vocations. Nurses were responsible for a breathing human subject, complicating their relationship to their labour and increasing their sense of personal responsibility.

In *Bedside Matters* MacPherson states that ‘[u]nlike American popular fiction, which regularly presented a range of nursing images, Canadian writers tended to support the traditional nursing persona’ (170). This chapter will interrogate this claim, alongside other issues such as the nurse’s obligation to care, the influence of new science and technologies, the lure of marriage and the tension between the conflicting ideologies of professionalism and femininity, in order to determine how conservative the depiction of the nurse really was in Canadian fiction. Did the moral and social expectations of the period constrain and limit her agency despite her status as a fictional construct? Or was she still able to find ways to act subversively and expand her role beyond those expected by the popular cultural imagination?

Literary Nurses: subservient or subversive?

When outlining the merits of nursing to young women in search of work, Knox is keen to emphasise the pleasure of service and deference to their superiors as one of its biggest attractions:

[i]n the first place, the nurse is under orders, and her work for a year at any rate is largely mechanical. She rejoices in something of the healthy, old-fashioned experience of practical work, only in place of candle-making and spinning, she is bed-making, tidying and waiting on a patient. She experiences also something of the old-fashioned relief of being in subjection. All great decisions are taken out of her hands. (25)

For Knox, the lack of direct responsibility is a blessing, not a curse. Nurses were expected to go about their work in an almost ‘mechanical’ fashion, learning the value of following orders and the necessity of submissiveness to their (usually male) superiors – the physicians. By referencing the ‘old-fashioned relief of being in subjection’ Knox ties the vocation of nursing closely to the Victorian cult of femininity, a set code of behaviour and values that centred around women’s moral fibre, purity and knowledge of their place as secondary to that of men. Works such as Knox’s would thus seem to suggest that the Canadian nurse at the turn of the century was ‘socialised to believe that her rebellion violate[d] not only her “professionalism,” but her very femininity’ (Ehrenreich and English 61). This section will explore the representation of nursing in Jessie Kerr Lawson’s *Dr. Bruno’s Wife* (1893) and Grant Allen’s *Hilda Wade* (1899), asking whether literary nurses maintained this rhetoric of female subjection and submissiveness or whether the novel instead acted as a site of agency and subversion for nurses and, perhaps, for women in general.

Grant Allen (1848-1899), was born near Kingston, Ontario, spending his childhood in Canada. At the age of 13, he moved to the United States with his parents, studying for his degree at the University of Oxford, before teaching in Jamaica for several years, finally settling in England in 1876. He was a prolific novelist and journalist, his fiction covering a wide range of genres from crime and mystery to more science-based narratives. He is perhaps best known today for the controversial New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895). Although he never returned to Canada (much like Sara Jeannette Duncan), and is largely considered an English author by adoption, Allen still holds a place in Canadian literary history, even garnering a short biography in Klinck’s *Literary History of Canada* (2nd ed) (1976). Similarly, in a 1900 book review of an Allen memoir, one *Canadian Magazine*

reviewer commented that '[i]f Grant Allen was not a Canadian, in the strict sense, the associations of his family with this country, and his own birth here, entitle us to a special interest in his personality' ('Review of *Grant Allen*' 380).

Although less well known today than Allen, Jessie Kerr Lawson (1838-1917) was nevertheless an impressive woman, supporting her husband and ten children, most of who went on to post-secondary education, through her writing as a novelist and journalist. She was born in Edinburgh and raised in St. Monans, Fifeshire, before emigrating with her husband and (then four) children to Hamilton, Upper Canada in 1866, spending the later years of her life in Toronto. She was incredibly prolific, often submitting several items to the same journal or magazine issue under different pseudonyms (McMullen and Campbell *Aspiring* 287). Most of her fiction is out of print today, but still offers great insight into Canadian society and literary culture at the turn of the twentieth century.

The female protagonist of Jessie Kerr Lawson's *Dr. Bruno's Wife* is the young Natalie Wyngate, a woman of upper-class background whose mother squanders their family fortune on extravagances and questionable investment prospects. When poverty befalls the pair, Natalie's mother dies and, overcome by the reality of her situation, Natalie suffers a mental breakdown and is admitted to the local Toronto hospital. It is here that she is treated by Dr. Arbuckle and Miss Stobie (a head nurse), and during the course of her rehabilitation, the doctor predictably falls in love with his patient. However, much to the surprise of the reader – and especially of Arbuckle – Natalie refuses to marry him straight away, explaining that she would rather train to be a nurse first.

Early in the novel, as her family's fortunes begin to dwindle Natalie appeals to her mother to be allowed to work:

'[s]ilence, Natalie. Don't dare to mention such a thing in my hearing again. What! Colonel Wyngate's daughter teaching music — hired by those vulgar tradespeople to teach their brats — never! We will die first;' and Mrs. Wyngate stamped her foot at the idea.

'But, mamma, work is honourable. And I like music, and I should like to teach — and —.' (Lawson 18)

Natalie's mother sees such employment as a clear sign of their social decline and vehemently refuses. Nevertheless, even this early in the novel Lawson is opening readers' minds to the view of women's work as 'honourable' and worthwhile, foreshadowing Natalie's later desire to become a nurse. She first mentions this desire to Dr. Arbuckle during the course of her

rehabilitation when he takes her on a less-than-professional carriage ride to help improve her health. Natalie calmly explains how

I would have worked long ago if mamma had only allowed me. I know now it is sinful to be idle in a world where there is so much work to do, and to keep one's self aloof from the workers who keep the world going. I have thrown off the past, I wish to bury it for ever. I am young yet, and, please God to grant me health and strength, I will be no longer a worthless drone in the world's busy hive. I would like to become a nurse —. (Ibid 66)

This speech is striking for both its language and tone. Natalie appears to associate the 'worthless drone' with her rejected upper class background of privilege and idleness, and instead embraces the philosophy of 'usefulness' epitomised by Thompson's 'pioneer woman' character type by seeking to become a nurse.

Dr. Arbuckle, aware of Natalie's background and his own marital intentions, continually tries to dissuade her from such a path but ultimately fails. He tries his best to remain aloof and disapproving of her decision. However, 'the first day that Dr. Arbuckle saw her attired in the natty white cap and neat costume of the hospital staff he stood trying to look disapproval, with eyes that glistened with admiration' (Ibid 71). The sense of pride and professionalism evoked by the nurse in uniform is a common motif of literature of this period, as nursing was one of the few female professions that required such distinctive dress. Any man seeing a nurse in uniform was instantly aware of both her profession and its attendant value system. As Frager and Patrias summarise, '[n]urses' uniforms, reminiscent both of nun's habits and elite servants' uniforms, symbolised sexual neutrality and subordination' (62), both of which were extremely appealing traits to men of that time, especially in a potential wife.

It is important to note that it is the 'amiable and capable head-nurse' (Lawson 29) Miss Stobie who inspires Natalie to undertake her nurse's training:

Miss Stobie was to her [Natalie] an angel in human guise, an angel in the calmness of her strength, her wisdom, her unvarying gentleness, her womanly loving-kindness to herself in private. To outsiders, and sometimes to those under her, Miss Stobie seemed a cold, capable, thoroughly qualified nurse, quite equal to her responsible position, and not at all troubled with sentiment. But Natalie had seen her when the veil of official reserve was withdrawn, and the picture to her grateful eyes was that of a most lovable woman. (Ibid 64-5)

Lawson's narrator describes Miss Stobie as an ideal nurse: 'angelic' in her kindness yet also appropriately 'cold' and 'capable'. Miss Stobie holds a position of responsibility and must therefore appear reserved and yet competent, but as the narrator and Natalie are both aware, no nurse can truly be successful without also harbouring a great deal of 'womanly loving-kindness'. Miss Stobie also holds another role in the novel, acting as a form of chaperone for the doctor in his early scenes with Natalie when she is still recovering from her mental illness. As MacPherson explains, 'the doctor's sexual respectability depended on the presence of the nurse, who could not only bear witness to the doctor's sexual propriety but could symbolically neutralise the doctor's male sexuality much as the presence of a wife made a man sexually safe, or "taken"' (16). Miss Stobie acts as a neutralising – or even protective – force early in the novel, ensuring that appropriate levels of propriety are maintained and reinforced whilst Natalie is in such an emotionally vulnerable position. However, despite the narrator's great emphasis on Miss Stobie's abilities and skill, ideal nurses were 'also expected to internalise the values of industrial work discipline and female submissiveness, to be managed as well as to manage' (Ibid 93). It is this subservience and loyalty to Dr. Arbuckle that first drives a wedge between Natalie and Miss Stobie. This happens when Natalie and Arbuckle's engagement is broken off, and Miss Stobie, believing Natalie is to blame, berates her, claiming 'you have done a wrong and cruel thing ... he does not deserve to be treated so' (Lawson 156). The narrator goes on to describe Stobie's affection for the doctor as 'almost motherly' (Ibid 157), suggesting that despite the close bond between the two women fostered by their shared role as nurses, many nurses were still expected (and indeed, chose to be) loyal first and foremost to the physician, not their female co-workers.

Whilst Natalie's insistence on training to be a nurse for two years before agreeing to marry Arbuckle might seem remarkably empowering for the 1890s, it is only when her motives come to the attention of the reader that the underlying conservatism of her reasoning becomes apparent:

'[m]y education has been very shallow and superficial — what does it amount to? A little painting, a little music, a smattering of languages. How long would that last you, my master?' said she, rallying him out of his frown with charming vivacity. 'Why, you would get tired of me in a year or two, and I should soon be in the list of tolerated wives. No, Doctor, I can never be entirely equal with you except in one thing, but at least I can bring myself much nearer you in the experience of life I shall get in these wards.' (Ibid 71-2)

This passage engages with a variety of issues surrounding women's work and the influence of marriage on women's occupational aims. Natalie sees her previous upper-class education as insufficient 'training' for her intended role as Arbuckle's wife, needing the 'experience of life' that working on the wards will provide. Perhaps even more telling in this extract is the assumed deference to her future husband. She states that she can never equal him 'except in one thing' (presumably love), suggesting that she sees work not as a way to gain more autonomy, but rather as a way to gain the appropriate skills to better 'serve' him: she even refers to him as her 'master'. These ideas are developed in the following exchange later in the novel:

'I am only learning to live, Edward,' she urged, 'it is so blessed to feel one's self of some use. I am so happy that sometimes I dread lest it should suddenly come to an end. Don't ask me to go back to the dependent know-nothing, do-nothing existence. I couldn't bear it.'

'Natalie! could you not bear to be dependent on me?'

'Ah, yes ! yes ! I am dependent on you now, and it is life to me to be so. But, oh, Edward! I have grown greedy—I want the work and you too. I want my life to be full—full to the brim, and overflowing, as it is now. I love you too well to marry you yet.' (Ibid 84)

Once again the language of 'usefulness' is invoked, this time tempered by an admission of her dependency on Arbuckle. By admitting her submissiveness, any threat that her work might pose is defused. This said, the comment 'I want my life to be full' suggests a desire for more from one's life than to be defined by marriage and one's husband, suggesting that this is perhaps the only way Natalie could ever 'have it all': marriage and the independence of work and professional training. Thus, although her ultimate goal is highly conservative, Natalie's actions are also potentially subversive, Lawson appearing to suggest that it was possible for women to have both a career and a husband (even if not at the same time).

Whilst Natalie spends the majority of *Dr. Bruno's Wife* nursing in an institutional setting, near the novel's close Lawson allows her protagonist to convey her maternal instincts through her decision to nurse the son of primary antagonist, Mrs. Tranent, whom (at this point in the plot) Natalie believes Dr. Arbuckle has forsaken her for. When Freddie Tranent is diagnosed with scarlet fever, she asks permission to leave her post and care for him in the family home as Arbuckle and Mrs. Tranent are abroad in Scotland. She offers despite having never had the disease herself, thus putting herself at great risk, an action that allows the reader to perceive her self-sacrificing nature and also her innate maternalism – she cannot bear for Freddie to suffer alone. Fellow nurse Miss Stobie is horrified by her request – '[m]y

poor child! Would you really care to go to *that woman's* house and nurse her boy?' (174) – but consents when Natalie's determination becomes clear. Natalie carries out all the duties of a typical private duty nurse of the period, working night and day to alleviate the child's suffering, but in the end his disease is too advanced and all she can do is his ease his passing:

[t]he nurse's task was over, and her reward was with her. In striving to comfort the child she had assuaged her own grief, her own loneliness, and as with brimming eyes she laid her thin hand on the sunken eyelids, like a heavenly strain of music there floated through her mind the assurance of the children's Eternal Friend — 'For I say unto you, the angels do always behold the face of my Father in Heaven' (Ibid 178)

Through this passage Lawson conveys a sense of the mutual rewards of nursing shared by both nurse and patient. In providing both medical and emotional support to Freddie in his final hours, Natalie is also able to subdue her own grievances, highlighting the emotionally (if not physically) restorative quality of private duty nursing for both parties. Natalie, of course, succumbs to the disease herself but eventually recovers. This only reinforces to the reader the nobility of her personal sacrifice, and she receives her eventual reward when she is reunited with Arbuckle at the novel's close, leaving the hospital to marry him and start a family in Scotland.

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Tranent functions as a foil to the selflessness of Natalie's characterisation. She is revealed to be a poor mother – a cardinal sin in novels of the period – the narrator claiming that '[a]t five, having outgrown his nurse, his [Freddie's] mother tried her hand at managing him, and failed. Even she herself had to confess that as a mother she was certainly not a success' (Ibid 43). Given the representation early in the novel of her as a woman more concerned with herself than her children, it is perhaps unsurprising that she turns out to be the villain of the tale, breaking the bond between Natalie and Arbuckle and attempting to get him imprisoned in Scotland. When her plot fails and her treachery is revealed, she decides to return home, her only solace being a newfound desire to make her oft-neglected son the full focus of her attentions: '[a]h, well! from henceforth she would devote herself to the task of being an exemplary mother. Freddie would not need to complain any more that he was lonely' (Ibid 172). However, as Lawson's novel is set in a Toronto steeped in a Victorian morality that places the highest value on the traits of selflessness, maternalism and usefulness – none of which Mrs. Tranent is seen to exemplify – she is duly punished upon her return when she discovers her son has been dead for over two weeks. As the narrator emphasises, '[s]urely, surely, God had punished her, was the conviction that

came sharply home to her; and forgetting all but the child she had cared so little for till now, she gave way to an abandon of grief and remorse. Her repentance, her awakening affection, had come too late' (Ibid 173).

Whilst Grant Allen's *Hilda Wade* might on first glance appear a far less conservative depiction of nursing than *Dr. Bruno's Wife*, it can still be argued that the novel's final resolution leaves the heroine in a far less autonomous position than we, as modern readers, might hope for. The main premise of the novel is the protagonist Hilda's desire to be close to the noted doctor, Professor Sebastian, who works at St. Nathaniel's, a London hospital: '[i]t is my object in life to be near Sebastian—to watch him and observe him' (Allen *Wade* 27). Such a mission intrigues and concerns the novel's narrator, Dr. Hubert Cumberledge, who has great respect for Sebastian, but also great affection for Hilda. Hilda watches Sebastian in order to uncover the truth about her father, who she believes was wrongly accused of murdering a patient whilst undertaking a series of medical trials. Hilda believes her father was framed by Sebastian and, worried that such actions might occur again in the name of scientific advancement, she also 'watches' Sebastian to ensure the safety of his patients. Hilda's presence therefore subtly undermines Sebastian's authority and her own supposed submissiveness to him: '[s]he spoke to me just now, and I thought her tone unbecoming in a subordinate ... Like Korah and his crew, she takes too much upon her ... We must get rid of her, Cumberledge; we must get rid of her. She is a dangerous woman!' (Ibid 50). Hilda's 'dangerousness' thus stems from her lack of complete passivity and obedience. By refusing to remain silent, she breaks from the image of the nurse that was idealised by the feminine ideology of the period and expected by physicians.

In an article for *Canadian Nurse* (n.d.), one writer commented that the nurse 'owes to the attending physicians absolute silence regarding their professional demerits or blundering. No nurse who has not learned the lesson of implicit obedience to authority and practised it until it has become a habit of life, is fitted to command others' (qtd in Coburn 157). This practice of 'implicit obedience' was seen as essential in a good nurse, and early in her time at St. Nathaniel's, Hilda, who only *simulates* obedience, is acknowledged by Sebastian to be a worthwhile addition to their staff:

'[a] nurse with brains is such a valuable accessory—unless, of course, she takes to *thinking*. But Nurse Wade never *thinks*; she is a useful instrument—does what she's told, and carries out one's orders implicitly.'

‘She knows enough to know when she doesn’t know,’ I [Dr. Cumberledge] answered, ‘which is really the rarest kind of knowledge.’ (Allen *Wade* 31)

The skill of ‘knowing when she doesn’t know’ was common expectation on the part of physicians of the period. Nurses were expected to endure two to three years of rigorous training in order to retain a degree of scientific knowledge which they were rarely consulted on. They were instead expected to act as the ‘physician’s hand’ – a phrase recalled in Sebastian’s own reference to Hilda as a ‘useful instrument’.

This tendency to refer to nurses as objects is repeated later in the novel when Sebastian tries to convince Dr. Cumberledge that Hilda is a liability to the hospital: ‘[w]hen she’s clothed and in her right mind, she is a valuable accessory—sharp and trenchant like a clean, bright lancet; but when she allows one of these causeless hysterical fits to override her tone, she plays one false at once—like a lancet that slips, or grows dull and rusty’ (Ibid 52). The ‘hysterical fit’ referred to in this passage is revealed to be a ruse on Hilda’s part. By overplaying her femininity and thus her inclination towards hysteria, she is able to avoid a blood test that would have taken her life. Sebastian, realising her true identity, attempts to poison her, filling the needle’s tip with a dangerous bacteria. It is only through her observational skills and knowledge of medical equipment (she notices the needle is not the regular type used for blood samples) that she is able to respond quickly, feigning a hysterical fit and managing to retrieve the needle from the Professor through sleight of hand. Catherine Judd has argued that the nurse’s gaze held great significance at the turn of the century as ‘the authority of this controlling female gaze derived from an amalgamation of domestic and medical ideologies: by the mid-nineteenth century, domestic ideology firmly claimed not only an innate feminine moral authority, but also a uniquely feminine ability to discern, control, and manage environmental details’ (56). Furthermore, Judd argues that, ‘rather than being an usurpation of the male medical gaze, the policing eye of the nurse derive[d] its authority from sources separate from, and often in opposition to, male medical authority’ (Ibid 75). The concept of valuing the nurse’s unique perspective due to their increased contact with the patient was far from revolutionary, Nightingale herself championing the ‘facts the nurse alone can observe’ (68) in her *Notes on Nursing* (1860). Nevertheless, Hilda would seem to be a stark literary example of this trend, her powers of observation not only saving her own life, but also allowing her to help others.

Aside from her gift for observation, another skill which stands Hilda in good stead for her role as a nurse is ability to discern temperament. Throughout the novel this ability is portrayed as an inherently feminine trait – much like intuition – which even Sebastian begrudgingly admits has practical applications in medicine: ‘[s]he recognises *temperament* — the fixed form of character, and what it is likely to do—in a degree which I have never seen equalled elsewhere. To that extent, and within proper limits of supervision, I acknowledge her faculty as a valuable adjunct to a scientific practitioner’ (Allen *Wade* 4). This skill is used not only in her work as a nurse, but also on occasion to help solve mysteries and uncover the motives of other characters in the novel when required. When Hilda explains the ability to Cumberledge, she likens herself to a novelist. This comparison allows Allen to comment self-reflexively on the act of writing *Hilda Wade* itself, and perhaps make a claim for his own status as a ‘great novelist’:

[c]haracter determines action ... That is the secret of the great novelists. They put themselves behind and within their characters, and so make us feel that every act of their personages is not only natural but even—given the conditions—inevitable ... Now, I am not a great novelist; I cannot create and imagine characters and situations. But I have something of the novelist’s gift; I apply the same method to the real life of the people around me. I try to throw myself into the person of others, and to feel how their character will compel them to act in each set of circumstances to which they may expose themselves. (Ibid 41)

The passage also allows us insight into Hilda’s nursing abilities, the fact that she sees those around her almost as literary ‘characters’ perhaps suggesting the need for appropriate distance from one’s subject (or patient) in order to accurately perceive their intentions and possible actions.

However, it is with this question of ‘distance’ that the division between the characters of Hilda and Sebastian becomes most apparent. In the hospital environment that Allen creates for the reader, the doctors (with the exception of the narrator Cumberledge) are seen to rely too much on science, losing their emotional attachment to the patient in the process. Allen illustrates this dilemma in the case of ‘Number Fourteen’ (Ibid 9):

‘[a] successful operation, certainly!’ the great surgeon admitted, with just pride in the Master’s [Sebastian’s] commendation.

‘And the patient?’ Hilda asked, wavering.

‘Oh, the patient? The patient will die,’ Nielsen replied, in an unconcerned voice, wiping his spotless instruments.

‘That is not *my* idea of the medical art,’ I cried, shocked at his callousness. ‘An operation is only successful if—’

He regarded me with lofty scorn. ‘A certain percentage of losses,’ he interrupted, calmly, ‘is inevitable, of course, in all surgical operations. We are obliged to average it. How could I preserve my precision and accuracy of hand if I were always bothered by sentimental considerations of the patient’s safety?’

Hilda Wade looked up at me with a sympathetic glance. ‘We will pull her through yet,’ she murmured, in her soft voice, ‘if care and skill can do it,—*my* care and *your* skill. This is now *our* patient, Dr. Cumberledge.’ (Ibid 10)

Managing to balance humour and poignancy, Allen highlights the dangers of the quest for scientific improvement, the potential loss of human compassion, and indeed the element of *care* essential to a successful cure. Nevertheless, it is perhaps telling that Hilda herself chooses to associate Cumberledge with the requisite ‘skill’ to save the patient, whilst she takes responsibility for the ‘care’. Similarly, Hilda refuses to refer to the patient as ‘Number Fourteen’ – a further attempt by the doctors to dehumanise and distance themselves from the people under their care, using the patient’s first name and knowledge of her personal situation to motivate her to respond to their treatment:

Hilda held her face close. ‘Isabel,’ she whispered—and I recognised in her tone the vast moral difference between ‘Isabel’ and ‘Number Fourteen,’—‘Is-a-bel, you must take it. For Arthur’s sake, I say, you *must* take it.’

...

The girl’s face lighted up again. ‘Yes, Hilda, dear,’ she answered, in an unearthly voice, like one raised from the dead. ‘I will call you what you will. Angel of light, you have been so good to me.’

She opened her lips with an effort and slowly swallowed another spoonful. Then she fell back, exhausted. But her pulse improved within twenty minutes. I mentioned the matter, with enthusiasm, to Sebastian later. ‘It is very nice in its way,’ he answered; ‘but... it is not nursing.’

I thought to myself that that was just what it *was*; but I did not say so. (Ibid 11)

Once again, Cumberledge and Hilda are placed in opposition to the clinically detached Sebastian, both the patient and Cumberledge agreeing that Hilda’s nursing of Isabel (aided no doubt by her ability to read the patient’s character and discern her reasons for living) are close to ‘angelic’ and exemplary of *true* nursing. Therefore, despite her subversive methods – going against Sebastian’s orders; relying on her feminine ability to read temperament –

ultimately Allen's protagonist still recreates the idealised figure of the selfless, caring and morally conscious nurse of the Victorian era.

Elaine Showalter has commented that 'in the imaginative as well as the medical literature of the *fin de siècle*, the woman becomes the case study as well as the case, an object to be incisively opened, analysed, and reassembled' (128). Through his choice of Dr. Cumberledge as the narrator of *Hilda Wade*, it could be argued that Allen makes his heroine into a 'case study' herself, one that Cumberledge (and by extension the reader) must analyse in order to understand. This reading of the novel as a form of case study is reinforced by the way in which Hilda is introduced to the reader. Both 'Hilda Wade's gift was so unique, so extraordinary, that I must illustrate it, I think, before I attempt to describe it' (Allen *Wade* 3), and 'Hilda Wade herself I will not formally introduce to you: you will learn to know her as I proceed with my story' (Ibid 4), are phrases designed to intrigue the reader and encourage further investigation of a character whom from the start the narrator refuses to explain and classify. As well as acting as a device to draw the reader in, this method perhaps evokes the desire of the period – with the rise in scientific discoveries and Darwinism – for everything to be quantified and categorised, Allen perhaps suggesting that such a desire was often highly elusive and even counter-productive, especially in the case of a woman like Hilda Wade.

However, as readers we cannot help but question the reliability of the narrative of *Hilda Wade* given the narrator's romantic intentions towards the heroine. Cumberledge's desire to marry Hilda might lead readers to question the extent to which her behaviour has been idealised by him through his role as narrator in order to fit the accepted female mores of the time, thus allowing her appear as a suitable bride for a doctor. Notably, Hilda Wade is portrayed as a woman of independent wealth, with no economic need to work – especially in a predominantly middle and working-class profession:

[s]he is independent, quite; has a tidy little income of her own—six or seven hundred a year—and she could choose her own society. But she went in for this mission fad early; she didn't intend to marry, she said; so she would like to have some work to do in life. Girls suffer like that, nowadays. In her case, the malady took the form of nursing. (Ibid 5)

The speaker, Mrs. Mallet, a close friend to Hilda, seems to find Hilda's desire to work inconceivable, obviously not buying into the ideology of feminine usefulness that Hilda herself (and Natalie in *Doctor Bruno's Wife*) lives by: 'what life can be better than the service of one's kind?' (Ibid 47). The assertion that she 'didn't intend to marry,' of course shocks

Cumberledge (her would-be suitor) and when pressed for details, Mrs. Mallet explains that ‘Hilda will never marry. Never, that is to say, till she has attained some mysterious object she seems to have in view, about which she never speaks to anyone—not even to me’ (Ibid 5). Whilst the pursuit of this ‘mysterious object’ has thus led Hilda to nurse, it leaves open the question of whether she would have chosen the same calling had Sebastian not been a doctor. For all her innate nursing skill, is her professionalism merely a convenience? And how does this affect our judgement on her apparent selflessness when she is ultimately revealed to be nursing to further her own interests?

This determination to achieve her ‘purpose’ (Ibid 55) is something that Hilda retains throughout the novel, even when Cumberledge follows her to Rhodesia to proclaim his love for her. Whilst in Rhodesia, it is also important to note Allen’s emphasis on Hilda’s maternal instincts. After saving a local baby from a massacre by Matabele rebels (hired by Sebastian), she insists that ‘it is my place to take her’ (Ibid 72), later berating Cumberledge as they are chased by the horde for asking her to give him the child to carry: ‘[y]ou are a man ... and you ask a woman to save her life by abandoning a baby! Hubert, you shame me!’ (Ibid). Allen seemingly felt the same necessity as Lawson to contrive a situation that illustrated the maternal nature of the novel’s heroine, suggesting the high value expected to be placed on this trait by readers.

It is only after several more months of global travel and the final admission of her father’s innocence from Sebastian’s dying lips that Hilda eventually agrees to Cumberledge’s proposal. She finally admits to there being ‘[n]o impediment ... I have vindicated and cleared my father’s memory. And now, I can live. “Actual life comes next.” We have much to do, Hubert’ (Ibid 122). The phrase ‘actual life comes next,’ a quotation from Robert Browning, adds a note of ambiguity to the novel’s close. If taken literally, it would suggest that Hilda’s ‘actual life’ begins from this point, with her decision to marry Cumberledge and presumably leave her job at St. Nathaniel’s. This would therefore devalue the significance of her time and skill spent nursing and caring for her patients, as well as suggesting that however subversive Allen’s heroine may have appeared – using her innate *feminine* skills and her refusal to defer to her superiors to solve mysteries, save lives, and help others – her destiny is still ultimately highly conservative and traditional by the standards of Victorian fiction.

There would seem to be much truth in Ethel Johns' claim that a nurse could not hope to 'conciliate' profession and marriage at the turn of the twentieth century, a reality which the literature of the period seems to both reflect and endorse. Both Natalie Wyngate and Hilda Wade ultimately give up their jobs as nurses to marry and start families. However, during their time as nurses they both manage to subtly undermine the patriarchal hegemony that the hospitals seem to encapsulate: Natalie through her refusal to marry Arbuckle (who she herself admits is her 'superior') until she has trained; and Hilda through her surveillance of Sebastian and his tendency to place science above patient care, often to the potential peril of the patients themselves. However, by constantly emphasising Hilda's *feminine* skills and her focus on caring rather than curing, Allen can be seen to fall back on the female stereotypes of the period. Thus, whilst the image of the selfless, submissive nurse was still prevalent, I would argue these texts suggest such images were being increasingly problematised and questioned, even if they were still far from being fully overthrown.

Indeed, even McClung's Pearlie Watson, who would seem on first glance to be an ideal example of such a figure, begins to show signs of (limited) resistance. She tends to the patient for hours *before* the doctor arrives, denying herself sleep, and then is forced to take the dominant role in her relationship with the pathetic, almost feminised, Doctor Clay, forcing him out of his own weakness to face the realities of their situation and save Arthur. All three women can thus be seen to show signs of Thompson's 'pioneer woman,' responding with confidence and proficiency to adverse circumstances in order to save lives and improve their situations. All three are ultimately rewarded in the novels with marriage, and, in the case of Natalie and Hilda, leave their professions, but, as McClung's Pearlie seems to suggest, certain skills and maternal instincts can never be unlearnt, and especially in frontier environments like Manitoba (where *Sowing Seeds* is set), can still allow them to save lives as well as making them better wives and mothers.

Secretaries and Stenographers

During an interview for the *Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association* in 1916, a female bank employee reassured readers that '[w]hen the opportunity offers the most successful banking woman amongst us cheerfully retires to her own hearthstone, preferring the love of a husband and little children to thousands a year and a seat in the council of the mighty' (Gowdy 320). Here, the interviewed employee would seem to reinforce the cultural expectation that women's work outside the home was merely a stop-gap until they could settle down and focus on their true roles as wives and mothers. However, given that the audience of the journal would still have been predominantly male (the banking profession was one of the slowest to allow women entry to even its lowest ranks), we cannot underestimate the extent to which this opinion was deliberately selected to reassure those male readers who felt threatened by the increasing number of women in the Canadian workplace. Such a statement thus may not reflect the real opinions and lived realities of many Canadian working women at the turn of the twentieth century. This section will explore whether this opinion was reflected in the literature of the period, or whether the fiction instead offered women workers an alternative lifestyle based around economic independence and self-sufficiency rather than the necessity of returning to the 'hearthstone.' It will examine Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) and Bertrand Sinclair's *North of Fifty-Three* (1914) in order to see how the two novels differ in their representation of female secretarial labour. Although Allen's novel is set in London (as was *Hilda Wade*), it can be argued that Allen's novel still holds relevance in this debate and provides an intriguing contrast to Sinclair's novel by allowing for both a metropolitan and colonial comparison in the fictional treatment of the women's work throughout this era.

Special attention will be paid to the fictional figure of the 'Type-Writer Girl' who Christopher Keep argues was 'the acceptable face of the "New Woman."' Keep suggests that she represented a 'desire for a career and independence in such a way as not to endanger those traditional feminine sensibilities that held matrimony and maternity as a woman's highest purpose in life' (Keep). This perspective is shared by critics Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell who assert that 'the journey from secretarial reproductive labour to sexual reproductive labour is one that women were encouraged to take, one path by which the apparently "new" woman could go home again' ('Invisible' 8). The extent to which the Type-Writer Girl reflected the image of the New Woman that came to dominate the cultural imagination of the *fin de siècle* will therefore also be explored as will the apparent 'training'

or preparation that work in the office gave these women for their eventual labours in the home.

Many historians and sociologists have focused on the apparent ‘feminisation’ of the clerical sector at the turn of the twentieth century. However, as Graham Lowe makes clear in his study of the Canadian administrative revolution, ‘[s]trictly speaking, stenography and typing jobs were not feminised; almost from their inception they were defined as women’s work’ (*Women* 74). The clerical sector was one of the fastest growing female professions at the turn of the century, growing from 4,710 female clerical workers to 12,660 between 1891 and 1901, and from 33,723 to 90,577 between 1911 and 1921 (Ibid 49). Although this was a period of mass immigration to Canada which led to a boom in population size, the sheer increase in numbers over this period emphasises not only that more women were entering the workforce, but that they were actively seeking white-collar jobs as secretaries and stenographers rather than the more blue-collar jobs as factory worker or seamstresses. This was likely due to the fact that female clerical wages were relatively high by female worker standards in this period. Indeed, Lowe claims that by 1911, 85% of all stenography and typing jobs were occupied by women (Ibid 53). However, it is also important to remember that these women only earned 53% of average male clerical salaries in 1901; tellingly, female clerical workers were still only earning 58% of male salaries by 1971 (Ibid 146).

One of the reasons female clerical workers earned significantly lower wages than their male counterparts was because women were deliberately ghettoised into the lowest ranking jobs which fulfilled the most repetitive and mechanical tasks. Roles such as type-writer and stenographer were centred on the ability to continually copy and take dictation efficiently without necessarily understanding or engaging with the intellectual content of the work. Female clerical workers were also rarely offered opportunities for advancement. Due to the assumption that most women would only work for a few years before leaving their jobs to settle down and start a family, it was not deemed worthwhile to train women to carry out the more senior and better paid supervisory and managerial office roles. This suited employers who could count on a continual, cheap turnover of female employees who would require limited training and pay to carry out the least desirable office roles before leaving to marry. As Meta Zimmeck explains, ‘providing work suitable for surplus women was not the same thing as opening the door to all forms of work to all women – that is to say, equal opportunity’ (157).

This practice of limited advancement is illustrated in Bertrand Sinclair's *North of Fifty-Three* (1914), the narrator informing us that the heroine Hazel Weir's work

consisted largely of dictation from the shipping manager, letters relating to outgoing consignments of implements. She was rapid and efficient, and, having reached the zenith of salary paid for such work, she expected to continue in the same routine until she left Harrington & Bush for good. (Chapter 2)¹⁷

However, it is important to note that Hazel herself feels no sense of injustice in her lack of upward job mobility. She begins the novel engaged to real-estate agent Jack Barrow, intending to give up her stenography job and spend her days 'mak[ing] the home nest cozy' (Ibid Chapter 1). Here, Hazel would appear to be internalising the cultural expectations made explicit by the bank employee at the start of this section about women's 'proper' place being in the home. In her study into American office culture at the turn of the twentieth century, Strom claims that 'working in an office usually meant cleaner, safer, steadier work, and a middle-class environment appropriate for native-born status' (275). This would seem to suggest that despite the limited opportunities for advancement and low wages, secretarial work nevertheless provided a safe working environment and gave workers a certain status not available to them in blue-collar occupations.

One of the reasons the figure of the Type-Writer Girl became so prominent at the turn of the century was due to the general consensus that women's bodies were ideally suited to typewriting. As John Harrison argues in his 1888 typewriting manual, '[the typewriter] is especially adapted to feminine fingers. They seem to be made for type-writing. The type-writing involves no hard labour, and no more skill than playing the piano' (9). Typewriting was thus portrayed in popular culture as a natural follow-on to women's previous associations with nimble fingers bred by both piano training and, of course, their work at the sewing machine. Women – as the weaker sex – were also seen as more malleable and submissive than male clerks, contemporary critics arguing that 'young women are more contented with their lots as private secretaries, more cheerful, less restless, more to be depended [upon], more flexible than young men. [She is] more willing to do as asked, more teachable...than the young man' (*Pernin* 46-7). As previously mentioned, female clerical workers were usually given the more repetitive, mechanical roles in the office, similar to the "light manufacturing" roles women held in the factories:

¹⁷ I have been unable to locate a print version of this novel and have thus relied on the digitised text provided by Project Gutenberg. However, I have still referenced the chapter each quotation comes from in order to ease quotation relocation.

[t]he traditional association between women factory operatives and repetitive work also facilitated the identification of women with mechanised and routinized clerking. Dressed up with somewhere to go, the factory girl could be put to work doing assembly-line clerical work in the office. (Strom 174)

However, as this quotation suggests, there was a certain element of glamour and adventure – and, perhaps most significantly, professionalism – attached to the figure of the office working-girl that the more working-class factory girl appeared to lack. Thus, despite the often dull nature of their work, the figures of the secretary and the stenographer still became associated with images of adventure, glamour and independence: they were ‘dressed up with somewhere to go.’ Two conflicting images of the female clerical worker thus appear to emerge at the turn of the twentieth century: was she an independent and liberated young woman eager to explore her surroundings and her newly acquired freedom, or was she instead a depressed, intellectually-stunted drudge eager to escape the office through marriage? And which of these two figures was more prominent in the fiction? Or was she instead a hybrid figure: enjoying her independence but still merely biding time until she could begin her ‘proper’ work in the home?

In her study *Working Girls In The West*, McMaster claims that ‘[w]orking girls in literature tend to lack the traditional family and thus have to fend for themselves’ (82). This statement could be applied to both heroines in the novels under discussion in this section and attention will therefore be paid to the impact this lack of parental influence or chaperones has on the protagonists, especially how this affects their relations with men and their need to work to make a living. It is also important to remember that at the turn of the twentieth century the term ‘type-writer’ could be used to refer to both the machine and its operator, leading literary critics to focus upon the ‘collapse of the mechanical and the feminine’ (Thurschwell 155) in secretarial fiction. Price and Thurschwell argue that ‘typewriting was imagined as de-corporealising writing,’ yet this only led to it being re-corporealised in ‘the conspicuously sexualised, yet simultaneously automatised, body of the female typist’ (‘Invisible’ 9). This study will draw attention to this tension between the female body and the machine and explore the extent to which fictional female workers felt this apparent blurring of the organic and mechanic. It will also discuss how such concerns might have influenced the authors’ construction of selfhood and personal agency in the automated environment of the office.

Earning one's 'bread' and the inter-office romance

Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* (1897) (written under the pseudonym Olive Pratt Raynor) is often cited as one of the archetypal 'Type-Writer Girl' novels of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. The novel follows the adventures of young Juliet Appleton who is forced to make her own living in Victorian London following the death of her father. She begins working as a type-writer girl and, inevitably, ends up falling in love with her employer Mr. Blank whom she dubs her personal 'Romeo.' However, where Allen's novel strays from the traditional office-romance is with its ending: Juliet refusing to marry her Romeo once she hears he is engaged to another woman, and instead choosing to return to the employment market.

Christopher Keep has argued that '[m]idway between "girlish" innocence and "womanly" experience, the subject position signified by the Type-Writer Girl was not an end in itself, an ontological telos like marriage or motherhood; it was, rather, a moment of transition, a way of becoming as opposed to a mode of being' (Keep). One of the aims of this section will be to interrogate this claim to uncover whether the figure of the Type-Writer Girl was purely transitional or whether it could be situated as a viable destiny for fictional working-girls at the turn of the century. In her study, *The New Girl* Mitchell argues that at the *fin de siècle* a new genre of literature emerged that constructed 'girlhood' as a transitional period between the child who lived at home and the fully grown, and most significantly sexual, adult. Mitchell argues that

[a]s 'young person' unsexed the worker, so, in a somewhat different sense, did terms such as *college girl*, *working girl*, or *bachelor girl*. The 'young lady' at home is on the marriage market, but a 'girl' is not husband-hunting. The ascription of immaturity and transition gives her permission to behave in ways that might not be appropriate for a woman. (25)

By calling these young working women 'girls,' authors gave their heroines a freedom to be adventurous, take risks, and most importantly, earn their own living. However, this was only a transitional state, based upon the assumption that these 'girls' would ultimately settle down and start families, forsaking their jobs to re-enter the home and become adults. Nevertheless, Mitchell is keen to point out that such actions always have a 'corresponding cost. To think of the worker as a girl is to emphasise lack of maturity, lack of skill, need of supervision, emotional (rather than intellectual) labour. It encourages separate job categories, impassable barriers to advancement, deskilling, separate pay scales' (44). By giving this literary figure the title of 'Type-Writer *Girl*,' authors were thus giving their characters a newfound freedom

from traditional responsibilities and expectations, but only at the cost of their infantilisation and the reassurance that such activities were merely a phase and not their ultimate destinies.

Allen's novel opens rather abruptly with the admission 'I was twenty-two and without employment' (Allen *Type-Writer* 23). From its very beginning the novel thus makes it clear how necessary Juliet's work is to both her physical and economic survival in London. The struggle to find employment is made even more stark when Juliet explains to the reader that 'I did not then know that every girl in London can write shorthand, and typewriting as an accomplishment is as diffused as the piano ... However, a type-writer I was, and a type-writer I must remain' (Ibid 28). Indeed, there are several points in the novel when she struggles to pay her rent or even buy herself a meal. One of her main marketing tools to potential employers is the fact that she owns her own machine (a Barlock), so when she is forced to pawn it in order to pay her rent the extent of her poverty and the *need* to work become even more evident. As she announces early in the novel on acquisition of a new post, 'I could earn my own bread – butter doubtful. In the *Struggle for Life* I had obtained a footing' (32). Nevertheless, despite the perilous position Juliet holds, constantly on the verge of utter poverty, her humour and the active imagination which she regularly exhibits in her narrative prevent the story from reading like a social-realist novel of the mid-nineteenth century. It reads instead more as a 'mock-heroic journey towards employment' (Thurschwell 155).

The position that allows Juliet to earn her 'bread' is at a small law firm called Flor & Fingelman. She responds to a newspaper advertisement for a 'Shorthand and Type-writer (female)' (Allen *Type-Writer* 28). However, this position is notable less for the job itself – which she only lasts four days at before leaving – but more for the portrayal of the interviewing process:

'[h]ow many words a minute?' he asked after a long pause.

I stretched truth as far as its elasticity would permit. 'One ninety-seven,' I answered with an affectation of the precisest accuracy. To say 'two hundred' were commonplace.

...

The pulpy youth ran his eyes over me as if I were a horse for sale ... 'That's good enough,' he said slowly, with a side-glance at his fellow-clerks. I had a painful suspicion that the words were intended rather for them than for me, and that they bore reference more to my face and figure than to my real or imagined pace per minute. (Ibid 30)

Here, it appears that Juliet is concerned with the way in which her body (rather than her skills and ‘words per minute’) are being evaluated to determine her suitability for the job. A common concern of the period was the manner in which women’s bodies were being made ‘public’ through their desire to obtain work and how this left women open to the perils of the male gaze. This sense of being visually appraised, much as slaves once were, is continued in the chapter when she is brought to Mr. Fingelman, whom Juliet refers to as ‘Ahasuerus’: ‘[h]e perused me up and down with his small pig’s-eyes as if he were buying a horse, scrutinising my face, my figure, my hands, my feet. I felt like a Circassian in an Arab slave-market. I thought he would next proceed to examine my teeth. But he did not’ (Allen *Type-Writer* 31). As Victoria Olwell has argued, it would appear that ‘[s]he is constrained to feel that she is not alienating and selling labour – words per minute or hours per week – but that she is sinking bodily into the status of property’ (57). Allen appears to be making the impropriety of such encounters clear, emphasising the threat many Type-Writer Girls faced: being judged less on their ability and more on their physical appearance. Whilst such tactics were highly discriminatory, the real peril of such hiring practices stems more from the potential risk of sexual harassment which the female office worker faced. However, Juliet is portrayed as being keenly aware of such threats, leaving her post when she begins to fear her employer’s interest is moving beyond the merely professional: ‘[h]e had not yet ventured anything rude to me, but I scented prospective rudeness in the way he watched me come in and out – the way he beamed on me benignly, with his small pig’s-eyes’ (Allen *Type-Writer* 35).

The other reason Juliet leaves her post at Flor & Fingelman after only a few days is due to her sense of boredom. Much of the recent criticism on this text has focused on the increased mechanisation and commodification of female labour at the turn of the twentieth century. This concern is hinted at early in the novel when Juliet remarks ‘[s]o I continued to click, click, click, like the machine that I was...’ (Ibid). By referring to herself as a machine, Juliet draws attention to the lack of intellectual activity necessary for the largely mechanical action of typing – typists were notorious for often having no comprehension of the material they earned their living typing. Even once she is settled in her new post at Mr. Blank’s publishing house, she still describes her own labour in commodified terms, seeing herself as ‘furniture’: ‘[a] table was set for me in Romeo’s own room. I feared to invade that sanctum. “Am I to sit right here?” I asked. He smiled and answered, “Right there.” So I took my place under protest. Thenceforth, I was part of the furniture of his study’ (Ibid 85). However, Juliet

appears happy to lower herself to the status of furniture – even initially questioning her eligibility to take on such a role – when it is for someone she admires (her Romeo), suggesting a certain double standard at work within the text and perhaps even within the experience of female clerical workers themselves in this period.

It is important to note that it is not until half-way through Allen's novel that the 'love-interest' emerges. This allows Allen to have Juliet comment self-reflexively on her own narrative:

'[t]his story,' you say, 'is deficient in love-interest.'

My dear critic, has anybody more reason to regret that fact than its author? I have felt it all along. Yet reflect upon the circumstances. Ten thousand type-writer girls crowd London today, and 'tis precisely in this that their life is deficient – love-interest. (Ibid 73-4)

Juliet therefore seems to be suggesting that every type-writer girl is merely biding her time until she meets her own 'love-interest,' the man that will remove this deficiency from her life and make her truly fulfilled. It could also be seen as a reflection by Allen on how romance narratives affected readers' expectations of their own lives. Juliet is awaiting her own 'love-interest' because novels (such as the one she exists in) nearly always provide them. For Juliet, this process begins when she finds an advertisement for a 'Lady type-writer, with good knowledge of shorthand' (Ibid 74). Contrasting this with the previous application for a 'type-writer (female),' she explains to the reader that '[m]y theory is that a type-writer girl should call herself a type-writer girl; but that an advertiser should do her the courtesy to speak to speak of her as a Lady Type-writer, or something of the sort: certainly not as a (parenthetical) female' (Ibid 75). The gender politics at work here are especially intriguing, suggesting that working-girls saw the necessity of diminishing their status and respectability by referring to themselves simply as 'girls,' but holding those employers who did them the honour of calling them 'ladies' in higher esteem than those who did not. Perhaps due to their status as working women they felt themselves unworthy of the title of 'ladies'? Or perhaps, as Juliet discovers, referring to oneself as a 'girl' conveyed a sense of modesty and propriety that had great appeal to their (largely male) employers? Finally, it is important to note how Juliet's narration clearly differentiates the hiring tactics of Mr. Blank from those of Mr. Fingelman, emphasising how she 'was aware that he was unobtrusively observing my dress and appearance, not as Ahasuerus had done, like a cross between an Oriental monarch and a horse-dealer, but like a gentleman of keen insight, accustomed to take things in at a glance without disconcerting the object of his scrutiny' (76). Thus by treating her with a level of

respect in both his observations and his advertisement for a 'lady,' Mr. Blank is set up for the reader as both a good employer and also an appropriate potential suitor.

Given the romantic relationship that grows between Juliet and her employer, the trend of referring to personal secretaries (a role Juliet fulfils to a large degree when she takes up her new post *inside* her employer's private office) as 'office wives' becomes oddly appropriate – especially given that, unknown to her, he is already engaged to another woman. Thurschwell refers to this trend when she discusses how

the tricky disappearing act of the ideal secretary at the *fin de siècle* was two-fold: to feminise the office, making it seem more like the domestic space of the home – a place apart from the strains of work; and, simultaneously, to make herself look like an unmarking medium, a straightforward conduit for the words and thoughts of her employer, while in reality functioning to edit and improve those words and thoughts. (158)

This was one of the central tensions faced by secretaries in this period (and still, in part, today); the struggle to appear insignificant and passive whilst still playing an active role in 'editing' their employers' words so that they were fit for public consumption. The position of the private secretary or stenographer inside their employer's office was also significant as it left them even more vulnerable to sexual harassment (as Bertrand Sinclair's *North of Fifty-Three* highlights), or in the case of *The Type-Writer Girl* the opportunity to develop a employer/employee romance. However, it is important to note that even the novel's heroine is shown to be aware of the potential impropriety of their relationship and that it is only made possible due to her reduced status as a Type-Writer Girl:

[p]overty emancipates. It often occurred to me how different things would have been had my dear father lived and had I remained a young lady. In that case, I could have seen Romeo at intervals only, under shelter of a chaperon; as it was, no one hinted at the faintest impropriety in the fact that the type-writer girl was left alone with him half the day in the privacy of his study. (Allen *Type-Writer* 86)

Nevertheless, although their relationship is able to develop into an inappropriate employer/employee romance due to the 'improper' proximity they share for large portions of the working day, Allen's heroine is also keen to emphasise that it is this admiration for him that helps make her a better employee: 'I wrote rapidly and well – more rapidly, I think, than I had ever before done, and I knew why: he was a Romeo' (Ibid 77). Although her affection makes Juliet a better worker it is also important to remember that if such a romance had been

fulfilled (the narrative ending with their marriage instead of their separation), she would still have been forced to give up her role, transitioning from 'office wife' to actual wife and mother. This could be why critics such as Keep appear to rather cynically posit that novels such as Allen's

do not so much document or mirror the life of the woman typist as produce her as the site of erotic attraction for the men who might otherwise be threatened by this sudden invasion of the spheres of masculine privilege. Thus they exaggerate the financial and emotional independence of women in white-collar jobs, but only insofar as they simultaneously demonstrate women's lingering need for male attention; indeed, the former will be shown only to accelerate the desire for the latter. (Keep)

In his study of the Canadian clerical sector, Lowe discusses the ambiguous socio-economic status of clerical employees and how they often share both working and middle class characteristics:

[t]he erosion of the clerks' relative wage position, their growing unionisation and the factory-like conditions in many offices may signal their descent into the working class. But at the same time, one can point to the clerks' greater mobility prospects, lifestyle differences and generally more favourable working environment than blue-collar workers as indicative of middle classness. (141)

This wavering position between classes is mirrored in the character of Juliet who alternately claims access to her working class identity as a Type-Writer Girl and her middle-class upbringing as a 'lady.' Early in the novel Juliet abandons her place at Flor & Fingelman's to join an anarchist settlement for which she ultimately finds herself 'too individual, too anarchic for the anarchists!' (Ibid 58). She is initially denied access to the site due to her lady-like appearance:

[h]e looked me over, all surprised. 'We are a party of working men,' he objected, at last, 'anarchists, sempstresses, labourers. We do not desire or court the aid of the *bourgeois*.'

Now, I can endure most things, but not be called a *bourgeois*. I coloured a little, I suppose; at any rate, I answered, 'I am an *ouvrière* [worker] myself. I have nothing to do with the *bourgeois*. I have ridden down from London to link my fate with yours ...' (Allen *Type-Writer* 46)

Similarly, Mr. Blank initially refuses to offer her a job at the publishing house believing her to be 'too good for the place' (Ibid 77), and then, once assured of her economic imperative to

find work, tries to offer her a wage far above typical type-writer wages, which she steadfastly refuses to take. Nevertheless, once their romance reaches full bloom, and she is invited to a dinner to meet his mother, Juliet is equally keen to be seen as a ‘lady,’ not just a ‘type-writer girl’:

I was conscious that Romeo liked my dress and felt some mild surprise to see how well I looked in it. He had hitherto known me in my black office gown alone. I forgot my poverty and was once more a lady.

It suits me better. I blossom under it. (Ibid 106)

During the same episode she then goes on to explain that ‘[n]o woman is born to be merely a type-writer’ (Ibid 108). Thus, for all her working-class pretensions, Juliet ultimately appears eager to still be seen as a middle-class woman, entitled to the attentions a lady can expect. As Clarissa Suranyi aptly states, ‘[u]ltimately, she wants the best of both worlds: the “freedom” of poverty and the respectability of middle class status’ (13).

A similar class tension emerges through the characters of ‘Michaela’ (whose real name is later revealed to be Meta, Romeo’s fiancé) and Elsie, both of whom Juliet befriends during the course of the narrative. She meets Michaela whilst out in the country when the two of them are involved in a bicycle accident. Juliet is struck by Michaela’s ‘charming childishness’ (Allen *Type-Writer* 68), describing her to the reader as ‘a wisp of a figure, a fluff of amber hair, blue eyes like April’ (Ibid 61). The character of Elsie is revealed to be equally childlike and ineffectual, although given Elsie’s status as a type-writer girl in search of work she is even more strongly contrasted with Juliet. Unlike Juliet, Elsie is depicted as largely unintelligent and dull, capable of only the most mechanical stenographic roles:

I found she could type fairly well, though quite unintelligently, like a well-trained Chinaman; but she had no machine of her own, and no money to buy one, nor could she undertake work where dictation was necessary, though, given copy, she could reproduce each word with mechanical fidelity. (Ibid 93)

Juliet takes pity on Elsie, allowing the typist to use her Barlock whilst she is at work with Mr. Blank, but given her inability to engage with the copy she writes (and her lack of her own type-writer), Elsie is seen to have very few job prospects, destined to engage in the same mechanical tasks until she escapes through either marriage or death. The text draws parallels between Elsie and Michaela, Juliet narrating that ‘she was built on the same lines as Michaela ... but with this trifling difference – that Michaela was rich, while my new little friend had not

a cent to bless herself with. One was bound in Morocco, with gilt edges; the other, a cheap edition, in paper covers' (Ibid 94). These two women thus appear to illustrate the two class extremes that Juliet herself fluctuates between throughout the novel. However, whilst Juliet is clearly able to move between class positions to suit her end goals, these two women remain fixed in their class positions. Both are passive and uninteresting, but Michaela, due to her class status, is more likely to at least marry and do something (debatably) more productive with her life. As Thurschwell outlines, '[t]o Juliet's eyes, Michaela and Elsie contain the same (uninteresting) text of femininity – it is simply the packaging that differs. Together they embody a version of femininity as imitative, shallow, reliant upon outside pricing to set its value' (160-1). Therefore, unlike Juliet who is clearly an independent and 'interesting' literary figure in her own right, these other two women only gain value through a culturally prescribed 'pricing' that they do not even attempt to influence or control.

In the same article, Thurschwell argues that the ideal secretary 'supplements her boss's needs erotically and intellectually' (162), and this is precisely what Juliet begins to do in the novel when she discovers Mr. Blank has been writing poetry in secret. She discovers one of his poems amidst a pile of papers Elsie intends to copy, but which Elsie struggles with due to the complexity of language and line spacing. She recognises his handwriting and cannot resist revealing her knowledge of his literary aspirations outside of the office:

[h]aving once accepted the fact that I knew of his work, he consulted me time and again as to type and paper – sometimes also as to the choice of an epithet or a point of cadence when two equally-balanced alternatives divided his preference. Should it be *lurid* or *livid*? was *ruddy* or *russet* the better? This led us into talks not altogether official. Though always reticent, he began to treat me less as a type-writer and more as a woman. (Allen *Type-Writer* 98)

Thus, by becoming an intellectual confidante to her Romeo she becomes viewed less as his employee and more as a 'woman' in his eyes, but her role remains one of assistance and support for *his* endeavours. However, he eventually encourages Juliet herself to try her hand at 'a short story of the modern girl who earns her own living in London', and her reply allows for another self-reflexive comment: 'I fear ... I have no knack of pathos; even at difficult turns I am apt to see rather the humorous than the tragic side of things' (Ibid 99). Juliet's decision to begin writing towards the end of the novel has led critics such as Price to argue that

[i]n bequeathing her typewriter to her friend [Elsie] once she no longer needs it for her own use, Juliet dramatises the novel's formal strategy of delegating automatism from a major character to a minor one. The secretary who uses typewriting as a stepping-stone to writing in her own name displaces the typewriter girl who treats the reproduction of words of others as an end in itself. (131)

However, I would argue that although Juliet does begin writing (the novel she narrates is revealed to be another attempt for her to earn money) it is important to remember that her writing is still largely based around fictionalising her own experiences as a type-writer girl. She is still taking on a largely imitative function, copying down her own life and experience for an intended financial reward. Similarly, she ends the novel back in another office as a type-writer, Juliet ending her tale in a position only marginally better-off than Elsie.

The novel's ending – '[f]or I am still a type-writer girl – at another office' (Allen *Type-Writer* 139) – has received a variety of different critical responses. On a more positive note, critics have claimed that it is 'an ending truly liberated from the dictates of conventional romance' (Young 146), and that 'Juliet is ultimately a victor in the struggle for life, but despite being the fittest to survive (certainly in comparison with Michaela), because of her ethics she chooses not to be one of the women who carry on the race' (Suranyi 16). However, less hopeful critics have instead seen the novel as an example of the 'culturally-shared anxieties about the loss of modern women's ability to bear children because of the dangers of excessive education,' Allen's heroine ending the novel 'smart and sassy, but significantly single' (Price and Thurschwell 'Invisible' 9). Here, Price and Thurschwell appear to be relating Allen's novel back to his earlier piece 'Plain Words on the Woman Question' (1889) which claimed that '[b]oth in England and America, the women of the cultivated classes are becoming unfit to be wives and mothers. Their sexuality (which lies at the basis of everything) is enfeebled and destroyed' (Allen 'Plain' 457). However, I would argue that throughout the novel Allen appears especially keen to emphasise Juliet's potential domestic ability and suitability for motherhood: she worries about the dust at Flor & Fingelman's (Allen *Type-Writer* 35), criticises the anarchists' gardening skills (Ibid 53), and even tries to 'reform' their kitchen during her brief stay, which increases her 'vogue among the men of the Community' (Ibid 55). In fact, her decision to forsake her Romeo, who offers to break his engagement to Michaela, is largely based around her maternalistic desire to protect the young girl from heartbreak: '[y]ou shall not wrong that child! ... Much as I love you, Romeo, not

even for my sake will I allow you to wrong her. She is right and we are wrong; the years must count ... I will not allow you to wrong her' (Ibid 132).

I would thus argue that Allen's treatment of the Type-Writer Girl in the novel is far from one-dimensional. Whilst his decision to deprive his heroine of a man might seem a form of eugenic plot-manoeuvring, it is important to remember that the love-interest doesn't even enter the narrative until almost half-way through the novel, leading its early focus to remain solely on the adventures and perils of the city for those in search of employment. Allen obviously had great affection for the urban working-girl, even if he did enjoy poking fun at her; he even admitted in 'Plain Words' that whilst the 'self-supporting spinster' was 'a deplorable accident of the passing moment,' his contemporary society 'ought to remove all professional barriers, to break down the absurd jealousies and prejudices of men, to give her fair play, and if possible a little more than fair play, in the struggle for existence' (455). Thus, even if Juliet Appleton does ultimately dream of the 'St. George who will come to rescue [her],' her day-to-day struggle and the fact that she remains fully prepared to 'face the dragons' (Allen *Type-Writer* 26) that one must overcome in the life of a *fin de siècle* Type-Writer Girl, still make her a an enjoyable literary figure, as well as one ripe for continued critical debate.

The 'drone of the hive' and the lure of the Canadian wilderness

Bertrand Sinclair's novel *North of Fifty-Three* (1914) follows the journey of young Hazel Weir from her stenography job in the eastern city of Granville to her eventual settlement 'out West' in the Canadian wilderness and marriage to woodsman, Roarin' Bill Wagstaff. Unconventionally, the pair meet when Bill essentially kidnaps Hazel after she gets lost in the woods. He refuses to take her back to the nearby settlement but tells her she can come with him to his home further north. After a winter spent captive, she is released by him and, unsurprisingly, in her time as his 'captive' she falls in love with him and also develops great affection for the wilderness, ultimately turning her back on civilisation to raise a family with him and live off the land.

Bertrand Sinclair (1881-1972) was born in Scotland and moved with his family to Saskatchewan when he was only eight. However, at the age of fifteen he moved further south, spending seven seasons working as a cowboy in Montana. He returned to Canada in 1912, living briefly in Vancouver (where he wrote *North of Fifty-Three* (1914)) before finally

settling in Pender Harbour, B.C. Western Canada remained a central focus of his literature throughout his lifetime, as did his idealisation of the pioneering labourer who worked in harmony with the Canadian wilderness. Nevertheless, McMaster comments that ‘few of these works feature female characters as prominently as does *North of Fifty-Three*, and none of them sold so well’ (55). Indeed, the novel was so successful that it was even made into a silent film in 1917.

Sinclair’s work is studied here to offer a contrast with Allen’s novel. The heroine of *North of Fifty-Three* works as a stenographer at the tale’s opening, seeing her work merely as a form of necessary drudge-work to support her until she can marry her fiancé Jack Barrow, a real-estate agent. For this reason, there is very little of the sense of adventure and independence we associate with Juliet Appleton’s quest to earn her daily ‘bread’ and seek out her future ‘Romeo’ at this novel’s start. Sinclair’s narrative instead seems to focus on highlighting the negative, materialistic traits of urban office-work when compared to the (in his mind at least) far ‘nobler’ roles men and women held in the less hospitable environments of the West: hunting, prospecting, and generally providing a safe home environment in which to raise their children. Given that *North of Fifty-Three* has a distinctly Canadian setting, this section will also explore the impact that this has on the depiction of what was deemed ‘appropriate’ women’s work, and the extent to which the text was influenced by the ‘pioneer’ tropes of the period which still idealised the Canadian wilderness as a response to the rapid industrialisation of the early twentieth century. To what extent did the figure of the urban working-girl become demonised in order to romanticise the traditional figure of the ‘angel in the house’ and the (unpaid) labours of the rural housewife?

In a vocational guide for young women published in 1910, Sarah Louise Arnold outlines the main distinction between the secretary and the stenographer:

[t]he ability to deal easily and pleasantly with the various persons with whom one is brought in contact is indispensable to the secretary. Invariably courteous, gentle, cheerful, tactful, sunny, courageous, optimistic, she creates the atmosphere of the office ... While serving as stenographer, she is merely the channel for the message, and her own personality for the time being is lost in the impersonal act. (203-4)

Thus, as Arnold outlines, the personal secretary was required to convey a certain amount of ‘personality’ that was not necessary for the more mechanical work of the low-grade stenography whose sole purpose was to act as a ‘channel’ for the transmission of information

within the office. It is this perception of stenography as an ‘impersonal’ profession that Sinclair appears to draw upon from the very opening of his novel when characterising urban female employment:

[d]ressed in a plain white shirt waist and an equally plain black cloth skirt, Miss Hazel Weir, on week days, was merely a unit in the office force of Harrington & Bush, implement manufacturers. Neither in personality nor in garb would a casual glance have differentiated her from the other female units, occupied at various desks ... The measure of her worth there is simply the measure of her efficiency at her machine or ledgers. So that if any member of the firm had been asked what sort of a girl Miss Hazel Weir might be, he would probably have replied—and with utmost truth—that Miss Weir was a capable stenographer. (Chapter 1)

Hazel is thus immediately portrayed to the reader as a figure dehumanised to the status of an undifferentiated office ‘unit’ during her working hours, her worth measured only by her efficiency. Even further, within the office environment, when asked what ‘sort’ of girl she is – a question that could bear upon many differing character traits – she is again defined only by her professional status as a ‘capable stenographer.’ By conveying the workplace as site of female disempowerment – Hazel is only one of many ‘units’; capable but far from outstanding or worthy of differentiation – from its very opening the novel seems to portray Hazel’s work as something that must be endured, without any redeeming benefits for one’s personal well-being, and ultimately, something to be escaped for the more appealing professions of wife and mother.

However, although she jokingly refers to herself as a ‘pore wurrkin’ gurl’ (Chapter 1), in the novel Hazel is portrayed as being reasonably well-off. She has no dependents and easily lives within her means, the lack of parental influence leaving her free to choose her own future husband. In fact, the narrator is keen to emphasise that whilst emancipated from the office realm, ‘Miss Weir then became an entity at which few persons of either sex failed to take a second glance’ (Chapter 1). It is only when one of her employers, Andrew Bush, sees her *outside* the offices of Harrington & Bush walking with her fiancé that he takes notice of her and offers her a more privileged role as his personal stenographer. As the narrator notes, ‘[t]here was an air of quiet in the private office, a greater luxury of appointment, which suited Miss Hazel Weir to a nicety’ (Chapter 2). However, it is with Hazel’s removal from the public sphere of the stenography pool to Mr. Bush’s ‘private office’ that she leaves herself open to one of the most common threats of the office: sexual harassment.

Women's work in the public sphere was frequently criticised at the turn of the century for manner in which it allowed women's *bodies* as well as their work to become public and thus open to sexual advances from male employers or co-workers. Reflecting the common beliefs of the period, Laura Hapke outlines that '[b]y rejecting the protection of the home they [female workers] were exposing themselves to advances from co-workers and employers; though their chastity was deemed superior to men's, their inferior powers of judgement would thus place them at constant risk' (9). Whilst this has already been discussed in relation to Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl*, in Sinclair's work these advances take on a far more explicit form. Similarly, although Hazel could be described as showing 'inferior powers of judgement' in her unwillingness to see her employer's true intentions, her response to such advances suggests that by the early twentieth century readers could expect their heroines to fend off these workplace advances themselves without needing to be rescued by a man.

Early into her new post as Bush's private stenographer, Hazel notices signs of his affection when he starts bringing flowers to the office for her benefit: 'Hazel accepted the tribute to her sex reluctantly, giving him no encouragement to overstep the normal bounds of cordiality. She was absolutely sure of herself and of her love for Jack Barrow' (Chapter 2). Thus, given her status as an engaged woman, Hazel feels herself safe from the potential threat that Bush's romantic gestures might have on a more emotionally susceptible employee, but equally is keen not to encourage Bush in any way for risk of causing office gossip or scandal. Nevertheless, despite her lack of responsiveness, it is not long before Bush feels compelled to admit his feelings to her by asking her to marry him one afternoon without any forewarning:

'[p]erhaps I've surprised and confused you by my impulsiveness,' he continued. 'But I've had no chance to meet you socially. Sitting here in the office, seeing you day after day, I've had to hold myself in check. And a man only does that so long, and no longer. Perhaps right now you don't feel as I do, but I can teach you to feel that way. I can give you everything—money, social position, everything that's worth having—and love. I'm not an empty-headed boy. I can make you love me.' (Chapter 2)

Unlike the slow-burning and mutually assured inter-office romance of Juliet and her Romeo, Bush's advances are wholly one-sided. He concedes the impropriety of such a proposal by admitting he has been unable to meet her 'socially', and that he had tried his best to hold such feelings 'in check.' However, most telling in this exchange is his apparent awareness that his affections are *not* shared but that he can convince her to see him differently – to *make* her

love him. In fact, he is so sure he can win her over that he even tries to kiss her, causing Hazel to act rashly to assert her unwillingness to give in to his advances:

[h]e kissed her; and Hazel, in blind rage, freed one arm, and struck at him man fashion, her hand doubled into a small fist. By the grace of chance, the blow landed on his nose. There was force enough behind it to draw blood. He stood back and fumbled for his handkerchief. Something that sounded like an oath escaped him.

Hazel stared, aghast, astounded. She was not at all sorry; she was perhaps a trifle ashamed. It seemed unwomanly to strike. But the humour of the thing appealed to her most strongly of all. In spite of herself, she smiled as she reached once more for her hat. And this time Mr. Bush did not attempt to restrain her. (Chapter 2)

In successfully fighting off such advances Hazel can thus be seen to epitomise the image of the working-girl as a woman who could fight her own battles when the need arose. She is shocked by own her actions but does not regret them, even finding the ‘humour’ in them. Nevertheless, despite Hazel’s assertion of female independence in fending off Mr. Bush’s advances, the office itself is painted in Sinclair’s novel as a site of potential female vulnerability to male sexuality. It is thus still presented as a place that the female worker should escape as soon as possible – ideally for the safety of the home.

Due to her skill and experience she is swiftly able to secure a stenography post at another local firm. However, when Mr. Bush becomes injured in a horse-riding accident and later dies he leaves her a large sum of money which causes great public interest and suspicion as to the nature of their working relationship. Female propriety and innocence were still greatly valued at this time, a woman’s name being one of her most precious possessions, and also something easily tarnished through slander and gossip. Bush asserts earlier in the novel that ‘[i]f you drive me to it, you will find yourself drawing the finger of gossip. Also, you will find yourself unable to secure a position in Granville. Also, you may find yourself losing the—er—regard of this—ah—fortunate individual upon whom you have bestowed your affections; but you’ll never lose mine’ (Chapter 2). His claim is seen to hold true, as Hazel’s new employers soon dismiss her without any explanation and her fiancé Barrow disbelieves her reassurances that there was no relationship between her and Bush. Despite her claims of innocence she is shunned by the local community and many of her friends, finally deciding to start afresh out West.

It is worthwhile to consider the motives behind Hazel's decision to leave the eastern city of Granville for the Western provinces. McMaster has argued in her study that 'Hazel is the independent working girl and the single woman traveller; both highly competent and decidedly nondomestic, she is a dual challenge to traditional gender roles. And rather than condemning her for this rejection of convention and domesticity, we are invited to admire her spirit of independence' (68). The portrayal of the one-sided nature of Mr. Bush's affections and the resulting unjust treatment of Hazel by the local Granville community would seem to support this reading. When faced with such an inhospitable environment – both economically and socially – it is unsurprising that she decides to head westwards given the growing trend in both travel literature and the popular imagination towards the idealisation of opportunities and freedom 'out West.' For Hazel, the West offers an escape from the strict confines of urban propriety which have labelled her an outcast in Granville society, and more importantly, a fresh start:

[s]trange lands, and most of all the West, held alluring promise. She sat in her rocker, and could not help but dream of places where people were a little broader gauge, a little less prone to narrow, conventional judgments. Other people had done as she proposed doing—cut loose from their established environment, and made a fresh start in countries where none knew or cared whence they came or who they were. Why not she? (Chapter 5)

Here, Sinclair appears keen to reassert the common associations of the West with a newfound sense of freedom, adventure and the 'pioneer' spirit. As Hazel continues, '[w]hat a country! ... It's wild; really, truly wild; and everything I've ever seen has been tamed and smoothed down, and made eminently respectable and conventional long ago. That's the place' (Chapter 5). The 'wildness' of the West is thus contrasted with the urbanity of the East, Sinclair seemingly finding the latter to be wanting.

Despite this idealisation of the West as a site of apparent renewal, the economic situation of the period is accurately represented through Hazel's inability to find clerical work. Given her middle-class status she, of course, disdains the option of paid housework – '[d]omestic service she shrank from except as a last resort' (Chapter 5) – settling instead on teaching. Hazel's brief role as a teacher is barely touched on in the novel itself, characterised more as a distraction from her other worries rather than as providing her with any great feeling of accomplishment or personal satisfaction: 'she laboured diligently at her appointed task of drilling knowledge into the heads of a dozen youngsters. From nine until three-thirty she had that to occupy her mind to the exclusion of more troublesome things' (Chapter 6).

Her role as teacher thus appears to act merely as a device to carry the heroine across Canada to the West where she can meet her romantic interest, the rough, yet noble, woodsman Roarin' Bill Wagstaff.

Even out West in the remote post of Cariboo Meadows, B.C., issues surrounding Hazel's dubious 'reputation' persist. When she is kidnapped by Roarin' Bill Wagstaff, her first worry is again for what the locals will make of her being alone in the woods with a man: '[i]f we wander around in the woods much longer, I'll simply be a sensation when I do get back to Cariboo Meadows. I won't have a shred of reputation left You're a man, and it's different with you. You can't know what a girl has to contend with where no one knows her' (Chapter 8). However, it could also be argued that through losing every 'shred' of her reputation, Hazel becomes emancipated from the social mores that she associates with her previous urban lifestyle. Bill takes her North into the Canadian wilderness where such matters of reputation and scandal become irrelevant, allowing her to reconstruct her identity and femininity along new lines.

During his attempted proposal, Mr Bush claims that 'I've never failed in anything I ever undertook, and I don't care how I fight, fair or foul, so that I win' (Chapter 2). At the time, readers were supposed to find such behaviour despicable – especially his later plot to ruin Hazel's name by leaving her his inheritance. Nevertheless, as modern readers we cannot ignore the fact that Sinclair's intended romantic hero, Bill Wagstaff, all-but-kidnaps the novel's heroine under the assumption that he is attracted to her and that, given time, she will reciprocate his feelings. Although he does not actually argue 'I can make you love me' (Chapter 2) like Mr. Bush, his tactics and endgame are ultimately the same. However, unlike Mr. Bush, he states that 'I'm going to play the game my way. And I'll play fair. That's the only promise I will make' (Chapter 8). Thus, as readers we are meant to forgive Bill his crude romancing tactics due to his determination to 'play fair' and never force himself upon Hazel. Whilst such wooing methods might seem incredibly misogynistic to modern readers (as does his tendency to refer to Hazel as 'little person' (Chapter 11)), Sinclair justifies Bill's 'roughness' through the narrator's declaration that '[i]n her heart every woman despises any hint of the effeminate in man. Even though she may decry what she is pleased to term the brute in man, whenever he discards the dominant, overmastering characteristics of the male she will have none of him. Miss Hazel Weir was no exception to her sex' (Chapter 7). Thus, for all her apparent independence and feistiness in physically repelling unwanted suitors and travelling across Canada on her own to find work, we are supposed to believe that Hazel

ultimately desires to be dominated and made subordinate to a man, ideally her future husband.

Another way in which Wagstaff's behaviour is made socially acceptable is through his portrayal as form of 'scholar-woodsman.' He is revealed to have come from a respectable, well-educated background and to have chosen to forsake his upbringing to live off the Canadian wilderness. Similarly, despite his gruff exterior, Wagstaff is revealed to hold traditional views on women's roles, praising Hazel for her cooking skills and denouncing her job as a typist:

'[y]ou're certainly a jewel, little person,' he drawled then. 'How many more accomplishments have you got up your sleeve?'

'Do you consider ordinary cooking an accomplishment?' she returned lightly.

'I surely do,' he replied, 'when I remember what an awful mess I made of it on the start. I certainly did spoil a lot of good grub.' (Chapter 11)

However, due to the her loss of her 'reputation' and Bill's decision to whisk her away from civilisation to the North, Hazel is also able to engage in several unfeminine activities whilst she is kept captive by Wagstaff. In her study of the 'pioneer woman' character type, Thompson outlines that 'the awareness that women are not limited by physical or mental frailty to the performance of one particular social role, and the knowledge that, on a frontier, women are not constricted by rules of social propriety and social convention, result in a welcome sense of freedom felt by the majority of emigrant women' (77). Whilst Hazel is Canadian-born, it could be argued that when she leaves the urbanity of the East and begins her life with Bill in the North, she enacts the role of an emigrant, helping Bill in his 'pioneer' activities (mining, farming, helping build their home) as they make a new life for themselves in the Canadian wilderness. He teaches her to shoot and how to walk in snowshoes, and later in the novel, once they are married, she accompanies him on a perilous journey to prospect for gold and helps with many of the physical tasks involved (where Bill allows): '[s]he insisted on this, though it blistered her hands and brought furious pains to her back. If her man must strain every nerve she would lighten the burden with what strength she had' (Chapter 19). Notably however, her work and newly acquired 'pioneer' skills are characterised as being subordinate to *his*, always used to support *him*, and thus perhaps cannot be characterised as particularly empowering.

The point at which Sinclair's heroine makes her choice to marry Wagstaff and fully convert from urban working-girl to pioneer wife is when – after a winter in the North – he gives her back her freedom and (along with a sizeable cash sum) gets her passage on a boat heading towards Vancouver. However, upon arrival in the city, Hazel's growing distance from her old lifestyle becomes apparent. She balks at the prospect of searching for another job and finds the city itself oppressive after her time spent in the natural wilderness:

[s]he remembered having heard or read somewhere the simile of a human hive. The shuffle of their feet, the hum of their voices droned in her ears, confusing her, irritating her, and she presently found herself hurrying away from it, walking rapidly eastward toward a thin fringe of trees which showed against a distant sky-line over a sea of roofs. She walked fast, and before long the jar of solid heels on the concrete pavement bred an ache in her knees. (Chapter 14)

Unsurprisingly, such a strong physical and mental reaction to the urban landscape leads her to immediately return to Wagstaff with the admission 'I didn't realize it until I got back into the civilized world. And then all at once I found myself longing for you—and for these old forests and the mountains and all. So I came back' (Chapter 15). It is at moments such as these that Sinclair's affection for the West and specifically the pioneering narrative become most heavyhanded. This theme is repeated towards the end of the novel when – after a successful mining operation – the happy couple travel back eastwards to spend a few months with Hazel's old friends. Predictably, she is seduced back into her old, highly materialistic lifestyle, eager to remain in the east living off their newly-found wealth rather than return to the hard, challenging, pioneer lifestyle of the West. Bill is finally forced to leave her, claiming she is no longer the woman he married and begging her to return to their home when she realises who she really is. What is most notable about this exchange is how he uses their lack of a child as reason for her descent into selfishness:

[y]ou'd be different [if we'd had a child]. You'd have something to live for besides this frothy, neurotic existence that has poisoned you against the good, clean, healthy way of life. I wish we'd had a kiddie. We'd have a fighting chance for happiness now; something to keep us sane, something outside of our own ego to influence us. (Chapter 30)

As McMaster outlines in her study, '[a]t the turn of the century the relatively new figure of the independent urban working girl represented for many writers the modern city: its opportunities, but also its potential for immorality and cultural disruption' (44). Sinclair

would thus appear, once again, to be reinforcing the corrupting force of the city and the loss of 'traditional' pioneer values, this time taking this polluting influence to even greater extremes by turning Hazel into a selfish socialite whose only salvation is through the purifying selflessness offered by motherhood.

The novel ends with Hazel realising her mistake and leaving the status and society of her life out east to return to Bill. When she arrives back at their Northern home he is away prospecting and she spends several months living alone awaiting his return. Significantly, however '[s]he was seldom lonely. She marveled at that. It was unique in her experience. All her old dread of the profound silence, the pathless forests which infolded like a prison wall, distances which seemed impossible of span, had vanished. In its place had fallen over her an abiding sense of peace, of security' (Chapter 34). Thus, in returning 'home' Hazel proves herself not only a loyal wife, but also freed from the negative influence of the urban community. Her reward lies, not only in the eventual return of her husband and their reconciliation but also in the revelation of their newly born child. As Bill explains at the novel's close, now that they are finally constituted as a *family* unit they 'should be the hardest combination in the world to bust' (Chapter 34).

Thus, despite her initial post as a stenographer, and her ability to defend herself physically (when required), Hazel Weir's ultimate destiny would appear to be highly conservative and firmly entrenched in a pioneer narrative which still placed the highest value on women's roles as wives and mothers. In her study, Thompson argues that many authors felt the need to 'rewrite and revise the definition of a feminine ideal so that it [became] compatible with a backwoods, Canadian setting' (24). However, in the case of Sinclair's novel I would argue that the author felt the need to deliberately reinforce the culturally prescribed feminine ideal: a woman with the ability to be independent and self-sufficient, but who willingly chooses to be subservient to her husband and prioritise her role as a mother. Hazel's work in the novel as a stenographer is merely a stepping stone to her eventual profession as a mother, the polluting influence of the Canadian office – as evidenced through Bush's sexual harassment – portrayed as a space to be escaped as soon as possible for the more gratifying and cleansing environment of the Canadian North.

In summarising her study of the representation of the working girl in Western Canadian literature, McMaster discusses the ‘tendency for moral arguments on urban life to coalesce around the working girl, whose independence in a setting of moral indeterminacy is considered unmanageable and thus thought to demand containment’ (57). Whilst this act of authorial ‘containment’ can be seen in the story of Hazel Weir and her eventual marriage to Wagstaff and renunciation of urban life, it could be argued that Allen’s heroine offers a more complex solution to the problematic figure of the ‘working girl.’ Juliet ends the novel without a husband or child, still fighting to make her own living through her work as a secretary and budding novelist. Thus, her adventurous spirit allows her to remain ‘uncontained’ but also emotionally unfulfilled and still waiting for *another* Romeo to sweep her off her feet.

As mentioned earlier, the figure of the Type-Writer Girl allowed authors to envisage independent, adventurous lifestyles for their heroines that exaggerated and extended the freedoms that many Canadian women attained through their positions as single working women at the turn of the twentieth century. However, the high turnover rate in the secretarial trade as well as the largely conservative destinies attained by the majority of the literary representations of these women would seem to support both Keep and Mitchell’s claims that this figure was ‘transitional’ rather than static. As Vipond outlines in her article on how women were portrayed in the mass circulation magazines of the 1920s: ‘[t]hey were encouraged to gain a good education and to find a stimulating career, but then to turn their attention solely to housework, husband and children when they married. They were encouraged to be independent and self-sufficient before marriage, but warned that in order to find and keep a husband they must become docile clinging vines’ (‘Image’ 120). Thus, by the end of *North of Fifty-Three*, the feisty and independent character Hazel Weir is reduced to a dutiful and subservient ‘angel of the house,’ and Juliet Appleton, by refusing to become a ‘docile clinging vine’ (epitomised in the novel through Mr Blank’s fiancé Michaela) ends up back in ‘another office’ (Allen *Type-Writer* 139).

Nevertheless, in choosing this ending Allen’s novel could be seen as the more subversive of the two under discussion, as it provides a much more detailed and (largely) positive representation of a woman earning her living as a secretary in Victorian London. But perhaps it is *The Type-Writer Girl*’s setting and Allen’s own extended residence in London that allow him to end his novel this way. It is also important to note the significant time gap

between Allen's novel (written in 1897) and Sinclair's Canada-set counterpart which wasn't published until 1914. Did the literary figure of the Type Writer Girl take longer to cross the Atlantic despite her extensive presence in the Canadian office throughout this period? Or was there something especially conservative about the Canadian readership that meant a figure like Juliet Appleton could only be appreciated and admired when she was situated in a detached English setting?

Teaching

In an 1871 article for the *Journal of Education for the Province of Nova Scotia*, an anonymous 'female teacher' outlined the status of her profession in the Maritimes. She argued that female teachers were willing 'to teach and love the profession, while by far the greater number of males, conscious of their want of adaptation to the work they have assumed' would leave the profession 'for something more congenial' (Anon 'Female' 559). Given such conditions, this anonymous author argues, the fact that women still earned significantly less than male teachers for providing the same labour was 'a sad commentary' (Ibid) on male Nova Scotian chivalry and gallantry (Prentice 'Feminisation' 63). Whilst this article ignores the fact that many female teachers also left the profession – in most cases for the apparently more 'congenial' role of wife and mother – it still raises important issues over the inequalities in status and pay which created tensions within the profession, and helps explain why many female teachers felt dissatisfied with their work. This section will attempt to uncover the extent to which these tensions were (or were not) reflected in fictional representations of women teaching at the turn of the twentieth century, and whether teaching was portrayed as a an opportunity for intellectual growth and personal development, or whether it was instead seen as an economic necessity or 'stop-gap' until these women could find husbands and begin their 'true work' as wives and mothers.

At a time when women still faced severely limited employment options, teaching was one of the few professions deemed appropriate for women as it was seen to tap into their innate maternal instincts – much like nursing. Many saw teaching as a good training ground for women who were expected to eventually give up the education of others' children to take care of their own. As early as 1865, Canada's first superintendent of schools, Egerton Ryerson, was arguing that women were 'best adapted to teach small children, having, as a general rule, most heart, most tender feelings, most assiduity, and, in order of Providence, the qualities best suited for the care, instruction, and government of infancy and childhood' (7). In an 1886 report, J. B. Boyle, a public school inspector for London, Ontario, continues to perpetuate such views when he states that 'experience has proved that the character and disposition of the female fit her better for dealing with youthful minds ... The little one turns trustingly and fondly to the female teacher; while, in most cases, it shrinks from contact with the sterner teacher of the opposite sex' (qtd Stamp 'Evolving' 317). The extent to which these maternalist discourses are reinforced or challenged in the fiction of the period will be explored to determine whether the novel's heroines saw teaching as a natural extension of

their innate feminine qualities, or whether teaching is instead portrayed merely as another form of labour that must be performed for a wage and respectable status within the local community.

However, it is important to remember that the supposedly ‘feminine’ qualities essential to nurturing and developing young minds were also used *against* female teachers when it came time to allocate their position within the academic hierarchy. Women were encouraged to teach the youngest children (primary or elementary classes) and were therefore paid lower wages than those teaching high school classes, and were offered few opportunities for advancement within institutions. This was because, as Alexander Forrester, Chief Superintendent of Schools in Nova Scotia commented in 1867, ‘both by the law of nature and revelation ... a position of subordination and of dependence’ had been assigned to women, which meant that some ‘situations in educational establishments [were] better adapted to the one sex than the other’ (565-6). Forrester states that it was for these reasons that elementary teaching was ‘best fitted for the female,’ while ‘the head masterships, and more advanced sections’ were best reserved for male teachers (Ibid). As with the other professions under study in this chapter, the main basis for entry into teaching was the fact that women could provide a cheap, regular turnover of much-needed labour without the need to extensively train or prepare them for long-term employment. Male teachers received a higher rate of pay than their female counterparts due to the assumption that they would be supporting a wife and family, regardless of whether they actually had any dependents or not. Female teachers, who were expected to only work for a few years until they could secure a husband and were assumed to have no dependents, while the expectation that they would soon be back under the financial protection of a man supplied ample justification for their low wages (Kinnear *In Subordination* 124).

The limited opportunities for career advancement and low wages meant that the female teacher’s ‘professional’ status was oftentimes considered tenuous. As Prentice et al. argue ‘the status of the teacher was ambiguous; it might represent upward mobility for a farm girl but not for a middle-class girl’ (129). The profession of governess and teacher had been portrayed in earlier periods as one of *downward* mobility, as middle and upper-class women, unable to support themselves, were forced into teaching as a ‘last resort.’ But by the mid-to-late nineteenth century, as teaching became designated a ‘profession’ with its attendant prestige and status, it began to be seen as an opportunity for *upward* social mobility. As Bessie Parkes wrote in 1865, the teaching profession was a place where two classes of

women met: ‘the one struggling up, the other drifting down’ (qtd Clifford 118-9). The image of the ‘lady-teacher,’ whose superior education entitled her to respect, conflicted with the notion of female teachers as ‘on the same (low) social and educational level as “spinsters and household servants,”... [and] no better than the “lowest menials”’ (Prentice ‘Feminization’ 61). This assumed ‘menial’ status was part of the reason why many female teachers, especially in the more deprived rural areas, found themselves responsible not only for their pupils but for the maintenance of the school building itself, and even in some cases for cooking and serving meals to their students for no extra pay.

Unsurprisingly, Canadian teachers (both male and female) developed a reputation in the nineteenth century as ‘the Arabs of Ontario’ (‘Annual Report’ 67), due to their tendency to constantly move from school to school when opportunities for higher wages, better positions, or even the chance to attend university and train for other professions presented themselves. This phenomenon is illustrated in L. M. Montgomery’s *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), where in the course of Anne’s education in Avonlea (less than five years), she is taught by both the inattentive Mr Phillips and the inspirational Miss Stacy. Even then, by the end of the novel, Miss Stacy is already planning to leave Avonlea to head to bigger and better opportunities, leaving the school open to taken by Anne in *Anne of Avonlea* (1909) once she gains her teaching certificate, and then two years later by Jane Andrews, when Anne decides to attend Redmond College.

However, whilst Montgomery’s Avonlea is an idealised and welcoming community (for the most part), the low wages and borderline exploitation that many teachers faced in this period reduced their attachment to their place of employment and meant that teaching became a refuge for questionable characters. As this 1873 report by provincial visitor Mr John MacNeill highlights

[t]he little encouragement which is in most cases held out to a teacher of character and qualification, and the precarious manner in which their salaries are paid, operate most powerfully as a bar in the way of the advancement of education. Hence, it too frequently happens, that it is only persons of shipwrecked character, and blasted prospects in life, after every other resource has failed them, who take up the important office of schoolmaster. (qtd Bolger 330)

Whilst the ‘shipwrecked character’ of local teachers that this report cites might be questioned, it is hard to dispute the fact that even by 1909, ‘only one-quarter of all first-class teachers

taught in rural areas, [with] over 90 per cent of third-class and permit holders were found in the country schoolhouses' (Millers 60). This was, however, most likely not an indication of 'blasted prospects,' but more a natural by-product of the limited advancement open to female teachers: women could attain a third-class certificate at a Normal School in less than a year and begin teaching straight away, working for a few years until they (hopefully) found husbands or saved enough to train for other, more financially viable, professions.

However, as the various reports already quoted make clear, female teachers were placed under intense public scrutiny. This attention came from both the provincial authorities who set their curricula and monitored their work through inspectors, and also the local community who had their own expectations of what was required both socially and morally of their teaching staff. As Jean Cochrane outlines, '[s]he might be a respected member of that community, or considered just another hired hand, not as much use as an experience farm hand. If the community was friendly and supportive, life was pleasant. If it was indifferent or hostile, the loneliness could be corrosive' (126). The perils of an indifferent community have already been outlined in Bertrand Sinclair's *North of Fifty-Three*, when Hazel Weir finds herself ostracised by the local community when rumours about her virtue begin to surface. It is her awareness of the 'corrosive' environment that awaits her upon her return that partially motivates her decision to stay with Roarin' Bill Wagstaff for the first winter of their romance:

[i]f we wander around in the woods much longer, I'll simply be a sensation when I do get back to Cariboo Meadows. I won't have a shred of reputation left. It will probably result in my losing the school. You're a man, and it's different with you. You can't know what a girl has to contend with where no one knows her. I'm a stranger in this country, and what little they do know of me—. (Chapter 8)

Here Hazel shows an awareness that any damage to her reputation will doubtless result in her removal from her post, as she is merely an outsider – 'a stranger' – and has no local ties to help defend her or prove her innocence.

Rural communities took great pride in the institution of the one-room school, as is evidenced by the fact that they continued to prosper well into the twentieth century, as these small schools promoted a sense of local autonomy and local control over the education and development of the community's young people. This 'local control' was largely spearheaded by the board of trustees who were responsible not only for the hiring of new teachers as and when needed, but also for controlling how much money teachers were given to buy supplies,

and ‘they pretty well governed her standard of living and standing in the community’ (Cochrane 143). Trustees also often competed with other boards, ‘not for the most competent of teachers, but for the cheapest, that is, those whose limited training and knowledge entitled them to the lowest class of certificate and thus the lowest salaries’ (Stamp ‘Evolving’ 316). However, it is important to note that teachers themselves often contributed to these low wages by undercutting each other when employment options were scarce and competition especially fierce.

The mercenary nature of this process is portrayed particularly well in Joanna E Wood’s *Judith Moore: or, Fashioning a Pipe* (1898). A sub-plot to the novel’s central romance centres around the local community of Ovid and its need for a new teacher, ‘[b]ecause he [the former teacher] says he can’t afford to keep himself here and his wife in Toronto on three hundred a year’ (Wood 50). Ovid’s trustee board meet to discuss the application of a local girl Suse Symmons for the post, the board comprising of three men: Hiram Green, the village storekeeper, Hen Braddon, and Andrew Cutler. Cutler, who acts as the protagonist’s suitor is portrayed as the voice of reason and generosity in the following scene, presumably to endear him to the reader and show his appropriateness for the novel’s heroine, Judith:

‘I tell you Suse is a good fist with a pen,’ said Hen Braddon, with conviction, and the other two agreed. ‘She ain’t no slouch at spelling either,’ said Hiram Green. The other two agreed with this also. Then Andrew took up his parable.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘Suse is quite smart, and being bred right here in Ovid seems to give her a claim to the school. I suggest we just appoint her.’ (Ibid 78)

To this, Hen replies pragmatically ‘[i]t’ll save advertising’ (Ibid 79). However, it is with Hiram Green’s response that the more mercenary and gender-based assumptions of the hiring processes of the period come to light:

‘[w]ell,’ said Hiram Green, ‘well, I ain’t got no objections to Suse *as* Suse, but what I think is, two hundred and fifty is enough to a pay a woman for what a man got three hundred.’

Andrew sneered. He didn’t have a sweet expression when he did that.

‘Don’t you think,’ he said, gravely – ‘don’t you think Suse might include cleaning the school-house and lighting the fires in winter for the two-fifty, being she’s a woman?’

‘No,’ said Hiram, reflectively; ‘old Mrs. Slick had done it so long.’

...

‘Oh, Mrs. Slick is owing, is she?’ queried Andrew, with solicitude. ‘I hope she pays you all right. Well, about Suse. Being she’s a woman, don’t you think you could fix it so’s she’d chop the wood for winter? That would save twelve dollars.’ (Ibid 79)

Hiram is clearly voicing the opinions of the era which argued that women did not need to be paid the same rate as male teachers, whilst Andrew, taking a more reformist stance tries to convince Hiram to pay Suse the same salary as a man. However, the fact remains that Andrew is forced to link Suse’s intended role with the domestic and menial tasks of cleaning, lighting fires and even chopping wood, to try and win Green over, arguing that ‘being she’s a woman’ (a phrase he repeats for emphasis) she would be more willing to do these tasks for no extra pay, and thus provide the trustees a saving in other areas. Whilst we, as readers, are presumably supposed to see through these thinly veiled manipulations and enjoy resulting humour his machinations cause, the scene nevertheless highlights the limited status of the female teacher and how easily her ‘profession’ was belittled to the same level as that of a domestic servant.

Even then, Green appears unwilling to concede the extra money, stating that ‘I ain’t particular whether she gets the three hundred or the two-fifty, though I hope you won’t deny when nomination comes round that you deliberately threw away fifty dollars of the people’s money’ (Ibid 80). Ultimately, it is Hen Braddon who resolves the issue for them, by arguing that they’d ‘[b]est let Suse have the three hundred ... old Reilly will be foreclosing Sam [Suse’s father] soon if he don’t raise the money somehow’ (Ibid 83). Reilly, described as a ‘hard-hearted, close-fisted old Shylock’ (Ibid), has already turned Green’s own brother out on the street the previous week and this ultimately wins Suse’s application Green’s approval. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Suse wins the post – and the same salary as a man – not on her own merit, but because of the assumed benefit it will have for her dependents, her father, who is well respected within the community. Despite, the reasons for her appointment, Suse still gets the last word, announcing at the end of the scene, after her father has come home to tell her of her appointment, that ‘I’ll just show them Greens what’s what’ (Ibid 90).

How (not) to teach: Anne’s early school years

L. M. Montgomery remains one of the few authors from this period who is still widely read and enjoyed by both adults and children today and this has led to a recent surge in scholarship surveying her literary output, with particular attention being paid to the *Anne* novels and why they remain so resonant to a contemporary audience over a hundred years later. Many

scholars have focused on the semi-autobiographical nature of much of her fiction (a process greatly assisted by the painstaking editing of Montgomery's journals by Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston in the 1980s and 90s), her role within (or rather in opposition to) the rising realism movement of the early twentieth century, the extent to which Montgomery's writing can be considered 'feminist,' whilst others have focused on her use of literary romance.¹⁸ However, with the exception of Irene Gammel and Ann Dutton's 'Disciplining Development: L. M. Montgomery and Early Schooling' in *L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (1999),¹⁹ there has been little extended study of Montgomery's portrayal of teaching *as work* and how this labour is presented as both a mode of employment and as a tool for personal development that both draws upon and extends women's innate maternal skills and attributes.

Montgomery's novels are also noteworthy for their setting on Prince Edwards Island (PEI) in the idyllic locale of Avonlea. By situating Anne in such rural surroundings, Montgomery is able to extol the virtues of the one-room school and the role local communities played in monitoring their children's education and the actions of their newly recruited teachers. These are both aspects that will be discussed in more depth in this examination. PEI itself is an unusual case as it was the first territory in the empire to introduce free education through the PEI Free Education Act of 1852 (Gammel and Dutton 108), as well as being home to a large Scottish emigrant population who placed great emphasis on the value of literacy among women for the sake of religious instruction: '[i]n 1891 when a general census was taken, young women (10-19) in Prince Edward Island had a literacy rate of 91%' (Åhmansson 119). Whilst Montgomery never gives Anne an exact birth date and even contradicts herself when dating certain historical events in the novels, the majority of Anne's education can be seen to take place in the early 1880s (Edwards and Litster 31), the period Montgomery herself would have undertaken most of her education. This thesis will focus on Montgomery's first two *Anne* novels, *Anne of Green Gables* and

¹⁸ Examples of these approaches can be found in studies such as Gabriella Åhmansson, *A Life and Its Mirrors: A Feminist Reading of L. M. Montgomery's Fiction*. Vol 1 (1991); Holly Blackford, ed, *100 Years of Anne with an 'e': The Centennial Study of Anne of Green Gables* (2009); Susan Drain, 'Feminine Convention and Female Identity: The Persistent Challenge of *Anne of Green Gables*,' *Canadian Children's Literature* 65 (1992): 40-7; Elizabeth Rollins Epperly, *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass: L. M. Montgomery's Heroines and the Pursuit of Romance* (1992); Irene Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly, eds, *L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (1999); Mary Henley Rubio, ed, *Harvesting Thistles: The Textual Garden of L. M. Montgomery* (1994); and Elizabeth Waterston, *Magic Island: The Fictions of L. M. Montgomery* (2008).

¹⁹ This study focuses on Anne's unintended use of corporal punishment in *Anne of Avonlea* and on the autobiographical links between Montgomery's own teachers from her childhood and how these are potentially mirrored in fictional counterparts in the *Anne* and *Emily* series.

Anne of Avonlea due to their emphasis on Anne's education and her two years teaching in Avonlea's schoolhouse. The discussion will explore whether Montgomery's novels align with existing portrayals of female professionalism across this period or whether their rural setting and status as 'children's literature' (a notoriously moralistic genre within this period) result in an even more conservative outlook than other works studied thus far.

Lucy Maud Montgomery was born in 1874 on Prince Edward Island. Montgomery herself studied for a teaching certificate and taught in provincial PEI schoolhouses from 1896 to 1898, before choosing to focus solely on making a career from her writing. After successful publication of countless short stories, her first novel *Anne of Green Gables* was published in 1908 to great acclaim selling over 19,000 copies in just five months (Gammel and Epperly 'L. M. Montgomery' 10). However, with success came demand – especially for her *Anne* novels which remained enormously popular throughout her career, eclipsing all her other literary endeavours. Before her death in 1942, Montgomery had produced over twenty novels and hundreds of short stories.

Before turning to the texts themselves, it is worthwhile to consider the status of the *Anne* novels as fiction for children or, perhaps more significantly, as 'girls' fiction.' Many have argued that her status as a novelist for children is a large part of the reason that Montgomery remained absent, or barely mentioned, in early surveys of the Canadian literary canon. However, in their study *What Katy Read*, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons argue that 'girls' fiction prioritises feminine experience and consequently (whether implicitly or explicitly) explores the possibilities of female self-expression and fulfilment in a male-dominated world' (2). Thus, Foster and Simons argue that it is this very focus on girlhood that makes texts such as *Anne of Green Gables* so appealing to feminist literary critics, and perhaps also helps explain why many of the young women reading the text found it so engaging and empowering. Foster and Simons outline that 'although in most cases the familiar behavioural codes of feminine self-effacement and domesticity are in the end reinforced, there are more suggestive "gaps" in the discourse in many of these texts which allow at least glimpses of alternative possibilities' (Ibid 6). These 'alternative possibilities' will be the main focus of this section through an examination of Anne's education and her work as a teacher. In these first two novels Montgomery is able to show the alternatives to marriage offered to women in this period, even if she ultimately removes her heroine from such realities in later novels to allow her to settle down and start a family. It is also worth noting that Montgomery herself was loathe to write more *Anne* novels, stating to a *Republic*

reporter that ‘I want to leave “Anne” just as she is forever; in her girlhood’ (Gillen 85). As Foster and Simons explain, at the turn of the century ‘[t]he image of childhood becomes sentimentalised and adulthood becomes less a state to be aspired to and more a sphere only reluctantly entered’ (7). This might help explain why Montgomery chooses to postpone the romantic sub-plot of the series for the first two *Anne* novels so that she could instead keep Anne protected in her girlhood, even though she works as a schoolteacher.

It is important to note that from its outset, *Anne of Green Gables* concerns itself with questions of female labour and self-worth. When Marilla is explaining her reasoning for adopting an orphan so late in life, she makes the practical value of a son clear: ‘[w]e thought we’d get a boy. Matthew is getting up in years, you know – he’s sixty – and he isn’t so spry as he once was. His ear troubles him a good deal. And you know how desperate hard it’s got to be to get hired help’ (Montgomery *Green Gables* 11). Thus, their decision to adopt is more for the potential labour the child will provide than any particular familial desire on the part of elderly brother and sister, Matthew and Marilla. As Frank Davey states, the scene where Anne’s femaleness is revealed is significant as it ‘poses the issue of a woman’s value. Is she to be “useful” only as domestic labour – a kind of labour which Marilla had no need – or can she be useful at productive labour outside the home?’ (165). Indeed, it is Anne’s desire to prove her ‘value’ to her new adoptive parents that helps fuel her desire to achieve high honours academically and prove them right in their decision to keep her. This viewpoint is taken up by Gabriella Åhmansson:

[t]here was only one way in which Anne could compensate Matthew and Marilla for their ‘loss,’ and in fact become like a boy. Physically she could not turn herself into the desired boy, but she could do it symbolically by excelling in school. This goal, to prove herself academically, is part of her repayment, especially to Matthew for his love and unwavering belief in her abilities. (125)

This desire to prove her ‘worth’ to Matthew and Marilla is significant not only as proof of familial devotion, but also because it suggests that Anne’s drive to excel is motivated less by a personal drive for self-improvement than by a sense of personal lack that she feels she must compensate for.

In Gammel and Elizabeth Epperly’s introduction to their *L. M. Montgomery and Canadian Culture* (1999) essay collection, they claim that ‘Montgomery’s ambivalent oscillation between social change and protection of old values is illustrated in her focus on

the teaching profession. Although the school is a classical space of authority, Montgomery uses the tools of satire in her classroom settings to expose the sins of authoritarian teaching' ('L. M. Montgomery' 9). This section will focus on Montgomery's depiction of teachers in Anne's childhood years in order to determine whether they act as positive role models or, as Gammel and Epperly suggest, act as examples of how *not* to teach: both of which could still act as important indicators in the development of Anne's own future teaching philosophies. Anne's first teacher, Mr. Phillips is characterised as careless and neglectful of his pupils due to his attempts to woo one of his senior students, Prissy Andrews, something Marilla chastises Anne for gossiping about: '[y]ou don't go to school to criticize the master. I guess he can teach *you* something, and it's your business to learn' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 92). However, whilst Mr. Phillips' romantic intentions might make him a poor teacher, Davey is right to stress that Phillips is 'constructed by Montgomery as humanised by this infatuation, and forgivable because of it' even if a modern-day reader is more likely to accuse him of sexual harassment (170). Regardless, Mr. Phillips' role as an example of the evils of 'authoritarian teaching' is mostly highlighted through his questionable disciplinary methods: 'Mr. Phillips said my spelling was disgraceful and he held up my slate so that everybody could see it, all marked over. I felt so mortified, Marilla; he might have been politer to a stranger, I think' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 92). This, perhaps unthinking, cruelty with regard to discipline is also a characteristic of the now infamous 'carrots' scene, when Anne reacts to Gilbert's teasing remark by breaking a slate over his head, an act for which she is – in her mind at least – unfairly punished by being made to sit beside a boy. However, it's important to remember that Mr. Phillips' reaction mirrors the cultural expectations of the period in regard to female behaviour. In an article for the Kingston *Daily News* in 1887, Archbishop Cleary of Kingston deplores the fact that '[m]odesty is not one of the things taught in our public schools ... Girls at these schools learn to be boisterous, immodest, screaming, kicking creatures, such as was never seen among pagans' (qtd Stamp *Schools* 11-12). By painting Mr. Phillips as the villain of the exchange, Montgomery is thus not only emphasising the perils of authoritarian teaching, but also the culture that encouraged the development of passive, unquestioning female students.

Gammel and Epperly have stated that the 'carrots' scene is 'remarkable in that it thematises the eruption of female temper in a space of male authority, Mr. Phillips' classroom,' and that '[t]he moment of female transgression, overtly punished, is covertly praised, admired and even eroticised, as this scene, of course, sparks Gilbert's romantic

interest, initiating the romantic plot of male desire and female delay' ('L. M. Montgomery' 10). Setting up Mr. Phillips as an inferior teacher, and a poor authority figure allows Anne to rebel without inducing the reader's reproach, enabling Montgomery to focus instead on how Mr. Phillips' neglect makes such seemingly subversive behaviour not only acceptable, but admirable. Indeed, the fact that even Mrs. Rachel Lynde has a low opinion of Mr. Phillips lays the groundwork for Anne's rebellious actions and underlies the need for a new teacher, with new teaching methods, to enter the Avonlea community: '[h]e'd never have got the school for another year if his uncle hadn't been a trustee—the trustee, for he just leads the other two around by the nose, that's what. I declare, I don't know what education on this Island is coming to' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 49).

It is also important to note that Anne's later academic zeal largely stems from the fallout of the 'carrots' exchange and her desire to prove herself Gilbert Blythe's superior. As this exchange earlier in the novel highlights, Anne's initial aspirations are far from scholarly:

'Charlie Sloane is *dead gone* on you. He told his mother—his *mother*, mind you—that you were the smartest girl in school. That's better than being good looking.'

'No, it isn't, said Anne, feminine to the core. 'I'd rather be pretty than clever. And I hate Charlie Sloane, I can't bear a boy with goggle eyes. If anyone wrote my name up with his I'd never *get* over it, Diana Barry. But it *is* nice to keep head of your class.' (Ibid 94)

Here it is clear that despite her pride in being top of the class Anne's priorities are more focused on more traditional female roles and her fears over her own apparent unattractiveness due to her hair colour and freckles. Such anxieties are seemingly only intensified after Gilbert's teasing, but given a new outlet through her desire to best him academically and retain her position as head of the class: '[s]he would not stoop to admit that she meant to rival Gilbert in schoolwork, because that would have been to acknowledge his existence which Anne persistently ignored; but the rivalry was there and honours fluctuated between them' (Ibid 116). Whilst such ambition could be considered 'unladylike,' it could be argued that Montgomery is suggesting that a certain degree of feminine ambition should be fostered in more schoolgirls even if, as in Anne's case, it is initially motivated by a petty desire to 'best' a fellow student.

One of the main transitions in the novel – and Anne's adolescence – takes place mid-novel when

[t]he two crucial locations, the church and school both undergo a change later in the book because male characters are removed and replaced by women, who are more sympathetic to Anne's needs and who tilt the community towards a more matriarchal structure. These women also take Anne's part, just like Marilla and Mrs. Lynde can be said to do under certain circumstances, assuming their place in the female support network that surrounds Anne. (Åhmansson 140)

Mrs. Allan, the new minister's wife, and Miss Stacy, the new teacher, who help construct Anne's 'female support network' within the previously patriarchal structures of the church and the schoolhouse are both intensely admirable to the young Anne, who characterises them both as 'kindred spirits.' The phrase is first used in the novel, when Anne is describing her previous Sunday school teacher Miss Rogerson (a role Mrs. Allan soon takes over). Anne finds Miss Rogerson's method of teaching by asking her students constant questions oppressive and stultifying, as she makes clear to Marilla: '[o]h, yes; and I answered a lot of questions. Miss Rogerson asked ever so many. I don't think it was fair for her to do all the asking. There were lots I wanted to ask her, but I didn't like to because I didn't think she was a kindred spirit' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 72). These actions form a strong contrast to Mrs. Allan with whom Anne falls 'promptly and wholeheartedly in love,' the narrator announcing that in Mrs. Allan '[s]he had discovered another kindred spirit' (Ibid 143). When voicing her admiration to Marilla, Anne explains that

'[s]he said right away she didn't think it was fair for the teacher to ask all the questions, and you know, Marilla, that is exactly what I've always thought. She said we could ask her any question we liked and I asked ever so many. I'm good at asking questions, Marilla.'

'I believe you,' was Marilla's emphatic comment. (Montgomery *Green Gables* 143-4)

Despite Marilla's sarcasm, it appears that Montgomery was an advocate for the more modern (for the 1880s at least) teaching methods which were moving away from rote learning and memorisation and attempting to instill creativity and thoughtfulness in pupils as well as the facts and figures needed to pass exams. However, Anne's admiration is also seen to stem from her earlier interests in 'prettiness' as is evidenced in her admiration of Mrs. Allan's physical features: 'Mrs. Allan has a lovely smile; she has such *exquisite* dimples in her cheeks. I wish I had dimples in my cheeks, Marilla. I'm not half so skinny as I was when I came here, but I have no dimples yet' (Ibid). Nevertheless, a certain degree of admiration of female authority figures is perhaps common in young girls and does not detract from the larger moral influence Mrs. Allan is seen to nourish in her pupils: 'Mrs. Allan said we ought

always to try to influence other people for good. She talked so nice about everything. I never knew before that religion was such a cheerful thing. I always thought it was kind of melancholy, but Mrs. Allan's isn't, and I'd like to be a Christian if I could be one like her' (Ibid). As Christiana Salah emphasises in her study of domesticity in *Green Gables*, '[v]alidated by their [Mrs. Allan and Miss Stacy's] example, Anne feels confident in asserting that students should ask questions, that as much can be learned in nature as in a classroom, and that religion should not be a sorrowful thing, but a joyful one' (200).

Miss Stacy, through her role as Anne's teacher, is portrayed as having an even greater influence on Anne's moral, personal, and even her *professional* development – as Miss Stacy is the one to suggest to Marilla that Anne begin to train for a teaching certificate of her own. Even before she arrives Miss Stacy's appointment causes concern among the Avonlea community due to her gender. As Anne explains to Marilla:

the trustees have hired a new teacher and it's a lady. Her name is Miss Muriel Stacy. Isn't that a romantic name? Mrs. Lynde says they've never had a female teacher in Avonlea before and she thinks it is a dangerous innovation. But I think it will be splendid to have a lady teacher, and I really don't see how I'm going to live through the two weeks before school begins. I'm so impatient to see her. (Montgomery *Green Gables* 153)

The novelty of Miss Stacy's status as a 'female teacher' forms a large part of Anne's initial fascination with her, a feeling which is only intensified when Anne injures herself and is forced to hear of Miss Stacy from her friends rather than meeting her herself: '[b]ut oh, I shall be so glad when I can go to school for I've heard such exciting things about the new teacher. The girls all think she is perfectly sweet. Diana says she has the loveliest fair curly hair and such fascinating eyes. She dresses beautifully, and her sleeve puffs are bigger than anybody else's in Avonlea' (Ibid 158). As with Mrs. Allan there remains a strong fascination with physical attributes as Anne still sees 'prettiness' as being a major asset at this point in her life. However, equally, if not more fascinating to the debilitated Anne are the stories of Miss Stacy's unusual teaching methods, which draw the attention not only of Anne, but also of suspicious community figures such as Rachel Lynde:

[e]very other Friday afternoon she has recitations and everybody has to say a piece or take part in a dialogue ... And the Friday afternoons they don't have recitations Miss Stacy takes them all to the woods for a 'field' day and they study ferns and flowers and birds. And they have physical culture exercises every morning and evening. Mrs. Lynde says she never heard

of such goings on and it all comes of having a lady teacher. But I think it must be splendid and I believe I shall find that Miss Stacy is a kindred spirit. (Ibid 158)

As with Mrs. Allan, Miss Stacy is designated a 'kindred spirit,' this time for her emphasis on creativity and on the wonder of their local natural environment (something Anne herself takes great pleasure from during her time in Avonlea). Such teaching activities were only just coming into popular use by the 1880s, but Kinnear outlines that although '[t]he classroom autonomy of a teacher was limited by the curriculum she had to teach; ... in her overall responsibility for the children's welfare and in her choice of teaching methods, she had considerable discretion' (*In Subordination* 150). This might help explain why Miss Stacy is able to engage in such 'modern' teaching methods, and also why they perhaps concern more traditional figures such as Mrs. Lynde who would have been unused to teachers taking such liberties with the assigned curricula. Even Marilla is portrayed as being suspicious of Miss Stacy's methods when she decides to put on a Christmas concert with the schoolchildren: '[i]t's just filling your heads up with nonsense and taking time that ought to be put on your lessons ... I don't approve of children's getting up concerts and racing about to practices. It makes them vain and forward and fond of gadding' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 122). Nevertheless, it is through Miss Stacy's unorthodox teaching methods that Anne's creativity and independent spirit are nurtured, fostering her own future interest in teaching and similarly inspiring other young people. It also important to note, as Gammel and Dutton make clear in their study, how both Miss Stacy – and Anne herself – 'exploit the pleasures of learning, giving their pedagogical innovations an added transgressive element in a pleasure-denying and duty-oriented society' (114).

In her study *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (1989), Rowbotham stresses the fact that 'it was essential for apprentice good girls to have an image constantly before them on which to model themselves' (25). It can be argued that both Mrs. Allan and Miss Stacy fulfil this role in Anne's childhood, Anne constantly referring throughout the novel to how her actions are centred around a desire to please Miss Stacy. When Anne is caught reading an inappropriate novel, she readily agrees with her teacher's opinion that such material is unsuitable for young girls: 'I didn't mind promising not to read any more like it, but it was *agonising* to give back that book without knowing how it turned out. But my love for Miss Stacy stood the test and I did. It's really wonderful, Marilla, what you can do when you're truly anxious to please a certain person' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 200). The positive moral influence of Miss Stacy – and her suitability as a role model for

young girls – is again evidenced when she arranges for a private discussion with her female students when they fully enter their adolescence:

[i]t's such a solemn thing to be almost fourteen, Marilla. Miss Stacy took all us girls who are in our teens down to the brook last Wednesday, and talked to us about it. She said we couldn't be too careful what habits we formed and what ideals we acquired in our teens, because by the time we were twenty our characters would be developed and the foundation laid for our whole future life. And she said if the foundation was shaky we could never build anything really worth while on it. (Ibid 199)

Again and again, Miss Stacy's moral uprightness is reiterated to emphasise her suitability to be shaping young minds, even if her teaching methods occasionally cause alarm for maternal figures such as Marilla and Mrs. Lynde. Even Montgomery's narrator appears to approve of Miss Stacy when they explain how

[i]n the new teacher she found another true and helpful friend. Miss Stacy was a bright, sympathetic young woman with the happy gift of winning and holding the affections of her pupils and bringing out the best that was in them mentally and morally. Anne expanded like a flower under this wholesome influence and carried home to the admiring Matthew and the critical Marilla glowing accounts of schoolwork and aims. (Ibid 159)

As a County inspector from 1877 writes in his annual report, '[t]he Teacher makes the School, and the Teacher alone ... Programmes, Exams and Text-Books may be valuable auxiliaries, but these are mere cyphers in comparison with the live Teacher' (qtd Stamp *Schools* 14).

The ending of *Anne of Green Gables* has long divided critics. Kornfeld and Jackson argue that Anne's decision to hold off on Redmond College to stay in Avonlea to teach and care for Marilla acts as a form of penance – a reinstatement of her feminine duties that must be undertaken before she can enter the 'traditionally male' world of university: '[t]his desire cannot be realised until she has done her duty in the matriarchal world. And even then, Anne cannot leave home' (150-1). However, in a far more emancipatory reading of Anne's predicament, Susan Drain argues that 'when Anne chooses to stay home, she is not dwindling into a girl. Instead she is continuing to construct her own female identity and future. It is neither conventionally feminine, nor masculine. It has room for both individual ambition and a commitment to others' (46-7). Indeed, in the text itself, Anne is keen to reassure Marilla (and by extension the reader) that 'I'm just as ambitious as ever. Only, I've changed the

object of my ambitions. I'm going to be a good teacher—and I'm going to save your eyesight' (Montgomery *Green Gables* 249). Her choice of career and familial responsibility is thus seen not as conscious decision to deny herself a chance to excel and better herself (academically speaking), but rather a natural extension of her desire to be useful, to be of assistance, to both Marilla and her local community. Indeed, Montgomery's decision to end the novel on Anne's contemplation of her future would seem to support this reading as Anne considers '[t]he joy of sincere work and worthy aspiration and congenial friendship were to be hers; nothing could rob her of her birthright of fancy or her ideal world of dreams. And there was always the bend in the road!' (Ibid 253). In reminding her readers of the 'joy of sincere work,' it could thus be argued that Anne's decision to postpone Redmond College ultimately acts not as a form of penance or a gender-bound 'duty,' but rather a natural extension of Anne's existing maternal instincts, and her desire to be 'of use' by teaching at the local school (a task that can be accomplished competently without a university education).

Rose-tinted ideals and the threat of spinsterhood

Anne of Avonlea has long been considered an inferior successor to *Anne of Green Gables* among both readers and critics. Epperly argues that 'as an active frolic that continues the good times of *Anne of Green Gables*, the sequel is a success; as an exploration of Anne's development and thinking, the book is a qualified failure' (*Fragrance* 41). Perhaps even more damningly, Waterston claims that '[a] glance at *Anne of Avonlea* shows a decrease of power ... L. M. Montgomery was not yet ready for a real study of late adolescence. Anne's romance builds no suspense' ('Lucy' 206). Some critics have tried to justify this change in tone and 'power' between the novels by seeing it as an inevitable outcome of the protagonist's development from girlhood to young womanhood: '[a]lthough still imaginative, impulsive, and inclined toward misadventures, the older Anne has become less a rebellious individualist, more a conformist, and therefore, less interesting' (Wiggins 49). Whilst I would agree that Anne does become less of an 'individualist' when she takes her teaching post and becomes a fully realised member of the local community, this section will attempt to explore why Montgomery might have felt such 'conformity' was necessary in order to meet cultural, societal and – perhaps most importantly – reader expectations. Epperly states that '*Anne of Green Gables* is about Anne; *Anne of Avonlea* is more about what Anne does' (*Fragrance* 41); a distinction that would, for the most part, appear to hold true. However, it is important

to consider how this increased emphasis on Anne's external rather than internal realities – what Anne *does* rather than what Anne *thinks* – might allow readers to gain a greater understanding of the alternating desires to both resist *and* conform that many Canadian women struggled with at the turn of the twentieth century.

This section will thus focus largely on Anne's work as a teacher in the novel as well as her 'work' within Green Gables itself, helping Marilla with household duties and the upbringing of the newly adopted twins Dora and Davy. Anne begins the novel 'half-past sixteen' (Montgomery *Avonlea* 9), awaiting the start of her first term's teaching with a mix of excitement and apprehension. As Montgomery's narrator makes clear, Anne's expectations about her potential influence on her students are still tinged with fancy and romance:

Anne had certain rose-tinted ideals of what a teacher might accomplish if she only went the right way about it; and she was in the midst of a delightful scene, forty years hence, with a famous personage . . . bowing low over her wrinkled hand and assuring her that it was she who had first kindled his ambition, and that all his success in life was due to the lessons she had instilled so long ago in Avonlea school. (Ibid 9-10)

Whilst it is clear that Anne desires to have even more of a positive influence than former teacher Miss Stacy had on her own upbringing, it is also perhaps telling given her later adoration of 'favourite' pupil Paul Irving that her idealised student is male. This passage also taps into the innate maternalism that Anne exhibits throughout the novel which gains special significance when related to the case of Paul Irving who lost his own mother at an early age. Anne acts as both teacher and surrogate mother, a role many female teachers found themselves taking regardless of their pupils' familial situations.

Throughout the novel Anne's teaching philosophy appears to be deliberately contrasted with that of former classmate and fellow teacher Jane Andrews who was in the same Queen's class as Anne and Gilbert and takes a post nearby at Newbridge. Jane's definition of 'good' teaching is based on pleasing her employers and gaining high honours: '[s]he meant to earn her salary fairly, please the trustees, and get her name on the School Inspector's roll of honour. Further ambitions Jane had none' (Ibid 30). Such aims are meant to seem hollow and self-serving when compared with Anne's more 'noble' teaching aims: 'I'd rather have my pupils love me and look back to me in after years as a real helper than be on the roll of honour' (Ibid 31). Later in the novel this comparison is reiterated when Anne writes to a 'Queen's Academy chum': '[t]eaching is really very interesting work ... Jane says

she thinks it is monotonous but I don't find it so. Something funny is almost sure to happen every day, and the children say such amusing things. Jane says she punishes her pupils when they make funny speeches, which is probably why she finds teaching monotonous' (Ibid 77). Jane's teaching is thus seen to be mechanical and satisfactory rather than inspiring, and lacking in the pleasure that Anne is able to find through emotional engagement with her students. Indeed, aware of the Avonlea pupils' affection for Anne, Mrs. Andrews (Jane's mother) feels it necessary to defend her daughter: 'Jane will do her duty, I've no doubt ... I don't suppose she'll tell the children quite so many fairy tales or spend so much time roaming about the woods with them. But she has her name on the Inspector's Roll of Honour and the Newbridge people are in a terrible state over her leaving' (Ibid 218). Montgomery thus appears to highlight the skills she sees as essential to the formulation of a good teacher (the novel itself is dedicated to her favourite former teacher Hattie Gordon Smith) and seems to suggest that professionally ambitious teachers such as Jane would always pale in comparison to more caring and inspiring figures epitomised by Anne Shirley and Miss Stacy.

Another way Montgomery distinguishes between the differing teaching practices of Anne and Jane is through the issue of corporal punishment. Although this issue has been discussed in greater depth in an article by Gammel and Dutton, it is still worthwhile to consider it briefly here as it acts as the defining moment of Anne's teaching experiences in the first half of the novel. In the novel's fourth chapter 'Different Opinions,' Jane freely admits her plan to enforce order through 'a good whipping' (Ibid 30) as and when required. This shocks and appalls Anne who (at this point in the novel at least) wholeheartedly believes that

I could *never* whip a child ... I don't believe in it *at all*. Miss Stacy never whipped any of us and she had perfect order; and Mr. Phillips was always whipping and he had no order at all. No, if I can't get along without whipping I shall not try to teach school. There are better ways of managing. I shall try to win my pupils' affections and then they will *want* to do what I tell them. (Ibid)

However, even Gilbert, Anne's future love-interest, cannot share in Anne's high ideals stating that '[c]orporal punishment as a last resort is to be my rule' (Ibid). In fact it is Anne's neighbour Mr. Harrison who comes closest to the truth and foreshadows Anne's inevitable fall from her highly-flown values: '[w]ell, well, we'll see. Someday when you get riled up ... and people with hair like yours are desperate apt to get riled ... you'll forget all your pretty little notions and give some of them a whaling. You're too young to be teaching anyhow ...

far too young and childish' (Ibid 33). This is precisely what happens later in the novel when Anne suffers from a 'Jonah day,' but before turning to the 'Jonah day' itself, it is worthwhile to dwell on Mr. Harrison's assertion that Anne is 'too young' to teach. Whilst it was common for girls of Anne's age to be employed as teachers in Canada, Montgomery herself seems eager to highlight the potential dangers of teaching your former peers: unlike Gilbert and Jane who are teaching in nearby settlements, Anne actually ends up teaching pupils with whom she was previously taught herself under Miss Stacy's tutelage. However, it is unclear whether Montgomery wished to confirm Mr. Harrison's claims that teenage girls were not mature enough to teach, or whether she was instead suggesting that Anne's high ideals were what made her 'immature' and that, once freed from these, she could still act as an engaging and inspiring figure to the young people of Avonlea.

The Ontario Teacher's Manual of 1915 states that '[i]n administering punishments, and especially corporal punishment, the teacher must bear in mind two things: first, that they must never be administered in anger; and secondly, that their frequency will be in proportion to the weakness of his management of the school' (qtd Cochrane 71). The very fact that Anne administers corporal punishment to Anthony Pye 'in anger' because of her 'Jonah day' is precisely why she is so ashamed of her actions:

Anne, conscience-stricken, dropped the pointer and told Anthony to go to his seat. She sat down at her desk feeling ashamed, repentant, and bitterly mortified. Her quick anger was gone and she would have given much to have been able to seek relief in tears. So all her boasts had come to this ... she had actually whipped one of her pupils. How Jane would triumph! And how Mr. Harrison would chuckle! But worse than this, bitterest thought of all, she had lost her last chance of winning Anthony Pye. Never would he like her now. (Montgomery *Avonlea* 88)

Much to Anne's chagrin, it is the very act of whipping Anthony that finally wins her his respect. Early in the novel, Anthony claims that 'girl teachers are no good' (Ibid 33) and refuses to recognise Anne's authority in the classroom. However, after the incident Rachel Lynde visits Anne and announces

'[w]ell, Anne, I guess you've won over Anthony Pye, that's what. He says he believes you are some good after all, even if you are a girl. Says that whipping you gave him was "just as good as a man's."'

'I never expected to win him by whipping him, though,' said Anne, a little mournfully, feeling that her ideals had played her false somewhere. (Ibid 90-1)

Here Montgomery's narrator appears to be poking fun at the heroine, making Anne's apparent fall from grace humorous rather than devastating and reasserting that Gilbert's middle-ground teaching philosophy – corporal punishment as a last resort – between the two extreme poles of Anne and Jane is indeed the right one. As Gammel and Dutton state, 'Anne's transgression, namely, the violation of her own professional ideals, the outburst of anger after a bad night's sleep, ultimately turns into a *felix culpa*' (111). Significantly, Gammel and Dutton take this argument on corporal punishment further, arguing that

[i]f the explosive temper humanises Montgomery's otherwise perfect teacher, the recurring patterns of such bouts of anger and aggression still constitute an important psychological and sociological subtext, calling the romance plot of the school novel at least partly into question. Frustration and rage voiced by teachers against pupils hint at negative social realities (gender imbalance, low remuneration, low status, overwork) that teachers were often not able to change. Strict discipline and order may indeed have been a pretext for release of sadistic anger. (Ibid 117)

Whilst it would be hard to justify such a claim when studying *Anne of Avonlea* in isolation from Montgomery's other novels, the underlying frustration with their profession that both Anne and Jane voice at various points throughout the novel does seem to illustrate an awareness that the day-to-day existence for the majority of Canada's female teachers was far from the 'rose-tinted ideal' Anne dreams of in the novel's opening.

Indeed, Montgomery's representation of Anne emphasises that the value of professional ideals and aspirations lies not in their being attained, but in the act of striving to reach them. In a conversation with 'kindred spirit' Mrs. Allan, Anne bemoans the fact that she has failed to live up to her ideals when it came to her teaching and Mrs. Allan provides a much-needed moral reassurance: '[w]e must have ideals and try to live up to them, even if we never quite succeed. Life would be a sorry business without them. With them it's grand and great. Hold fast to your ideals, Anne' (Montgomery *Avonlea* 115). Anne's work as a teacher thus becomes symbolic of a much larger life philosophy. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Montgomery's narrator indicates to the reader that despite her failure-turned-success with Anthony Pye, she still manages to have the kind of influence on her pupils that she could only daydream about at the novel's start:

she had taught them, more by her own sweet personality than by all her careful precepts, that it was good and necessary in the years that were before them to live their lives finely and

graciously, holding fast to truth and courtesy and kindness, keeping aloof from all that savoured of falsehood and meanness and vulgarity. They were, perhaps, all unconscious of having learned such lessons; but they would remember and practice them long after they had forgotten the capital of Afghanistan and the dates of the Wars of the Roses. (Ibid 219-20)

Whilst Montgomery is doubtless romanticising Anne's impact, the fact that she feels the need to idealise the teaching profession to this degree is still telling and seemingly reflects her own beliefs about the positive influences a good teacher could have on her pupils. It is also interesting to note that, much like her own role-model Miss Stacy, Anne only lasts two years at Avonlea's schoolhouse before moving on to better prospects, an act which accurately mirrors the nomadic nature of the teaching profession in this period. However, this decision also works to re-emphasise Anne's earlier ambitiousness; finally choosing to privilege her desire to better herself and learn over the ongoing care of her local community.

As mentioned briefly earlier, this study will now focus on the maternalism that appears to be inherent not only in Montgomery's depiction of female teachers, but in Anne's home life as well. Anne's affection for pupil Paul Irving is clear from their very first meeting: 'Anne realized that he was unlike other children anywhere, and that there was a soul subtly akin to her own gazing at her out of the very dark blue eyes that were watching her so intently' (Ibid 35-6). Paul and Anne bond over their mutual creativity and Anne works tirelessly to support and develop Paul's imagination, perhaps due to the waning of her own (a fact that critics such as Epperly and Waterston have focused upon). However, by making Paul one of her 'favourites' (Ibid 82) and providing him with encouragement and emotional support, she takes on an almost maternal role, something Paul's own father notes when he is finally introduced to Anne near the novel's close:

I think that your influence has been just what he needed. Mother is one of the best and dearest of women; but her robust, matter-of-fact Scotch common sense could not always understand a temperament like my laddie's. What was lacking in her you have supplied. Between you, I think Paul's training in these two past years has been as nearly ideal as a motherless boy's could be. (Ibid 200)

Paul's status as a 'motherless boy' enables Anne to take on this maternal role to a greater extent than she does with her other pupils; frequently visiting him outside the schoolhouse and sharing meals with Paul and his grandmother. Through her nurturing of Paul, Anne therefore proves not only her superior teaching abilities – through her emotional attachment

and sincere interest in her students – but also that she has all the qualities desirable in a good mother.

In her study of the *Anne* novels and what she refers to as the ‘culture of Imperial Motherhood,’ Devereux argues that, especially in the later novels ‘motherhood is her [Anne’s] ambition, and reaching it is her story’ (‘Not One’ 121). Whilst many feminist critics have reacted negatively to Anne’s eventual decision later in the series to stop teaching (after her time at Redmond) to settle down and start a family with Gilbert Blythe, Devereux argues that such a decision was inevitable given the cultural expectations of the period and that

the Anne books serve to remind us that what is still rather inaccurately called ‘first-wave’ feminism is characterised in English Canada not necessarily by suffragism, and, after the 1890s, not by the ‘new woman,’ but by the idea of woman as imperial ‘mother of the race,’ something Anne Shirley arguably realises more fully than any of her fictional contemporaries. (Ibid 125)

Although Anne is still working as a teacher for the majority of *Anne of Avonlea* and her feelings for Gilbert are still largely subconscious and repressed (though evident to the reader), it could be argued that Montgomery’s extensive focus on the more maternal elements of Anne’s profession as well as her work in the home helping Marilla care for the newly inherited twins, Dora and Davy, still show this emphasis on Anne’s suitability for future motherhood.

When Marilla first mentions the possibility of taking responsibility for the twins from an ailing family member she makes it clear that such a commitment will require a great deal of ‘work’ for both of them: ‘[y]ou needn’t look so delighted, Anne. It will mean a good deal of extra work for you. I can’t sew a stitch on account of my eyes, so you’ll have to see to the making and mending of their clothes. And you don’t like sewing’ (Montgomery *Avonlea* 54). When Davy turns out to be a troublesome child, constantly getting into scrapes and mishaps (much as Anne did herself in *Green Gables*), Anne suggests sending him to school but Marilla refuses, stating no child should be sent to school until they are at least seven. Anne thus concludes that they ‘must try to reform Davy at home then ... With all his faults he’s really a dear little chap. I can’t help loving him’ (Ibid 76). Significantly, almost as much space is given over in the novel to outline the ways Anne and Marilla try to ‘reform’ Davy as is spent recounting Anne’s time teaching. As the narrator proudly asserts, ‘[Anne] was much better fitted for the task than Marilla, for she remembered her own childhood and had an

instinctive understanding of the curious ideas that seven-year-olds sometimes get about matters that are, of course, very plain and simple to grown up people' (Ibid 118-9). Here Anne's age is an asset when carrying out the work of 'reforming' Davy, allowing her to engage and understand his feelings and responses on a more equal, companionable level, and leaving Marilla to fulfill the more traditional authoritarian maternal role that Davy needs to help discipline his wayward impulses. By the end of the novel even Mrs. Rachel Lynde has noticed a change in Davy: '[w]ell, Anne's methods seem to have worked fairly well with Davy ... He is a reformed character, that's what' (Ibid 202). Anne's abilities to teach and help mould and 'improve' young minds outside the confines of the schoolhouse are seen to be just as worthy of praise as her efforts within it, and would seem to support Devereux's argument that Montgomery's heroine can be seen – even in these earlier novels – to show potential as an 'imperial mother of the race.'

However, whilst critics such as Devereux argue that an increased focus on maternalism and more conservative ideals is almost inevitable given the culture of Montgomery's time, other critics have still seen this shift in Anne's character as disappointing and this has led many to question Montgomery's status as a 'feminist' author. For example, in *The Fragrance of Sweet-Grass*, Epperly argues that '[i]n keeping with her first-page day-dreams of inspiring some male pupil who later recalls and praises her, Anne's life ambitions have become quiet and small and harmless' (43). Epperly focuses on the scene where Gilbert and Anne discuss their futures as evidence of the dwindling of Anne's ambition:

Gilbert had finally made up his mind that he was going to be a doctor.

'... I want to do my share of honest, real work in the world, Anne ... add a little to the sum of human knowledge that all the good men have been accumulating since it began. The folks who lived before me have done so much for me that I want to show my gratitude by doing something for the folks who will live after me. It seems to me that is the only way a fellow can get square with his obligations to the race.'

'I'd like to add some beauty to life,' said Anne dreamily. 'I don't exactly want to make people *know* more ... though I know that *is* the noblest ambition ... but I'd love to make them have a pleasanter time because of me ... to have some little joy or happy thought that would never have existed if I hadn't been born.' (Montgomery *Avonlea* 51-2)

Whilst this is an admirable aim and something that Montgomery herself seemed to heartily endorse, as Epperly argues these ambitions are decidedly 'quieter' in scope than Gilbert's,

and reflect a more conservative and passive form of femininity that was still highly attractive to potential suitors in this period. As Epperly outlines:

Gilbert stands for what is supposedly superior: the world, work, knowledge, struggle, advancement, honour, strength, action, *male*; Anne stands for their supposedly inferior opposites: domesticity, pleasure, feeling, effortless, complacency, self-indulgence, weakness, reaction, *female*. Montgomery's largely unchallenged stereotypes are at the root of the book's problems because prescriptions and conventional romance seem so often to go together. If conventional romance did not require such rigid boundaries of gender, Gilbert and Anne could together explore the collective values they split unevenly. (*Fragrance* 44)

Here I would argue Epperly is perhaps oversimplifying a rather complex – if highly gendered – distinction, as whilst Anne still retains her earlier sense of romance and creativity, she is far from 'effortless' or 'complacent' when undertaking the tutelage of her pupils, and could still be seen to largely uphold the Protestant work ethic that predominated in the period. I would instead argue that due to Anne's eventual destiny as Gilbert's wife and mother of his children, her more 'masculine' characteristics such as her ambition and competitiveness (which were a main focus of *Green Gables*) must be suppressed in order to emphasise her more maternal and feminine traits, but these do not leave her free of all agency and personal ambition.

Whilst Anne's 'ambitions' are still present, as is evidenced by her eventual decision to attend Redmond College to get her BA, it is perhaps significant that it is Marilla, not Anne who suggests such actions. As Anne outlines when contemplating her decision one evening, 'I've put out a lot of little roots these two years ... and when I'm pulled up they're going to hurt a great deal. But it's best to go, I think, and, as Marilla says, there's no good reason why I shouldn't. I must get out all my ambitions and dust them' (Montgomery *Avonlea* 200-1). Anne's 'ambition' is still there but has grown 'dusty' in her two years teaching, suggesting that whilst such work is emotionally gratifying it does not provide the intellectual stimulation that she remains capable of. Regardless, it is important to note, that even with her decision to attend Redmond, she has lost the competitive drive that led her in *Green Gables* to fight Gilbert tooth and nail for every honour:

'I s'pose you'll be scooping up all the honors that are lying round loose at Redmond.'

'I may try for one or two of them,' confessed Anne, 'but I don't care so much for things like that as I did two years ago. What I want to get out of my college course is some

knowledge of the best way of living life and doing the most and best with it. I want to learn to understand and help other people and myself.'

Mr. Harrison nodded.

'That's the idea exactly. That's what college ought to be for, instead of for turning out a lot of B.A.'s, so chock full of book-learning and vanity that there ain't room for anything else. You're all right. College won't be able to do you much harm, I reckon.' (Ibid 234-5)

By stating that college won't do Anne 'much harm' the suggestion appears to be that Anne has matured from the earlier novel and finally learnt the feminine qualities of modesty and humility. These were both traits desired in good wives and mothers, and Montgomery's decision to sacrifice Anne's ambitiousness and competitive nature to highlight these might, as Epperly argues, emphasise the limits that the 'conventional romance' structure placed on the representation of young heroines. Indeed, as Mrs. Andrews argues within the novel, 'I don't see that Anne needs any more education. She'll probably be marrying Gilbert Blythe, if his infatuation for her lasts till he gets through college, and what good will Latin and Greek do her then? If they taught you at college how to manage a man there might be some sense in her going' (Ibid 218). Given Anne's eventual marriage to Gilbert shortly after her graduation from Redmond, one could argue that Mrs. Andrews' argument contains more than a grain of truth, and draws attention to a fact that Montgomery herself was painfully aware of.

Just as telling perhaps is the fact that the second half of the novel is almost entirely focused on the plot of Miss Lavender, her stalled romance with Paul Irving's father, and their eventual reconciliation and marriage at the book's close. Miss Lavender is portrayed in the novel as another of Anne's 'kindred spirits' due to her love of life, plentiful imagination and good humour; something she has managed to retain throughout her adult life (she is now in her forties.) Given the similarities in temperament and imagination between the two, it could be argued that Miss Lavender acts as Anne's shadow-self, illustrating one possible future for the novel's heroine. However, for all her enthusiasm and affection, Miss Lavender's life still remains unfulfilled due to the loss of her former suitor, Stephen Irving: '[w]hen I was seventeen, Anne, I didn't think forty-five would find me a white-haired little old maid with nothing but dreams to fill my life' (Ibid 175). Whilst far from bitter, Miss Lavender nevertheless appears to show sadness at the fact she has 'nothing but dreams to fill [her] life,' suggesting she mourns her lack of a husband and child. Anne seems aware that she could end up sharing Miss Lavender's fate (still showing no romantic interest in Gilbert at this point in the series), but appears to embrace it with pragmatism: '[t]hen I shall die an old maid ... I

daresay it isn't the hardest death by any means' (Ibid 205). It is important to note that many of Anne's female role models at this point in the series are successful, independent and emotionally satisfied single women (Marilla, Miss Stacy and Miss Lavender), which might help explain this outlook. However, in the case of both Marilla and Miss Lavender, both are seen to find *greater* fulfilment through either marriage or the adoption or nurturing of young children, suggesting an element of naivety to Anne's belief that she will be content to die an old maid. The fact that Montgomery chooses to end the novel with Gilbert's thoughts rather than Anne's also seems to reinforce Anne's continued naivety about her future, Gilbert and the narrator seemingly more aware of the novel's adherence to the conventions of literary romance than its own protagonist: 'Gilbert wisely said nothing more; but in his silence he read the history of the next four years in the light of Anne's remembered blush. Four years of earnest, happy work ... and then the guerdon of a useful knowledge gained and a sweet heart won' (Ibid 240).

It could thus be argued that Montgomery's decision to postpone the romantic plot of the *Anne* series throughout *Anne of Avonlea* to allow Anne to focus on her career was actually rather subversive given both the social expectations of the period regarding young women *and* the conventions of the domestic romance genre. However, as this study has tried to illustrate, for all her apparent independence and professionalism, Anne Shirley remains closely tied to both Green Gables and her local community, thus allowing her to continue to hone and develop the maternal and feminine traits that will serve her well as Gilbert's future wife. As Epperly outlines, 'Anne does not instantly swap the old tortured, chivalric romance ideal for the equally prescriptive of love and marriage, nor does she immediately bury her identity in Gilbert's. The immolation comes, but Montgomery delays it for as long as she can' (*Fragrance* 38). Montgomery's own reticence to 'marry off' Anne is well documented in her journals, and there is much to suggest that she felt pressure from her readership to resolve the romantic tension between Anne and Gilbert, finally bowing to public demand in *Anne of the Island*: 'I am not good at depicting sentiment – I can't do it well. Yet there *must* be sentiment in this book. I must at least engage Anne for I'll never be given any rest until I do' (Rubio and Waterston Journals 2: 133). As Kornfield and Jackson highlight in their study of the female *bildungsroman* in nineteenth century America, authors were largely 'bound by the constraints of domestic fiction and the need to create a facsimile of life. The parameters of this world are set by a social reality over which even an author cannot exercise complete control' (151). In light of such comments, and the public pressure Montgomery faced,

perhaps the fact that *Anne of Avonlea* was even written at all in its present form is impressive. Despite extensive focus on the Miss Lavender plot and Anne's 'reforming' of Davy it still remains one of the few sustained literary representations of the Canadian female teacher within this period and allowed young girls in the period (and still today) to imagine – however fleetingly – destinies for themselves outside the boundaries of marriage and motherhood.

Women's Work and the First World War

In the pamphlet *War and Women* (1914), author and suffragist Flora MacDonald Denison argues that '[w]oman's thought and action have always been constructive,' and that 'she demands not only protection of her young but the conservation of human life by a more humane civilisation' (6). Presented to the Canadian Suffrage Association, Denison's paper is suitably combative, claiming that '[w]hen we studied history, what was the keynote of it all? Battles, battles, battles' (Ibid 5). In order to rectify this, Denison explains how 'Venus must be the star in the ascendant and the mothers of the race must assist in tracing out a new code of ethics' (Ibid). When explaining why women desire and indeed *deserve* such a right, Denison asks '[w]hat now of woman's place being in the home, and what will home be with the darling boy rotting in the trench, the devoted husband crippled for life and the brother diseased and ruined'; as '[f]or every man killed there is also killed a wife – a mother and a family of children' (Ibid 6). Whilst Denison's arguments might seem particularly adversarial given that they were made at the start of the war when public opinion was largely behind the conflict, their larger purpose as an endorsement of the need for woman suffrage must be taken into account, as well as the fact that, since many believed the war would only last a few months, Denison most likely wanted to strike whilst the iron was still hot. However, we once again see a strong emphasis on women's roles as mothers and wives, something which remained prevalent throughout the war, even when women began to take on more traditionally masculine roles "substituting" for soldiers as the conflict lengthened and more and more young Canadian men were sent to the front. Through an examination of literature written during and following the war up until the mid-1920s, this chapter will survey the depiction of women's war work in a variety of novels from authors such as J. G. Sime, Nellie McClung, and Gertrude Arnold. It will investigate whether women's war work was depicted as an emotionally rewarding and emancipatory pursuit which offered a new sense of agency for both the single and married woman, or whether it was instead portrayed as a way in which women could fulfil their sense of duty and service – not only to their nation, but to their loved ones overseas.

In *Dubious Glory* (2000), one of the first extensive surveys of Canadian literature of the two world wars, Dagmar Novak describes the fiction produced during and shortly after the First World War as remarkably consistent in both tone and style: '[r]hetorical, romantic, idealistic, and national ... [these novels] are written for an Anglo-Saxon, Protestant community which enthusiastically embraced the cause of the Allied war effort in 1914' (7).

Novak argues that these novels fulfil a two-fold purpose: ‘to celebrate Canada’s war effort, and to evangelise, to communicate the power of faith in God and of reliance on basic human virtues. Theirs is a story of triumph and heroism, a sermon of optimism’ (Ibid). However, for Novak this ‘jingoistic patriotism’ does not mean these works should be dismissed, as they still remain valid as cultural documents which ‘reflect the beliefs and values of many Canadians, including those who enlisted in the Canadian forces to serve at the front’ (Ibid).

Another reason the novels of this era have been dismissed by literary critics is due to their tendency to reinforce the propaganda that was already saturating the Canadian public consciousness. The propagandist role of fiction was freely acknowledged, with one prominent Canadian publisher admitting that ‘the decision to accept or turn down a manuscript dealing with the war was based in part on its usefulness from a propaganda standpoint’ (Eayrs). Given the limited contact Canadian soldiers had with their family and friends due to the distance between the home- and battle-fronts, military censorship proved highly effective, allowing much of the Canadian public to believe in the positive aspects of the war for far longer than their European counterparts. As Novak emphasises, ‘[t]hat the Canadian novelists clung for so long to the rhetoric of unselfish fury and the humanitarian crusade makes them stand out’ (50), whilst Peter Webb has argued that ‘for ... authors not yet attuned to the existential tenets of modernism – ideology (the abstract spiritual, moral and imperialist ideals directed towards the prosecution of the war) *was* reality’ (42).²⁰ When discussing these novels’ American counterparts Stanley Cooperman has argued that ‘[w]e cannot understand the effect of World War I on literature, and the effect of World War I literature on the reading public, by limiting ourselves to the more objective work produced at the end of the twenties and during the early thirties’ (241). Whether the Canadian novels of the immediate post-war era are indeed less ‘objective’ than the novels of the late 1920s and ‘30s will form one strand of this chapter’s debate, as through these earlier novels’ emphasis on women’s war work and their detailing of women’s desire to be of *use* during the war years, they often portray perspectives that would have appeared subversive or even radical at the time of their publication.

Critics such as Amy Tector and Donna Coates have highlighted the emancipatory potential prevalent in many of these Canadian war novels (especially those written by

²⁰ This chapter will not focus in any great depth on the contested “modernism” of Canadian Great War fiction. For more detailed discussion of this debate see Hill 58-76.

women), claiming that ‘amid the chaos occasioned by war, writers insist that the time is ripe to restructure society, to create a “new world order” which incorporates women’s voices and values into the design’ (Coates ‘Myrmidons’ 115). In ‘Myrmidons to Insubordinates’ (2001) Coates argues that women lacked the literary or historical precedents necessary ‘to tell them how to “occupy” themselves in wartime,’ therefore ‘they are characters without texts,’ ensuring that ‘war absents women, render[ing] them unimportant in the face of mighty concepts and the male anguish of battles’ (123). Nevertheless, by focusing in her study on texts which draw attention to this marginalisation, Coates suggest that these female war writers ‘are war profiteers, seizing the opportunity occasioned by war to vanquish women’s subordinate status. In their texts they insist on bringing an end to the image of women as care-givers and nurturers, and forcefully reiterate that women deserve a place in society alongside men, not as their subalterns’ (124). Whilst I would argue that within this period the image of women nurturers is still very prevalent, new working roles for women are also illustrated, and it is important to stress that through the redefinition of the traditional care-giving roles as ways to do one’s duty or service, these roles were elevated and given even greater social status.

Given the pervasiveness of such celebratory, nationalistic rhetoric we must not overlook the fact that ‘[p]ropaganda had constructed not only women’s conception of the War, but women’s conception of themselves in relation to it’ (Tylee 64). Although Claire Tylee’s study focuses on British literature I would argue that her comments can equally be applied to Canadian women’s war writing. The novels under discussion in this section are all written by women, and it is worth taking a brief moment to consider the significance of this, as war, even today, is still largely regarded as a masculine zone within which women must consistently negotiate (and re-negotiate) their position. In ‘Not So Quiet in No-Woman’s Land’ (1993), Margaret Higonnet discusses how war as a literary subject is seen as a ‘politically reserved terrain’ (207) upon which female writers ‘trespass’ when they articulate ‘knowledge of a “line of battle” presumed to be directly known and lived only by men’ (206). In choosing to write *about* war, women are thus seen to be acting treacherously, as ‘a woman ... had not been called upon to make parallel sacrifices, from this point of view, had no right to criticise the very system that protected her’ (Ibid 207). This might help us understand why so many of the female novelists from this period choose to set their stories on the home-front, venturing to the front lines only momentarily for brief episodes of adventure or suspense. Nevertheless, it was because of this presumed exclusion from writing about the front that so

many of these authors were able to create such convincing and nuanced portrayals of life for those left behind; the authors' exclusion from the action on the battle-front (and perhaps even their frustration at this fact) mirroring the experience many women felt when they sent their sons and lovers abroad to fight.

Higonnet then goes on to discuss how 'war interrupts the social syntax. When war breaks out, it defies understanding' (Ibid 211). This lack of understanding causes people to 'fill the discursive gap with propaganda and new (old) clichés,' helping to reinforce the sense of a 'gap between the silent "knowledge" of the battlefront and the ignorant wordiness of the home front' (Ibid). Critics such as Coates, Tector, and Higonnet have all attempted to emphasise that this 'ignorant wordiness' of the home front, whilst lacking clear details of the front lines, still holds great value in articulating female experience. Indeed, as Coates reinforces in her work on women's war writing, '[o]ne of the tactics Canadian women writers employ to demonstrate that women are not men's inferiors is to show them "in action," functioning in the workplace as effective teachers, farmers, and shopkeepers' ('War' 1190). In *Remapping the Home Front* (2002), Debra Cohen bemoans the tendency to 'homogenise women's war writing ... [and] underestimate the range and complexity of home-front rhetoric and misrepresent the resultant ambivalences of home-front texts' (2). For this reason, this chapter will focus on novels which show women "in action" in their much-politicised positions as munitions workers and nurses, but also in their less-lauded (yet still invaluable) roles in rural areas where wives and daughters took on the work of farmhands and labourers in order to keep farms and homesteads running whilst the male members of the community were absent. It will also focus on the ways women's maternal instincts were given new purpose through caring for war orphans and through the adoption of "godsons" in the trenches. These women offered emotional support to their new "godsons" who in turn became surrogate sons for the women themselves, many of whom had already lost a son to the war.

In fact, the very 'ambivalences' Cohen outlines are the reason why, in the words of Margaret and Patrice Higonnet, '[w]e must beware of interpreting women's involvement in the war simplistically through the image of the Other, a figure so often understood to be a passive victim without responsibility for constructing the relationship' (39). Far from the passive figure left waiting for the return of her father/husband/brother, the female protagonists in these texts are marked out by their *activity*. Women are constantly depicted at

work: nursing, making munitions, farming, fundraising, knitting and even, on occasion, writing. As Dorothy Goldman articulates:

[b]ecause their wartime experiences were unique, women felt the need to record, to provide an accurate and reliable account; but equally they needed to understand their experiences and to interpret them, to discover the significance of the experience imaginatively. And so we get the emphasis on truth, experience and memory, alongside the perceived need to write stories, novels and poems. ('Introduction' 10)

By allowing their protagonists to actively write their own stories, these female wartime authors foregrounded the value of their own work as novelists, providing catharsis for many of the female readers who could sympathise with the hopes and fears of the novels' characters, whilst also inscribing the value of female experience and labour into the literature of the First World War.

The "double helix" is a metaphor which has proved especially useful to critics such as Margaret and Patrice Higonnet when contemplating the status of women's work during wartime. The double helix

evokes the paradoxical progress and regress that has characterised women's status and representation during the two world wars. When the homefront is mobilised, women may be allowed to move 'forward' in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield – pre-eminently a male domain – takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation does change, relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations. (M Higonnet 'Introduction' 6)

Higonnet and Higonnet argue that women's status remains subordinate in relation to this new hyper-masculine role that the male population undertakes, ensuring that male activity and work are still privileged over female. It is also significant that war propaganda served to constantly remind female war workers that these new war-work roles were only being undertaken "for the duration" and were in no way seen as a permanent transition – that such work was still clearly defined as "masculine" and to be naturally carried out *by men*. Thus, as Higonnet and Higonnet articulate, '[t]he image of the double helix allows us to see that, although the roles of men and women vary greatly from culture to culture, their relationship is in some sense constant ... The actual nature of the social activity is not as critical as the cultural perception of its relative value in a gender-linked structure of subordination' (34).

This chapter will attempt to explore some of these ambiguities by uncovering the ways in which the novels' protagonists still appear to idealise the sacrifices of their male counterparts even as they revel in their newly acquired opportunities and freedoms.

Finally, it is important to note that many women did not support the war, and 'the image of the patriotic clubwoman and sock-knitter is not fully representative of the experience of Canadian women' (B Roberts 60). Many women were pacifists and vocally protested against the war at its outbreak, though many, most famously Flora MacDonald Denison and Nellie McClung, soon lost their indignation once their own sons enlisted. Nevertheless, despite the International Peace Conference at The Hague in 1915 and the resultant founding of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), very few pacifist novels were published during or immediately following the Great War. Nicola Beauman has argued that the pacifist novel was 'a genre which, perhaps surprisingly, was not much favoured by women – surprisingly because many women were anti-war and had the gift and opportunity to write; unsurprisingly, because few men would read their pacifist outburst (and indeed, few men would publish it)' (146). Canada did produce one significant pacifist novel in this period, Francis Marion Beynon's *Aleta Dey* (1919), which was only published after Beynon's vocal anti-war rhetoric had forced her to relocate to the United States. However, Coates has argued that many of the canonical war fictions written by women are 'in subtle ways, pleas for peace, instructions on how to avoid war. Although women writers cannot fight war itself, they can expose war mentality: they point to the dangers of propaganda, and make their characters cognizant of the hype generated by war' ('Myrmidons' 135). The extent to which these narratives may (however subtly) question and explore the reasoning behind the war will thus provide another thread of this chapter's exploration of the representation of women's war work, especially given that women's status as "natural peacekeepers" remained a central focus of the maternal feminist movement across this period.

Wartime Nursing

In her study of French literature of the First World War, Darrow outlines how ‘the trench-fighter’s story became *the* story of the First World War, not necessarily because it was the majority story, but because it made sense out of the war ... installed its meaning – dehumanising horror but also patriotic sacrifice – in a popular consciousness’ (4). Darrow argues that although women played an active role in the international war effort in Europe through their work at the front as nurses and VADs, their personal sacrifice and heroism was rarely translated into fiction or cultural myth with the same rhetoric of national glory or “honour” that features so predominantly in tales of (male) soldiers fighting in the trenches. Although Darrow’s work is concerned exclusively with French literature, this section will make reference to some of her study’s analytical concepts and motifs, applying them to an English-Canadian context to emphasise the similar (and, at times, starkly different) experiences of Canadian nurses from their European counterparts during the First World War and how these were illustrated and reconstructed in the literature of the period.

The association of wartime *activity* with masculinity (as opposed to the supposed inactivity of those left on the home front) ensured that wartime nurses, whose pursuits were traditionally tied to an ideology of female nurturance and care, were forced to negotiate a position and status for themselves in the new hyper-male environment of war, whilst still retaining the distinctly *feminine* skills that defined their nursing role. This might help explain why the nurse rarely takes centre stage in the war-related fiction of this period (Gertrude Arnold’s *Sister Anne!* is an obvious exception). Although the fictional wartime nurse largely retained the qualities of self-sacrifice and deference that were prioritised before the war, it is also interesting to note the increased sexualisation of this figure in the early twentieth century and the increasingly negative perception of the ‘husband hunting’ nurse who used her close proximity to soldiers and male patients to secure a partner.

Margaret Ecker, a Canadian war correspondent posted in Europe during the First World War famously proclaimed ‘I think Canadian Nurses are the cream of our womanhood’ (qtd Gibbon and Mathewson vi). Indeed, by the end of the war, Canada’s nurses had proved themselves able to work alongside their European sisters to fight a common enemy, and were rewarded for their valour with a series of increasingly uplifting representations in the novels and periodical short fiction of the era. The Canadian Army Nursing Corps (CANC) had been formed in 1901 following the Boer War, although it is important to note that when war broke

out in 1914, the Corps consisted of only five nurses with fewer than 30 reservists (Allard 153, Ross-Kerr 110). However, following the announcement of war, women flocked in their hundreds to do their duty and help protect the Empire. As Janet Ross-Kerr outlines, '[t]he number of Canadian Nurses who joined the Canadian Army Medical Corps in World War I was 3,141, and of these 2,504 served in the Overseas Military Forces of Canada. In total, 46 nurses lost their lives in military service during this war' (111). Clearly these women felt an immense sense of duty to protect and care for not only their Canadian brothers who had been sent overseas, but also for the European men fighting alongside them. In 'Caregiving on the Front' (2005) Geneviève Allard discusses how '[a]t the turn of the twentieth century, the front was perceived as an exclusively male domain. In principle, women had neither the skills not the qualities required to practise their profession there' (153). Perhaps it was for this very reason that so many Canadian women cherished the opportunity to enter this predominantly male arena and prove their mettle.

Nevertheless, both Darrow and Higonnet have been eager to emphasise that 'to represent nursing as a collective female war experience would raise the spectre of an alternative feminine war, undermining or even opposing the national war effort' (Darrow 161). During the war, the potentially subversive facets of female war work would have been a source of great anxiety, and many modern critics have attempted to re-read women's wartime endeavours through this lens. However, Sandra Gilbert's oft-cited 'Soldier's Heart' (1983) is frequently criticised for too-boldly asserting the emancipatory qualities of women's war work.²¹ Despite its unabashed enthusiasm, I would argue Gilbert's analysis accurately conveys the exhilaration and sense of opportunity most frequently depicted in novels written during and immediately after the war in Canada. She argues that '[t]he figure of the nurse ultimately takes on a majesty which hints that she is mistress rather than slave, goddess rather than supplicant. After all, when men are immobilised and dehumanised, it is only these women who possess the old (matriarchal) formulas for survival' ('Soldier's' 211). Gilbert also refers to the 'secret glamour' of wartime nurses, claiming that 'her [the nurse's] evolution into active, autonomous, transcendent subject is associated with his [the soldier's] devolution into passive, dependent, immanent medical object' (Ibid). Whilst I would argue that Gilbert is over-emphasising the status of the wartime nurse who, as already discussed was still forced to rely on feminised traits of service and caregiving in order to justify her

²¹ See Claire Tylee's "'Madness Run Riot' – The Great War and Women's Resistance to Militarism.' *Women's Studies International Forum* 11.3 (1988): 199-210, for a sustained dismantling of Gilbert's central arguments in 'Soldier's Heart.'

place in the masculine war-zone, these comments suggest that authors would have had to be particularly sensitive in their portrayal of nurses to avoid rendering the heroic soldier figures of the war ‘in-valid’ and well as ‘invalid’ in their fictions (Ibid 209).

The value of good housekeeping and ‘regimental buttons’

One of the most distinguishing features of the Canadian medical presence during the war was the fact that ‘[o]f all the nurses on active duty during World War I, only the Canadian nurses were under the direct control of the army and held a military rank’ (Allard 158). With access to better pay and the increased respect associated with their roles, Canadian nurses’ officer status ‘gave them greater freedom of movement and a higher level of prestige, two elements that their foreign counterparts did not enjoy’ (Ibid 165). Despite the prestige attached to such positions, very few fictional representations of Canadian nursing during the war draw attention to this improved status position, perhaps due to its potential to complicate the traditional image of nurses as servile, humble vessels of disinterested care.

One of the few stories to engage with this issue is ‘Lieutenant Marjoribanks’ (177-92) from J. G. Sime’s *Canada Chaps* (1917). This collection of short stories and sketches was part of a wartime series (which also included titles such as *Russian Chaps*, *Joffre Chaps* and *Kitchener Chaps* written by other popular authors of the period)²² designed to help raise public spirits through representations of the noble efforts taking place overseas. Such series helped reassure the reading public that they were still fighting (and sending their husbands and sons to fight) for a good cause. *Canada Chaps* is often seen to lack the ‘emancipatory qualities’ (Coates ‘War’ 1190) of Sime’s later, most groundbreaking work, *Sister Woman* (1919), but because of Sime’s emphasis on those “left behind” as much as those “on the front lines,” critics such as Campbell and K. Jane Watt have argued for its cultural distinctiveness. Indeed, in a recent reissue of Sime’s short fiction and plays, Watt argues that ‘[i]f World War I has been conceptualised as a chasm, an abyss, a gap in history, Sime attempts in *Canada Chaps* to make of this period a fullness, a time of humanity, or individual crises and acts of kindness among the generalised and systematised cruelty of national conflict’ (‘Introduction’ “*A Place*” 36). Continuing in this vein, Watt claims that ‘[i]n contemplating Canada’s contribution to world affairs through its agency in the war, Sime takes on another potent national myth, that of the healing powers of the new world, the ability for the new world to

²² M. C. Lethbridge, *Russian Chaps* (1916), Pierre Mille, *Joffre Chaps and Some Others* (trans. B. Drillien) (1915), A. Neil Lyons, *Kitchener Chaps* (1916).

revivify a crumbling empire, an ancient, decadent old world society' (Ibid 38). Whilst on first glance, 'Lieutenant Marjoribanks' might appear to be one of the collection's most unambiguously patriotic tales (though doubtless many readers may have been shocked to discover on close reading that the titular 'Lieutenant' was in fact a woman), I would argue that even this short tale of an Englishwoman's journey to find purpose and a profession in the New World offers great insight both into the not-so-secret 'glamour' of wartime nursing and into the ability of Canada to 'revivify' European women through hard work and a renewed sense of imperial duty.

'Lieutenant Marjoribanks' chronicles the journey of Alicia, a young English woman of aristocratic background (though little money) who decides to make a fresh start in Canada. Relying on letters of commendation to gain interviews with leading figures of the "New World," 'she rather thought, perhaps, the manageress of something really good might suit her' (Sime *Canada* 183). Shocked that nothing 'really good' wishes to hire her as a manageress she is encouraged by her parents to open a boarding house as '[her parents' letter] said it had it upon good authority, which it underlined, that a comfortable Private Family Hotel was one of Canada's crying needs' (Ibid 185). Whilst this suggestion is revealed to be a convenient way for her parents to unload old furniture – and thus old responsibilities onto her (here, the "baggage" of the Old World is literal as well as figurative) – Alicia's undertaking ultimately provides ideal training for her narrative destiny as a wartime nurse. Alicia's boarding house serves business girls and professional women, for whom she cleans rooms and provides 'indifferent' meals due to her dissatisfaction with her lot in life (Ibid 186). Alicia's hard work is described in surprisingly sombre tones, which suggest little enjoyment of her task and no time for the antics stereotypically associated with a young working woman: '[h]er roomers came and went, and on their complaints she lived. She had no money to go anywhere and no time to make outside acquaintances' (Ibid).

Whilst it might seem odd for Sime to devote so much of her story to a woman's employment *before* she becomes a nurse, there almost appears a sense in which Alicia must earn the *right* to the opportunities available to her in her new home. Much like women on the prairies, Alicia is seen to "do her time" carrying out intensive, drudgework in order to prove her worth; in short, she must be "healed" of her former class pretensions and disdain of manual labour – a presumed by-product of her Old World upbringing. This would seem to reflect public opinion of the period regarding untrained gentlewomen who came to Canada in search of work, but lacked the household skills many working- and middle-class women in

Canada took for granted.²³ As Marjory MacMurchy bemoans in *The Canadian Girl at Work* (1919) ‘[I]ack of training in home-making is probably the greatest drawback which a girl in paid employment can have. Her business during her first years of paid employment may not require much skill or experience, but her living conditions require all the specialized woman’s knowledge that training can give her’ (M MacMurchy). In fact, as we have already seen in the earlier chapter on nursing, women working ‘within the domain of medical science were deliberately restricted to the “womanly” business of nurturing and housekeeping’ (Ehrenreich and English 19), because such work was seen as appropriate to their inherently *female* aptitudes for such tasks.

Sime’s short story appears to support such ideals, as it is only once Alicia has proved herself as a landlady and housekeeper that she is finally able to exhibit her value to the employers who had initially dismissed her job applications:

[y]ou don’t have three and a half years of practical education – scrubbing and cooking and scouring and washing dishes and earning pennies that you live upon – without learning something worth knowing about life. This time Alicia knew what she wanted, knew definitely how to ask for it; and the business men, accustomed to humanity and to handling it, saw that the child who came to them once bringing her alphabet as testimonial, and asking that the moon should be handed down to her, had grown to be a business proposition, something to be weighed and measured and later adjudged a market value according to efficiency. (Sime *Canada* 188-9)

The language here is particularly striking as Alicia is now classified as ‘a business proposition,’ a phrase which would seem to dehumanise her – she can now be allocated a ‘market value’ – at the same moment in which she is finally given the agency and opportunity to become a “professional” by training as a nurse. Sime’s narrator is also eager to emphasise that ‘Alicia was successively probationer, nurse, sister, all the rest of it; thanks to her rooming-house, each and all of them successfully ... She hadn’t realised that year by year she had been digging out of it the kindly common sense that only roots in life’s bed-rock

²³ Emigrant guides of this era made frequent reference to the need for educated women to only settle in Canada if they were capable and willing to undertake hard work. For example, a section titled ‘Openings for Educated Women’ in *The Canadian Settler’s Handbook: A Guide for Intending British Settlers in Canada* (1911) stresses that: ‘If women of the educated class are strong, capable, adaptive, and possess plenty of grit, then, and only then, may they turn their thoughts Canadawards. To those who are tired of the narrowness and greyness of their lives, the painfully small remuneration offered for conscientious and capable work, and the petty slights and annoyances incidental to their various positions, the following abridged information will prove interesting. ... The right kind of women are assured ... of positions as home-helps, manageresses of hotels and restaurants, matrons of schools, governesses in private families, typists, secretaries and school-teachers’ (69-70).

realities' (Ibid 189-90). Here the narrator seems to suggest Alicia's achievements all stem from the qualities of hard work and 'common sense' that she attained when she gave up her romantic notions of the New World and allowed herself to start again from scratch, learning the 'bed rock realities' that all good Canadian workers seemingly need in order to succeed and carve out a profession for themselves.

Historians such as Allard have stressed how 'the idea of enlisting was imbued with romanticism, represented by the elegance of the uniform ... [and] its draw as a symbol of courage and patriotism' (158-60); and this 'romanticism' is clearly in evidence at the close of Sime's short story. Having proved herself as a boarding-house-keeper and then as a ward nurse and supervisor, Alicia closes the story an enlisted military nurse, ready to head back to the Old World and provide her own healing influence on behalf of her newly-adopted homeland:

[a]nd now she was actually settled in the state-room of the ship that was taking her back again to England –and further, perhaps, than that – as a Canadian Nurse! She was Lieutenant Marjoribanks, with scarlet shoulder straps and regimental buttons, approved by the Government, with men in khaki saluting her as officer whenever they met her in the streets of Canada. (Sime *Canada* 191)

The sense of national pride here is unmistakable, as is the glamour and prestige associated with both her uniform and her new rank. Saluted by soldiers, she is their equal, worthy of respect, but as Sime's story seems to suggest, it is a respect that has been hard-won, earned through years of hard labour and drudgery rather than through any entitlements based on aristocratic background or class status.

Given *Canada Chaps'* status as a form of literary propaganda, it is worthwhile to consider what message Sime may have hoped to convey with this story. Did she intend to encourage women of lower economic backgrounds to prove themselves by taking on the task of nursing? Did she mean to emphasise the value of hard work and housekeeping in all female occupations, however noble and grand? Or did she perhaps wish to emphasise to those women taken in by the 'glamour' of nursing during the war that it was a profession that required dedication and drudgery, rather than a mere whim and chance for adventure? Most telling of all, perhaps, is the narrator's closing remark, with its tacit endorsement of female activity and productiveness: '[w]hy is the way to a woman's heart through usefulness?' (Ibid 192).

The British VAD and ‘the false nurse’

One of the most popular figures of women’s war writing of the late 1920s and 30s was the VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) nurse. Deployed to great dramatic effect by authors such as Vera Brittain and Evadne Price between the wars, the liminal, elusive figure of the VAD is also a feature of Canadian fiction written shortly after the Great War. The Voluntary Aid Detachment was registered with the British War Office as part of a national defence scheme, but it was considered very much an auxiliary and based firmly on the *home* front in England (Ouditt 9, 11). Receiving no government funding, the VAD relied solely on voluntary contributions, and in order to qualify ‘members were required to sit and pass examinations on home nursing, first aid and hygiene,’ as well as undergoing voluntary experience at a hospital (Ibid 11). First used abroad in October 1914, by 1915 the British War Office found themselves struggling to meet demands for fully-trained nurses in military hospitals both at home and overseas and began housing VADs amongst their own staff as ‘probationary nurses’ (Ibid 13-15). Whilst remaining a largely British phenomenon, women from across the British Empire were able to volunteer for the VAD provided they passed the necessary qualification tests and were willing to relocate to London for the length of the war.

Although they lacked the formal training of military nurses, VADs were made prominent in war propaganda and literature of the period due in part to the fact their ranks were only open to ‘women of a certain class’ (Ibid 4). As Sharon Ouditt outlines in *Fighting Forces, Writing Women* (1994) ‘[t]he VAD recruitment campaign worked on the assumption that upper- and middle-class women would be seen best to represent England; working-class women would not. The appeal was to that class whose static, Victorian value system could overcome, by sheer “character” and “breeding,” any of the possible dangers that might affront the woman on active service’ (Ibid 20). However, whilst these women were assumed to be of the highest “character,” by only taking women of “good background” the VAD was thus forced to utilise a class of women who ‘had been educated to rely upon the enormous servant class for the drudgery of daily housekeeping’ (Ibid 21), rather than on those women who already made a living carrying out such tasks.

In Nellie McClung’s *Painted Fires* (1925), the Great War features largely as a plot device designed to separate the recently-married Helmi from her husband Jack Doran, but more significantly it also offers a chance for redemption to one of the novel’s main antagonists, the selfish and bored housewife Eva St. John, through her decision to join the

VAD. In *Literature as Pulpit* (1993), Warne comments on the ambivalences present in McClung's portrayal of the war in *Painted Fires*; in which the message of patriotism and maternal pride prevalent throughout *Next of Kin* (1917) is clearly altered by the 'dull, selfish age' of the 1920s (66). Whilst figures such as Englishman Arthur Warner are portrayed as heroic for heading to war (Arthur ultimately sacrifices himself for Jack so that husband and wife can reunite in Canada), characters such as Old Sim proclaim heavily anti-war sentiments such as '[e]veryone in the war loses – no one wins' (McClung *Painted* 179), and '[w]ar is hell on women ... but it don't do no good to worry, Helmi' (Ibid 180). Nevertheless, despite this fluctuation between support and abhorrence for the war, Warne correctly states that, '[f]or McClung, the only truly unacceptable stance was to live as if the war had not happened, and to forget the hard-won lessons of its moral proving ground' (Warne *Literature* 66).

Although set before the war, *Painted Fires* is read by Warne as McClung's indictment of the rise of decadence and flapperism in the 1920s, a culture epitomised through the figure of Mrs. Eva St. John. Following the outbreak of war, Dr. St. John, previously forgiving of his wife's indolence, begins to question her lack of responsibilities, growing increasingly severe in his condemnation of her: 'Eva having nothing to do, did nothing, and doing nothing, degenerated, grew shallow, selfish, cross-grained and hard' (McClung *Painted* 273-4). The narrator justifies the doctor's sentiments by explaining how

Dr. St. John would not have been critical of his wife if she had chosen to follow some profession. He would have liked that. He did not believe that every woman had to be run in the domestic, making coffee and ironing shirts – any one could do that! But the companionship – the good fellowship of a wife – how he craved it! And how that craving was slowly turning to resentment. Other men had wives – he had a queen of chatter, a hoarder of trinkets, a bridge player, a tea drinker! (Ibid 275)

Here Eva embraces the very pursuits that McClung herself abhorred in post-war society, her condemnation given emphasis through the use of Eva's husband as her main detractor. In losing the respect of her own husband, Eva St. John commits one of the cardinal sins of marriage. McClung justifies Dr. St John's change in affections as an inevitable result of the 'moral proving ground' of wartime. As Dr. St John prepares to join Jack Doran and help the war effort he exclaims, '[n]o Eva, your type might last a long time in peace, but it shows up badly in time of war' (Ibid).

Eva is clearly meant to contrast negatively with the patriotic immigrant Helmi who proudly claims that ‘Canada is my country ... and I would fight for it if I could. I wouldn’t hang back like a big coward’ (Ibid 189). Helmi displays all the attributes of selfless care and nurturance desired in wartime nurses when she cares for Arthur Warner, leading him to comment that ‘you are a born nurse, so quiet and capable. They are calling for nurses over there – can’t you come along?’ (Ibid 191). However, despite her patriotism, Helmi is revealed to be providing an even greater service to her new homeland through her pregnancy and her ability to help re-populate a race suffering from the ravages of war.

Indeed, it is only after her husband’s harsh words and his decision to help the war effort that Eva herself finally makes a decision to take action and head to London to join the VAD. When Jack escapes capture by German forces and begins to make his way back to Canada, he is shocked to come across his own sister working as a VAD nurse in the English capital: ‘[h]e wondered what had brought her to London – Eva, the luxury-loving, indolent Eva. It was strange to see her in plain uniform, carrying stretchers. But there was a high look on her face that transformed her. She looked more like the Eva he had known long ago’ (Ibid 305). Ouditt’s study explores how

[t]he VAD in civilian clothing might have been identified by its wide variety of coded signals, suggesting her parents’ social status and her role as their daughter. In uniform, however, having invested herself with the prescribed lengths, breadths, colours and fabrics of the institution that had accepted her, she was required entirely to subjugate her appearance and behaviour to the demands of that institution: to become its representative. (17)

In the case of Eva, this loss of her ‘luxury-loving’ appearance in order to become a ‘representative’ VAD nurse appears to have an almost cleansing effect. In Jack’s eyes, she has reverted to an earlier less indolent, more selfless version of herself; seemingly free of the presumptions and elitism associated with her social class.

However, the “care” that Eva provides through her VAD work is portrayed as blurring the lines of traditional patient/nurse respectability. Due to her inability to ‘get into’ the more conventional tasks associated with those left behind on the home front, Eva instead falls back on her previous skills of flirtation and flattery:

[b]ut anyway, every one was knitting and making bandages, and I couldn’t get into it. So I rented the house and I can live easily here on the money. I really like the work I am doing, and I love the boys – they are so brave. I bring them home with me sometimes and write their

letters and listen to their stories. I have one little extra room – and really, Jack, I never was so happy in my life. (McClung *Painted* 306)

Whilst this could be justified as Eva's desire to provide her own brand of care and support for the war wounded by offering these men feminine attention and support, the questionable propriety of having soldiers stay with her must have troubled many of McClung's readers. It also encourages the reader to consider the *effort* Eva is willing to undertake in her new duties and whether or not she is taking on an 'easier' form of service. Similarly, despite her drab 'regulation' appearance, Eva is revealed to live in plush, extravagant surroundings, justifying this to Jack by explaining 'I work all day in misery and horrors so I have to have beauty at night' (Ibid 306). These ambivalences appear designed to allow the reader to question whether Eva has truly changed her ways: she is able to put her love of beautiful things and male attention to good use, but still seems to place great value on the more superficial aspects of her nursing role. Nevertheless, she shows real affection for her recovering brother Jack, whom she assures 'I musn't let you tire yourself out. You see I am a pretty good nurse now, and I know how to take care of people' (Ibid 307).

Given the ambiguous nature of Eva's motives and nursing duties, she could be classified as what Darrow refers to in her study as a 'false nurse':

[t]he true nurse...whose feminine nature supported the war effort, was usually shadowed by the false nurse, suspected of putting her own, i.e. feminine, interests ahead of the national, i.e. masculine, ones. Instead of supporting the war, the false nurse tried to hijack it, to undermine the virile national regeneration that was its justification and its ultimate purpose. (136)

Whilst I would consider it a stretch to see Eva's methods as an attempt to 'undermine national regeneration,' there is a sense in which her continued over-emphasis on flirtations and "the finer things" could be seen as evidence of putting her own interests before those of the soldiers around her. Whilst she lacks the sexual aggressiveness Darrow associates with the French figure of the *mondaine*, Eva could be seen to mirror characteristics of the 'fashion-plate nurse.' As Darrow explains, '[w]hile the true nurse inhabited a cell with the nursing manual at her bedside like a breviary, the "fashion-plate" nurse arrived in a limousine, dripping with jewellery and self importance' (Ibid 147). Therefore, whilst Eva's attentions are far from the transgressive sexuality often associated with many of the 'bad nurses' of post-war fiction (Judd 48), her revelling in the limited control she obtains over these injured

men through the power of her *attentions* enables the reader to question the extent and reasoning behind her apparent ‘transformation.’

The authenticity of Eva’s reform is also placed into question by the fact that McClung still felt the need to “punish” her within the narrative by a form of divine intervention (acting much like the bolt of lightning that kills the magistrate before Helmi has a chance to murder him). Whilst Jack visits her in London, Eva admits her culpability in the crime that initially forced Helmi to be placed in the Girls’ Friendly Home. Almost as soon as this is revealed, a bomb goes off leaving Eva alive, but with a face badly scarred by shrapnel. However, with these scars she is finally able to contribute to the war effort in a significant way, admitting to Jack, ‘[w]hat I really wanted to do was to drive an ambulance in France, but I was afraid, not of death, but of disfigurement. I hate ugliness so – far more than sin’ (McClung *Painted* 310). Humbled by the loss of her beauty and her new ability to see beyond the superficial and glamorous aspects of nursing, she is partially redeemed through her new desire to head to the front: ‘[b]ut now, with a blue scar on my cheek and my nose broken I will not be afraid. I will go to France. Maybe I can take the place of some better and happier woman, and when the shell comes marked for her, it will take me instead’ (Ibid). Nevertheless, Eva’s willingness to sacrifice her own life for another’s could still suggest an element of self-aggrandisement through her desire to fashion herself as a martyr.

Warne has argued that ‘McClung’s anachronistic depictions in *Painted Fires* are the fictional means by which she is able to remind those of a “dull, selfish age” of the very real sacrifices which had been made for them in the hope of converting them to the path of social responsibility’ (*Literature* 66). Through this exploration of the figure of Eva St. John I would have to agree with Warne’s assessment, as I would argue McClung’s portrayal of Eva acts as a warning to McClung’s contemporaries to avoid succumbing to the indulgences and frivolities of the 1920s. Mrs. St. John is partially redeemed by her work for the VAD, but it is only after she pays the price for her earlier vanities by losing her attractiveness that she is finally able to achieve her dream of being an ambulance driver, and at last make a concerted effort to help and support her Canadian brothers and sisters in Europe.

Writing the ‘forbidden zone’ of wartime experience

In ‘Corpus/Corps/Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War’ (1989), Jane Marcus focuses on the ways in which war novels are marked ‘by the fragmentation and dislocation of poignant

love/war battles and romantic and chivalric, almost religious, ethos of self-sacrifice' (127). Through close analysis of Evadne Price's *Not So Quiet...* (1930), Marcus explores how

[t]he fragmented bodies of men are reproduced in the fragmented parts of women's war texts, the texts themselves a 'forbidden zone' long ignored by historians and literary critics. Writers of war produce pieces of texts, like parts of a body that will never be whole. The texts are specific to World War I and the kinds of warfare specific to that particularly horrible war and its mutilation of millions of bodies. (Ibid 128)

This tradition of fragmented narratives is predominant in women's war fiction of the 1930s, especially in works by authors such as Price, Mary Borden and Vera Brittain, but I would argue that with their episodic sketches and short stories, novels such as J. G. Sime's *Canada Chaps* and Gertrude Arnold's *Sister Anne! Sister Anne!!* (1919) could be read as precursors to this tradition, many of their tales dealing with nurses and other female war workers struggling to make sense of the various 'mutilations' of war – both physical and emotional.

Gertrude Arnold's *Sister Anne! Sister Anne!!* remains one of the few Canadian World War I novels (written within the period under discussion) in which wartime nursing takes a central role. Receiving passing mention in studies of Canadian women's First World War fiction by critics such as Coates, Tector and New, Arnold's *Sister Anne!* has only been extensively analysed by Colin Hill in his article 'Generic Experiment and Confusion in Early Canadian Novels of the Great War' (2009). This might seem odd given its emphasis on women's work *beyond* the home front (a location very few women authors dared to venture into until the very late 1920s), though the critical dismissal of his novel could be due to its occasional forays into romance and melodrama. Nevertheless, as Hill states, '[*Sister Anne!* ranks] among the first serious Canadian novels to treat the war in a sustained manner and to eschew the obligatory romanticism that contemporaneous writers brought to the subject' (61). In his examination of the novel Hill argues that *Sister Anne!* 'is only superficially idealistic, [as] it strives to represent the war experience realistically, and in a manner that is remarkably self-reflexive, it challenges the generic conventions of the literary romance' (Ibid 61-2), and remains 'highly critical of the war and eager to document its horrors' (Ibid 62). The majority of Hill's analysis focuses on the apparently metafictional and self-reflexive elements of the narrative, whereas my exploration of the novel will focus predominantly on the portrayal of the nurses themselves, their relations to both their work and their patients and their sense of purpose and pride in their workmanship.

From the outset Arnold's *Sister Anne!* displays an awareness of its status as a piece of documentary fiction through the narrator's commentary on the collection's apparent belatedness. In the preface to the novel, the narrator proclaims:

'[t]oo late!' says a Voice, 'The War has now been over a dozen months. We have heard enough!'

One has a vague idea, that to 'Sister Anne,' a cycle of months will make but little difference for the hearts of men do not vary according to the times or the seasons. (G Arnold x)

This defensive statement appears to suggest that Arnold (incorrectly) feared the Canadian reading public would lose interest in war fiction once hostilities drew to a close. However, Arnold's narrator seems to suggest that the themes explored in the novel were timeless and did not require the context of a continuing war to provide emotional resonance.

Nevertheless, Hill's treatment of the text focuses less on the fictional narrator's role in the text and more on the figure of Sister Anne and how she and her fellow sister-nurses themselves act as narrators of the stories they hear from soldiers on their wards. In the second tale, 'The Fear of Fear' (19-34), Sister Anne details such gatherings – her 'Society of Three' (Sister Anne, "Australia" and "Peg-o' my Heart") – and explains how

[i]n most of the other bed-rooms, there is a kind of unwritten law – 'It is forbidden to talk of the War or the Wards.'

'We have enough of both through the day,' they say, 'We want a change at night.'

In my room it is different.

'I can't talk about anything else,' I insist, 'and what is more, I don't *want* to talk about anything else. The War and the Wards are my whole life and I just warn anybody who comes in here, that I'm going to talk about them just as much as I please.' (Ibid 19)

Clearly, for these women the war has become something inescapable – almost *hyper-real* – that they can only make sense of, and come to terms with, through speech (and by extension through the narrator's writing). Nevertheless, the problematics of discussing other people's stories – revealing the experiences of others, and most significantly, of men – is clearly a troubling prospect, justified to the reader through the nurses' love for their patients. 'Sometimes I don't quite know, girls,' admits Peg, 'just how much right we have to repeat these things the men tell us. I wonder – I wonder if we are breaking confidence! If I didn't

feel and know that you two *love* the boys as much as if you were really their Sister – it would be different!’ (Ibid 21).

For Hill, such sequences allow for an ‘exploration of the writerly anxieties and ethical issues associated with writing about war realistically. Arnold’s documentary war novel contains romantic flourishes, yet it purports to be a credible representation of the details of life behind the front’ (62). When discussing Peg-o’ my Heart’s anxieties about ‘breaking confidences’ Hill argues that ‘[Sister Anne’s] narrative also expresses an anxiety about its own subversive nature because it narrates a traditionally male subject from a woman’s perspective and challenges official, idealistic, and nationalistic accounts of the war’ (Ibid 63). It is this point that I find most effective as it ties in with Marcus’ ideas about the “forbidden zone” which was considered improper for women (especially nurses) to talk about, let alone write about. Within Arnold’s text this blurring of the bounds of respectability and nurse-patient confidentiality is justified through an assertion that through their role as nurses they come to ‘love’ their patients as if the men were their siblings or their sons. However, the fact that these ‘confidences’ are then supposedly written down and disseminated to a larger reading public brings such actions into question. Perhaps this might itself be a self-reflexive technique used by Arnold to draw the reader in and make them feel that they themselves are privy to (fictional) confidences not meant for civilian ears.

In the later section, ‘The Push Is On!’ (84-94), Sister Anne faces similar anxieties to those expressed by Peg. When discussing the horrors one sees as a nurse stationed in France (away from the front) she explains how ‘[o]ne sees suffering, amputation, death, and one glories in the spirit in which it is met. One thanks God daily for the privilege of being allowed to help’ (G Arnold 86). Despite being given the ‘privilege’ to help she refuses to ‘enlarge on these ghastly wounds which war brings in its trail’ (Ibid 88). Intriguingly, this statement is immediately followed by the admission ‘[a]lthough, sometimes, I think why is it that we may not even hear of the sufferings which will be the price of our Victory when it comes? Our brothers can suffer them, but we must not speak of them’ (Ibid). Here, Sister Anne appears to vocalise what Hill considers the ‘contradictory demands that their [war writers’] novels both document and celebrate a bloody and pointless war’ (64). Sister Anne’s annoyance that the ‘price of our Victory’ must remain unarticulated also suggests a certain degree of subversive behaviour, as whilst Sister Anne (and by extension Arnold) do not enter the “forbidden zone” that authors such as Price and Borden later exploded in the 1930s, the mere act of drawing attention to this absence can be seen as potentially insurrectionary.

As has been mentioned again and again, there was a strong desire to desexualise the women who worked as nurses (both during and outwith wartime) due to the obligatory close interaction with men and male bodies. In *Sister Anne!* this question is addressed in the ‘Christmas’ (48-64) episode when one patient remarks to the other

‘[w]otcher talkin’ abaht? Mistletoe, an’ ther aint no gals!’

‘Wots them Sisters then? Huh?’

‘They ain’t – they’re just *Sisters!*’ (G Arnold 50)

Sister Anne’s patients see her as just that – a sister – and thus as a figure it would be highly inappropriate to consider in a romantic, let alone sexual, manner. However, at other points in the text, Sister Anne and many of her patients see nurses in an overtly maternal role. In the same episode, whilst Sister Anne and a fellow nurse sneak around to deliver Christmas presents to the patients, she silently remarks that ‘[m]others, like poets, are born, not made. And here, in the centre of this darkened Ward, is a woman [her fellow nurse], tending with the love and care of the truest of Mothers, her wounded children’ (Ibid 56). Whilst this tendency to refer to one’s patients (however jokingly) as ‘children’ might appear another potential site for emasculation within the novel, Arnold’s soldiers are depicted as finding no real threat or shame in such tendencies. Indeed, in the only story within the novel not recounted through Sister Anne’s experience – ‘The Military Cross Was Awarded...’ (132-5) (a tale written by one of her patients) – the Sister is referred to in heartfelt terms as a ‘proud mother hen’ when, on hearing of one of her patients has been awarded a military cross, she immediately ‘hurries round the Ward, spreading the news’ (Ibid 133).

In fact, across many of the stories within *Sister Anne!* the protagonist is depicted to show great personal investment in both the ward and her patients, referring to ‘my ward’ and ‘my boys’ on multiple occasions, another characteristically maternal trait. She is portrayed as feeling great pride and respect for her patients, who in turn worry as much about her as she does for them:

[t]hey never seem to think of us as a piece of a large machine. They never seem to think that even if we are a little tired, what is it to their loss of limb or their terrible sufferings? They never seem to think that they have a *right* to our service. It is almost humiliating the manner in which they persist in thanking us for the very little we can do compared to what each one of them is doing for us. So when one of my Tommies calls me to his bedside and says in a

reproachful, but understanding way, ‘You are tired, sister, and you *know* you are!’ I laugh and deny it, of course, but I turn away feeling rested. (Ibid 118)

Here, Sister Anne seems to reiterate the expected rhetoric of self-effacement and humbleness so often associated with fictional representations of nursing. She is surprised her own patients do not simply see her as ‘a piece of a large machine,’ as someone dehumanised as well as unsexed, and the fact she feels almost ‘humiliated’ by their concern for her, again reinforces the presumed (and expected) selflessness of those women who chose to nurse during wartime.

Another key component of Arnold’s depiction of wartime nursing is the ‘lesson of Atmosphere’ (Ibid 195), something Sister Anne’s fellow nurse “Peg-o’ my Heart” is meant to epitomise. When first introducing Peg to the reader, Sister Anne explains that ‘Peg has the real Irish love of sentiment, sees the Vision, and has the power of understanding ... I suppose she has, what the novelists call, charm. To her, the Hospital is a world; the patients are never “cases”; they are individual men to be studied and understood’ (Ibid 20). Again, Arnold’s exemplary nurses are presented as those who are able to bring both tenderness and sincerity to their work, using their feminine attributes to help soothe their patients. Indeed, later in the novel, the Sister-in-Charge exclaims how ‘that girl is worth all the tonics in the dispensary’ (Ibid 200), through ‘her tender nonsense – her beautiful nonsense – stirring these boys’ hearts, and lighting again the love of life’ (197). In contrast to the potentially dangerous attentions Eva St. John gives her recovering soldiers in *Painted Fires*, here flirtation is promoted due to its lack of seductive intent. It is instead portrayed as mere ‘nonsense,’ a fleeting encounter designed to lift spirits without leaving any lasting impact.

In *Fighting Forces* Ouditt discusses how ‘[b]eing trusted simply to act – to take on duties for which experience is lacking, whether it be becoming head cook or taking charge of a ward for the first time – gave many of these women a sense of their responsibility and of their own capability’ (32). At several points in Arnold’s work, Sister Anne is forced to leave her main military hospital post and take up new roles and challenges. In ‘On An Ambulance Train’ (1-18), the opening tale of *Sister Anne!*, our heroine finds herself ‘where I little ever expected to be – at the Railhead – as near the trenches as is allowable for women. I am glad. I have always wanted to get away from the Base, and to go with my Tommies up to the feet of the Monster that has been devouring us’ (G Arnold 2). Here, Sister Anne truly skirts the edge of the “forbidden zone,” absorbing all the sights and sounds of the front lines so keenly that ‘I

don't really want to eat. It is all too interesting' (Ibid 6). Setting the tone for the later 'documentary' feel of her narrative, Sister Anne learns the ropes of life as an ambulance train nurse. When asking about the extent of their duties, a Clearing Station sister explains that '[w]hen a push is on, we often send them straight on as they are. You will soon find that out. But you know a shave, and a wash, and even one clean garment, helps a man wonderfully. He feels convinced then that there is a much better chance of his recovery' (Ibid 3). Thus, even here at the very brink of open combat, the emphasis remains as much on female nurturance and creature comforts as on medical triage.

Similarly, in 'Tommy in Convalescent Camp' (136-155), Sister Anne and another nurse are set to help out in the canteen of the nearby convalescent camp. Enjoying the later start (9am instead of 7.45) and their new 'pretty green overalls' (Ibid 139), the sisters soon realise that working in the canteen provides very little in the way of 'rest' much like their work on the wards. When the breakfast rush begins, Sister Anne recounts how 'I placed myself behind the great tea urn, flanked by many mugs. I don't know what anybody else did. I only know I filled mugs and mugs and mugs, passing them over the Counter to an indefinite number of hands' (Ibid 140). Initially shocked to find the convalescing soldiers referring to the canteen workers as 'sister,' canteen organiser "Chips" explains that 'I think the boys call every English woman in France, who is working for them, "Sister." I know that officially it is only the Army Sisters who should be called it, – but it's such a beautiful name, and the boys like it – especially away out here' (Ibid 143). The suggestion from Arnold's narrative appears to be that the service these women provide for the recovering soldiers can be as valuable to them as their initial recuperation in hospital, especially when Sister Anne realises that the duties of these women extend far beyond the mere preparation and serving of meals:

'[d]o you and Cookie do anything else besides preparing and selling food to them - not that that is not hard enough work,' I added apologetically.

...'That's only the very *beginning* of the work, Sister, though it is the most obvious to the outsider. It's one of the means by which we get to know them and get in touch with them.'
(Ibid 142)

Yet again, the emphasis is placed on women's contribution in reminding the soldiers what they were fighting for – providing them with much needed human interaction, conversation and support to enable them to head back to the lines to continue the fight. As Chips explains, '[y]ou mustn't mind being looked at ... The Front Row [of feasting soldiers], I have found out, is composed of boys who have been up the Line for a year perhaps and have scarcely

seen an English woman for all that time' (144). As well as conversing with her charges, Chips is revealed to spend her free time writing letters for soldiers, organising whist tournaments and even helping to organise music: all to help raise the soldiers' spirits. Once again, such behaviour is seen as almost inevitable, a natural side-effect of being a woman in such environments. Surveying Chips whilst she watches the camp's marching band practice nearby, Sister Anne notes how

[h]er head was held high. Her cheeks were rosy from the wind that was blowing. She had made 'home' for these boys for the little time they had been allowed to remain here.

I believe most of those men carried away in their hearts that picture – I saw a girl, whose face was full of Mother love. (Ibid 148)

The innate maternalism of all women is reiterated here, suggesting that even if women lacked the training to become wartime nurses, they could still provide invaluable support to soldiers through other tasks and duties. This episode could also be seen as a way of humbling and repositioning the almost transcendent image of the nurse as the pinnacle of achievements amongst female wartime workers. Arnold's narrative appears to place as much respect and affection on women such as Chips, as it does on Sister Anne and her fellow nurses, allowing the reader to see the range of roles, different in content yet very similar in maternal intent, women could undertake during the war. In fact, the novel ends with Sister Anne working in a remote prairie region of Canada. As she explains to her driver, Damase, 'I haven't quite got used to motoring round to my patients ... instead of having them all round me in a ward' (Ibid 218). Nevertheless, she reassures the reader '[o]nce a Sister - always a Sister!' (Ibid 221), and that she will continue to provide support – both physical and emotional – to those in need, even in times of peace.

In 'Corpus/Corps/Corpse' Marcus claims that female authors who wrote on wartime nursing 'wrote the body of war, the wounded soldier's body and their own newly sexualised (only to be numbed) bodies as well as the effect of war on the body politic' (128). Whilst Arnold's protagonist does indeed write the 'body of war' from the perspective of one nurse working in France, as we have already discussed, the novel steers clear of any literal discussions of the wounds inflicted on her patients. Similarly, the extent to which Arnold's nurses are 'sexualised' is very mild; they provide harmless flirtations and attentions, but never venture beyond the bounds of female respectability in their encounters with male patients. However, Beaman has explored how '[e]xpressing one's true feelings, instead of

repressing them in the name of the all-important “bravery,” was something women novelists favoured. Partly they are more in touch with their feelings and more accustomed to expressing them, and partly they had a generally cynical attitude to male concepts of bravery’ (141). This tendency can be found in *Sister Anne!*, as whilst the bravery of the soldiers under the nurses’ care is discussed and applauded, Arnold’s emphasis remains heavily on interpersonal relations and Sister Anne’s patients (and fellow nurses’) “character” and personal triumphs. The novel avoids heavyhanded declarations of glory and bravery, though it does inevitably stray close to this territory from time to time. Hill argues that ‘Arnold’s novel posits recollections of wartime suffering – the exhaustion of the nurses, amputations, deaths – as an antidote to the post-war Canadian nationalism that was reaching new heights in 1919 when the novel was published’ (62). Whilst I would not go as far as to consider *Sister Anne!* a ‘protest novel’ as Hill does, in choosing to focus on the suffering of men injured during the war, and the *struggles* as well as the triumphs of nursing in these conditions, Arnold’s novel does appear to open up new ways of depicting female war work – something that came to fruition in the late 1920s with the more well-known female-centric war novels of the Great War, written by Borden, Brittain, and Price.

The Home Front

‘It is the men warriors who reap all the material rewards of war; it is the men who have medals pinned upon their breast; it the men whom the world lauds as heroes,’ proclaimed an anonymous contributor to the *Winnipeg Tribune* on October 9, 1915. ‘What of the women who labour and suffer at home in the cause of justice and freedom? In Winnipeg there are thousands of women who are doing as much to win battles as their soldier fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. There are women who are devoting every waking hour to the provision of comforts for boys at the front, and to planning for their care when they return’ (qtd J H Thompson 111). This cry for recognition of the efforts made by countless women during the Great War is just one among many voices arguing for the duties and sacrifices of those “left behind” to be acknowledged and rewarded. Returning to Cohen’s comments that critics have tended to ‘underestimate the range and complexity of home-front rhetoric and misrepresent the resultant ambivalences of home-front texts’ (2), this section will explore representations of women’s activities on the home front written by Nellie McClung and J. G. Sime. Whilst both authors focus on women left on the home front whilst Canada’s men went to war, they differ in their treatment of women’s work during this time of social upheaval, as well as in their depictions of the new possibilities such disruption enabled in reforming pre-existing gender roles and societal expectations. As J H Thompson outlines in *The Harvests of War* (1978), ‘by changing the ordinary woman’s image of herself and her position in a world dominated by men, the war advanced the cause of women in ways not simply political’ (113).

When discussing home front literature Ouditt argues that ‘what was to become the ironic “other” in war literature, the pastoral, is fused with war’s alternative, mythologised “other” – woman’ (50). As the majority of Canadian women (wives, daughters, and mothers) were left to wait and wonder whilst their men went overseas to fight, many authors of the period conflated their depictions of these “angelic,” sacrificing women with the idyllic landscapes these soldiers were leaving behind to go and fight on the bleak battlefields of Europe. Ouditt argues that during the war a ‘conspiracy of silence’ existed, in which women felt obligated to support the war, suppressing their reservations for fear of shaming their male counterparts (Ibid 99-100). Thus, for Ouditt ‘[t]he image of the silent, domesticated nurturer is, then at the ideological junction of those conservative representations of women who fought for the war and radical women who fought against it’ (Ibid 89). However, by choosing to internalise this rhetoric the women were given ‘access to a separate value system, specifically female, which had no interface with the real world of war, except through

deferential complicity with the apparent wisdom of benevolent matriarchs' (Ibid 100). Whilst Ouditt's tone would appear to suggest an element of frustration with this apparent confirmation of existing gender roles and their attendant status, I would argue that for many women the sense of community spirit and assumed "nobility" attached to this newly-reinforced role as 'benevolent matriarchs' actually offered many opportunities to champion causes both foreign and domestic; something the literature of the period appears to reinforce.

Lacking the continuity provided by the male presence in their lives, many women would doubtless have struggled to maintain "business as usual"; especially when they were now forced to take on many of their husbands' duties in their absence, whether this be by running a shop, working the farm, or otherwise endeavouring to ensure the soldiers had livelihoods to return to. Ouditt claims that '[w]ar is isolating and annihilating for women who live their lives through their men and who then lose their entire investment' (Ibid 125). However, whilst many women did indeed 'lose their investment' this was rarely the focus of home front novels written during and immediately after the Great War. The majority of these texts instead focus on the new opportunities and employment roles opened up to women by the temporary absence of a significant proportion of the male population. Through these tasks, Ouditt has argued that '[g]iven the chance ... women discovered that in many cases expertise was as serviceable as developed muscles and that the division of tasks into masculine and feminine was merely conventional' (52-3). This last point will form a central focus for this discussion as, in a time of war, the arbitrary assignment of tasks as "masculine" and "feminine" come under repeated attack when women are forced into, and often succeed at, tasks that in peacetime would be considered alarmingly inappropriate for female hands and bodies. The extent to which the novels under discussion engage with and potentially endorse this loosening of gender-specific employments will thus be a persistent concern.

Finally, it is important to note that McClung's novel is set in predominantly rural locations where women would have traditionally worked alongside their husbands as farmhands and assistants, meaning many of these women would have seen the adoption of more intensive wartime roles as a natural extension of their existing duties. Nevertheless, Canada did not create a Land Army movement equivalent to that pioneered in Great Britain,²⁴ and many of the Canadian farmers who did not go to war were still resistant to employing

²⁴ The Land Army was formed in the UK in July 1917 and successfully placed 23,000 women on the land by October 1919. Applicants wore uniforms and could earn stripes and commendations for "good service." See Ouditt 54 for more detailed information.

women to help replace male farmhands. They were even more adverse to paying these women a fair wage or training them up to operate machinery. Despite these setbacks, women still took to the fields in their hundreds, whether to help the family business or more pressingly, to help support their family if the worst had occurred and their husbands or fathers were killed in battle. Sime's short story 'Munitions!' (taken from the 1919 collection *Sister Woman*) has been chosen here to provide a deliberate contrast with McClung's rural tales of female resourcefulness and perseverance. Unlike their rural sisters, many of Canada's urban women would not have been accustomed to working alongside men, or taking part in the traditionally 'heavy' labours associated with the growing war time industry of munitions manufacturing. Through an analysis of Sime's text I will thus be able to explore how women responded to these new opportunities and the attendant loosening of social strictures that such employment required, and whether there remain any clear differences in the representation of women's labours on the home front during the war.

Canada's 'war mothers' and the need for female 'occupation' in times of war

Writing in the early stages of the Great War, Nellie McClung boldly asserts that

although men like to fight, war is not inevitable. War is not of God's making. War is a crime committed by men and, therefore, when enough people say it shall not be, it cannot be. This will not happen until women are allowed to say what they think of war. Up to the present time women have had nothing to say about war, except pay the price of war - this privilege has been theirs always. (*In Times* 15)

That women paid the true 'price' in war through the loss of their sons and husbands was a common theme of early female pacifist literature (as Flora MacDonald Denison's *War and Women* has already emphasised); McClung's ironic use of the word 'privilege' highlights women's lack of real rhetorical power in existing dialogues on war. Nevertheless, McClung's comments argue for a change in the status quo, for women to stand up and 'say what they think of war,' a call that many female authors took up once the extent of the devastation taking place overseas began to filter back across the Atlantic. McClung's own relationship with the war fluctuated greatly throughout the years 1914 to 1918, her earlier commitment to pacifism ultimately tested when her eldest son Jack entered the army whereby, according to Warne 'maternal devotion triumphed over feminist certitude, leaving McClung in the unenviable position of having to qualify what had appeared to be her undying commitment to

pacifism' ('Nellie McClung' 35). This process of qualification can be seen under negotiation in her short story cycle *The Next of Kin: Those Who Wait and Wonder* (1917), which explores the experiences of those 'left behind' when their husbands and sons were sent off to fight in the war. Indeed, Warne argues that this text 'articulates the complexity of the war experience from a variety of perspectives ... In presenting the reader with a kind of phenomenology of women's experience, rather than a theoretical analysis, McClung has made a valuable, though overlooked, contribution to Canadian social history. More importantly, she has illuminated how ordinary people may react to war' (Ibid 40). This section of the thesis will therefore explore McClung's fictional representation of the labours that women undertook back on the home front, and how these valuable services were depicted in order to help restore a degree of purpose and pride to a generation of women made to feel powerless and ineffectual through their limited opportunities to help and support the men fighting overseas. Close attention will be paid to the structure of the collection itself to explore the extent to which McClung's book can be read as a fictionalised 'phenomenology' of women's wartime experiences.

In one of her most famous quotations from *In Times Like These*, McClung discusses the female practice of knitting. Knitting was an everyday domestic duty which had become imbued with national significance following the outbreak of war and the rapid development of Red Cross groups across Canada, whose main aims were to raise money and send supplies to help their troops overseas. As McClung outlines:

[s]ince the war broke out women have done a great deal of knitting ... It is the desire to help, to care for, to minister; it is the same spirit which inspires our nurses to go out and bind up the wounded and care for the dying. The woman's outlook on life is to save, to care for, to help. Men make wounds and women bind them up, and so the women, with their hearts filled with love and sorrow, sit in their quiet homes and knit. (*In Times* 23)

Despite the oppositional tone of this entry, it is important to remember that McClung herself did not aim to polarise men and women. As Warne outlines in her study of McClung's war writing 'she [instead] found in women's experience a spiritual and moral force which could educate men and offset a one-sided understanding of the world. That men in power had allowed and even encouraged war did not mean men were evil' ('Nellie McClung' 39). Indeed, as Warne argues in the same article, '[i]t is this belief that male behaviour *can* be changed which is at the very root of her feminist activism' (Ibid 36). The stories in *Next of Kin* thus harbour serious didactic intent, designed to educate Canadian society (both male and

female) on the untapped abilities and resourcefulness of Canada's female population to rise to the challenges brought about by war, and on how such challenges could be used to demonstrate their gender's resilience and strength in times of national crisis. As Warne argues in her study '[although McClung] wrote tirelessly of ways to avert war ... when it arrived, she sought to use its harsh reality as a resource for social transformation' (Ibid 44).

McClung's *Next of Kin* also features prominently in Coates' work on the neglected genre of women's Great War fiction. Although Coates' analyses cover a wide range of countries and texts, she nevertheless draws attention to the value of McClung's collection of 'woman-centred stories which radically reverse the notion of who speaks with authority in war' ('Myrmidons' 128). Coates argues that McClung 'displaces the voices of soldiers, of fathers, brothers, sons, renders them almost "missing" by putting their stories on the margins' (Ibid). Whilst I would argue that, given McClung's strong maternal feminist ties and her aforementioned unwillingness to polarise men and women, her works were perhaps never explicitly designed to 'displace' male voices and values, it cannot be denied that her short stories do indeed foreground female voice and experiences – but this is in order to ensure that *both sides* of the wartime experience are explored. Furthermore, McClung's women are constantly concerned and focused on their men (whether they were husbands, fathers, brothers or lovers), so whilst these men may be classed as 'missing' from her text, their absence is nevertheless keenly felt, and discussed at great length. Coates' analysis, much like Warne's focuses on the collection's structure. She argues that 'McClung refuses to write a conventionally plotted novel, her text calling for a redefinition of what constitutes a war story: *The Next of Kin* is a series of short stories, a chorus of women's voices, McClung's testament to her belief that "counter" stories of ordinary citizens and their experiences (especially women's) are worthy of the telling' (Ibid 128). Although Coates is perhaps rather overenthusiastic in her treatment of McClung (no doubt due to her role as one of the first critics to draw attention to the critical value of analysing women's Great War fiction), I would agree with her assessment of the structure as a 'chorus of women's voices,' many of the stories building upon one another to try and create a comprehensive image of Canadian's women's experiences on the home front.

McClung's short story cycle *The Next of Kin: Those Who Wait and Wonder* opens with a foreword that cleverly outlines the structure and intent of her collection. The book's narrator arrives at the station of an unnamed Northern Alberta district where she has been invited by the President of the local Red Cross division to give a speech. Unusually, the

content of the narrator's public address is not related to the reader, instead the narrator informs us that '[t]he things that I said to them do not matter; they merely served as an introduction to what came after, when we sat around the stove and the young girls of the company brought us coffee and sandwiches, and mocha cake and home-made candy, and these women told me some of the things that are near their hearts' (McClung *Next* 7). One of these women that the narrator speaks with (known simply as 'Alex's mother' in the text) relates her recent discovery that her eldest son, Alex, has been killed in action. This news exacerbates the mother's existing feeling of helplessness and desolation at the situation abroad, and she laments that

[w]ell-kept homes and hand-knit socks will never save the world ... Look at Germany! The German women are kind, patient, industrious, frugal, hard-working, everything that a woman ought to be, but it did not save them, or their country, and it will not save us. We have allowed men to have control of the big things in life too long. While we worked - or played - they have ruled. My nearest neighbor is a German, and she and I have talked these things over. She feels just the same as we do, and she sews for our Red Cross. She says she could not knit socks for our soldiers, for they are enemies, but she makes bandages, for she says wounded men are not enemies, and she is willing to do anything for them. (9-10)

In this short speech, made by one mother to fellow mothers and wives, McClung manages to touch upon many of the key issues and grievances faced by Canadian women on the home front. Rather unusually for a text produced whilst the war was still ongoing, Alex's mother stresses the need for solidarity and sisterhood with their German counterparts, assuring her audience that had these women had a more active role in their country's governance the bloodshed and tragedy of war would never have begun. This passage even draws attention to the large proportion of German immigrants who would have moved to the prairies in the early twentieth century, and how these women too, 'feel just the same as we do.' However, what most disturbs and worries Alex's mother is not the war itself, but its outcome: 'what I am most afraid of is that we will settle down after the war, and slip right back into our old ways, – our old peaceful ways, – and let men go on ruling the world, and war will come again and again' (Ibid 11). Continuing her speech, she informs the narrator and her fellow mothers that, given the loss of one of her own son's to the war, she now feels that she has 'earned the right to speak out. I have made a heavy investment in the cause of Humanity and I am going to look after it. The only thing that makes it possible to give up Alex is the hope that Alex's death may help to make war impossible and so save other boys' (Ibid 12). The fact that these

statements are made not by McClung's narrator (whom many readers would doubtless have read as a facsimile of McClung herself), but by a woman identified first and foremost as a 'mother' is significant. By placing these bold ideals in the mouth of an everyday woman, rather than in a speech given by a middle-class feminist outsider, these statements gain a level of authenticity as they come from the lips of 'one of their own.'

It is therefore important to stress that it is Alex's mother, rather than the narrator herself, who suggests the idea of compiling the stories that eventually make up *Next of Kin*. Alex's mother implores the narrator to '[w]rite down what you feel, even if it is not what you think you ought to feel. Write it down for all of us!' (Ibid 14). Gaining this commission from these women, McClung's narrator informs the reader that 'I am not to be the author of this book, but only the historian' (Ibid 17). Nevertheless, she reassures her readers that '[t]he trouble is that most of us feel too much to write well; for it is hard to write of the things which lie so heavy on our hearts; but the picture is not all dark – no picture can be. If it is all dark, it ceases to be a picture and becomes a blot' (14-15). Here we get one of the few signs of the fictional compiler's active engagement with her 'source material,' through her determination to ensure that these tales do not fall into the trap of complete desolation, leaving her readers with some hope, some reassurance that the future prospect for women and for their active role in the prevention of wars is 'not all dark.'

Later in the collection, we find this very desire to avoid the 'blotting' influence of excessive contemplation of the war and its inevitable fallout related in the short story 'Saving Our Souls' (58-68). This chapter opens with a poem (presumably of McClung's own composition) which champions the value of work in these times of great suffering as a balm to women's worries and fears:

[o] work - thrice blessed of the gods -

Abundant may you be!

To hold us steady, when our hearts

Grow cold and panicky!

I cannot fret - and drive the plough, -

Nor weep - and ply the spade;

O blessed work - I need you now

To keep me unafraid!

No terrors can invade the place
Where honest green things thrive;
Come blisters - backache - sunburnt face
And save my soul alive! (Ibid 58)

Here women's work, and specifically agricultural and gardening labour, are championed for their palliative influence, the 'blisters – backache – sunburnt face' of honest labour providing those women suffering from feelings of helplessness and fear with an outlet for their energies and distraction from their true concerns. As the narrator relates at the start of the tale itself: '[n]o wonder that increased production has become a popular cry. Everyone wants to work in a garden – a garden is so comforting and reassuring. Everything else has changed, but seed-time and harvest still remain' (Ibid).

The story then moves on to discuss the role of knitting, a topic already mentioned above in McClung's earlier political treatise *In Times Like These*. However, by 1917, the role of knitting has taken on a new purpose linked less to a desire to 'mend' or 'knit back together' what men have broken, but rather, as McClung's narrator relates, '[t]here is a psychological reason for women knitting just now, beyond the need of socks. I know how these women feel! I, even I, have begun to crochet! ... It keeps me from thinking; it atrophies the brain; ... When the casualty lists are long, and letters from the Front far apart – I crochet' (Ibid 61). However, McClung's narrator is keen to stress that such activities are not perpetually necessary as the 'mental chloroform' of crochet is only needed for 'the real dark moments, when the waves go over our heads ... We all have them, but of course they do not last' (Ibid 62). Thus women's labours, whether they were agricultural, horticultural or knitting and crochet-based, are depicted as activities that offer women solace and distraction in these times of increased uncertainty. The feeling of productivity – whether it be achieved through the successful knitting of a sock, or the ploughing of a field – is thus supposedly restored to these women through their actions; reinforcing to readers McClung's commitment to 'effective action rather than pious abstraction' (Warne 'Nellie McClung' 36).

Questions of maternity inevitably take centre stage in many of the stories compiled in *Next of Kin*. 'The Orphan' (171-192) relates the journey of an aging housewife named Mrs. Winters who, never having had children herself, finds herself adopting two war orphans, a girl aged four and a two weeks old baby boy. Early in the chapter she relates her feelings of uselessness to her husband, a doctor kept busy carrying out recruiting duties for the army,

informing him that '[a]ll my life – and I am now forty years of age – has been given to making a home pleasant for one man. I have been a housekeeper and companion for one person. It doesn't look exactly like a grown woman's whole life-work, now, does it?' (McClung *Next* 177). Her husband brushes off her feelings of uselessness, reminding her that her first duties should be to him, not to the war effort. However, Mrs. Winters gets her opportunity to take on a 'grown woman's whole life-work' when she overhears women in her local Red Cross meeting discussing the case of the recently deceased mother and her orphan children, wondering whether 'there is any woman patriotic enough to adopt those two little ones whose mother is dead and whose father is in the trenches' (Ibid 185).

Upon visiting the two children in the local shelter Mrs. Winters resolves herself to adopt them, taking them home without consulting her husband, whose absorption in his new recruiting duties has now become all-consuming. When he returns home to find two children in his home, his wife informs him '[t]hey are mine, Fred, mine until the war is over, at least, and Private Wilson comes back; and if he does not come back, or if he will let me have them, they are mine forever' (Ibid 190). Although decidedly shocked by the turn of events, the Doctor proves his worth by agreeing to keep the children, though he is unable to resist a sly dig at his wife by announcing 'I'll see that you do not attend any more recruiting meetings, you are too literal. But all the same ... I am proud of my convert' (Ibid 191). These closing exchanges between the couple are intriguing for many reasons. Firstly, it must be stressed that Mrs. Winters refers to the children as 'mine' rather than 'ours,' suggesting both her determination to care for them regardless of her husband's opinion, but also more significantly perhaps, her determination to make them the new central focus of her life. Perhaps sensing this shift in the power dynamics of his household, the doctor is thus keen to stress at the chapter's close that his wife remains 'my convert.' This final statement allows him both to take partial credit for her selflessness, but more importantly, to restate his position as head of the household. Whether such gender imbalances are ultimately restored and whether or not the Winters keep the orphans is left open to the reader's imagination, but the story nevertheless acts as a strong endorsement for the desire and indeed necessity for women to find a useful outlet for their time and maternal resources in a period of wartime.

This point is reinforced in the story that directly follows 'The Orphan' in *Next of Kin*. Titled 'The War-Mother' (193-207), this short tale details the adoption of one soldier who has 'no one to cry over him,' by an elderly woman, who having lost her own son to war is keen to 'have some one belonging to me – even if they are going away!' (Ibid 195). Meeting

briefly at a train station she commands him to ‘[t]ell me your name and number, and I’ll be your war-mother, – here’s my card, I have it all ready, – I knew I’d get some one. Now, remember, I am your Next of Kin. Give in my name and I’ll get the cable when you get the D.S.O., and I’ll write to you every week and send you things. I just can’t keep from sending parcels’ (Ibid 195-6). Shocked by the generosity of this stranger, the young soldier nevertheless accepts, telling her ‘[y]ou sure can have me – mother’ (Ibid 196). Beauman discusses the phenomenon of wartime “godparents” in her work on British wartime novelists relating how ‘often a soldier would advertise to be adopted as a godson – *filleul* – or a woman would advertise to be a godmother – *marraine*’ (142). However, in McClung’s tale this tendency is taken to the next level; these two people, lacking a personal connection, choose to forge new links of parenting in a time of emotional upheaval. As the woman explains to the narrator as the train departs the station with her newly adopted ‘son’ on board: ‘I just can’t help it ... I have to be in it! After I got the word about my last boy, it seemed for a few days that I had come to the end of everything ... but after a week I wanted to be working at something. I thought maybe the Lord had left my hands quite free so I could help some one else’ (McClung *Next* 197). Thus, for an author such as McClung for whom women’s innate maternalism remained one of their most redeeming qualities, the thought of such maternal potential being squandered was unthinkable. In both of these tales, women are able to find new purpose and meaning in their lives through their ‘work’ in the new wartime profession of adopted motherhood.

‘The Last Reserves’ (227-240) acts as one of McClung’s most openly political entries in the collection, mirroring much of the language and rhetoric found in *In Times Like These*. McClung’s narrator calls on all her female readers informing them that ‘[w]e have come to the place now when our full force must be called out. The women are our last reserves. If they cannot heal the world, we are lost, for they are the last we have – we cannot call the angels down’ (Ibid 239). It is in sections such as these that McClung’s text becomes overtly political, suggesting the new spaces and avenues open to women in Canadian society that Coates highlights in her analyses of *Next of Kin*. In sections of the book such as these McClung does indeed ‘[throw] down the gauntlet to Canadians, challenging them to restructure their society so that it includes women’s worth and experience. With so many men overseas holding up the pillars of Empire, McClung’s narrator urges that the time is ripe to take advantage of their absence’ (Coates ‘Myrmidons’ 125). As McClung’s narrator proudly pronounces in the closing sections of the story:

[t]he call is for citizens, – woman citizens, – who, with deft and skillful fingers, will lovingly, patiently undertake the task of piecing together the torn mantle of civilization; who will make it so strong, so beautiful, so glorified, that never again can it be torn or soiled or stained with human blood. The trumpets are calling for healers and binders who will not be appalled at the task of nursing back to health a wounded world, shot to pieces by injustice, greed, cruelty, and wrong thinking. (*Next* 239-40)

However, it is important to stress that the rhetoric McClung employs in the rest of the collection is far less explicit in its political intent. For the majority of the book, she continually reinforces her message of female empowerment to change and ‘heal’ a war-damaged Canadian society through repeated tales and images of women’s perseverance and small victories in the face of the bleakness of wartime. It is because of these nuances in McClung’s portrayal of her ‘wartime heroines’ that I find Coates’ celebratory enthusiasm for the text problematic as such analyses elide many of the underlying tensions within Canadian society – the fight against ‘blots’ of sadness and desolation, the occasional need for ‘mental chloroform’ – that McClung’s stories tackles so deftly, and which for me help to make her fictional survey of Canada’s homefront so engaging.

Finally, it is worthwhile to consider the placement of the collection’s last tale, ‘Waiting!’ (247-255). Positioned after the decidedly forceful, overtly political rhetoric of ‘The Last Reserve,’ ‘Waiting!’ brings the collection to a close in a much softer, wistful tone. Whilst driving through the countryside, the narrator spots a woman driving a mower: ‘[s]he was a fine-looking woman, with a tanned face, brown, but handsome, and she swung her team around the edge of the meadow with a grace and skill that called forth our admiration’ (Ibid 251). Feeling compelled to speak to the woman whom she recognises from a Farm Woman’s Convention, they share greetings until the woman abruptly asks ‘[d]id you know I’ve lost my husband?’ (Ibid). The woman then relates to the narrator how ‘when the news came, it seemed I could not go on living ... but I am all right now, and have thought things out ... This isn’t the only plane of existence ... there are others; this is merely one phase of life. ... I am taking a longer view of things now’ (Ibid 252). This ‘longer view’ of her present circumstances is revealed to stem from her belief that she is still connected to her husband’s spirit, and that they will eventually be reunited. The pair’s discussion then turns to the woman’s new farm labouring duties, and her need to provide for her children:

‘[f]reedom is like a farm – it has to be kept up. It is worth something to have a chance to work and bring up my children – in peace – so I am living on from day to day ... not grieving ... not moping ... not thinking too much, – it hurts to think too hard, – just living.’

Then we shook hands, and I told her that she had found something far greater than happiness, for she had achieved power! (Ibid 254)

Coates argues that McClung’s decision to conclude her text with ‘a story of a woman’s achieving might through independence’ is significant as, in her view, ‘one of the narrator’s recurring tenets is that women will never be able to employ their energies and talents to the full if they remain shackled by the demands of domesticity. In the absence of her husband, this woman attains agency’ (‘Best Soldiers’ 74). However, it is important to stress that whilst this woman does indeed gain agency or ‘power’ (to use McClung’s own phrase), it is at the expense of her husband. Although he fought to achieve the ‘peace’ she now lives in, the woman is nevertheless depicted as ‘not thinking too much,’ due to the pain that such reminiscences cause. She is ‘just living.’ Therefore, whilst the image of a woman riding a tractor and supporting her family is significant, especially given its placement so near the novel’s close, I would argue that the wistful tone of the figure that McClung’s narrator holds in such regard subtly undermines such congratulatory rhetoric. For this woman has attained peace; she has achieved autonomy – but at a heavy cost.

I have attempted to emphasise the ambivalences that I have uncovered in McClung’s text. Given *Next of Kin*’s relative obscurity until critics such as Coates, Warne, and Tector chose to start recovering many of these early Great War novels, I am wary of arguing against Coates’ enthusiastic and emancipatory readings of the text. However, I think it is important to stress that McClung’s treatment of women’s wartime struggles and their desire – their *need* – to find productive employment and work to occupy themselves is not always portrayed as a signal of female empowerment in the text. I strongly agree with Coates that this collection does indeed place women front and centre in the narrative of Canadian war fiction in ways rarely seen both during the war and well into the 1920s. Nevertheless, I would suggest that men are never fully ‘displaced’ from McClung’s text. Although they may be sidelined to ‘the margins’ of the texts as Coates outlines, I would argue that they still hold great influence over the female characters depicted in McClung’s novel. Their men (whether they be husbands, fathers, brothers or lovers) motivate these fictional women in their various pursuits throughout the text, helping to encourage McClung’s own female readers to undertake the much-needed ‘healing’ and ‘binding’ roles that she felt Canada so dearly needed. As Warne

suggests in her reading of McClung's war fiction: '[i]n the end, there are no miraculous solutions; the hard work of peace is the responsibility of us all' ('Nellie McClung' 44-5).

'Turned loose': Munitions and questions of female workers' immodesty

Reflecting on the Great War's 'turmoil of echoing misery,' J. G. Sime recalls in *In a Canadian Shack* (1937) how 'though we [women] were far from the scene of conflict, the facts of death and destruction were brought home to Canadian women in the cities of the Dominion' (122). Although Sime's *Canada Chaps* has already been discussed briefly in this chapter in reference to wartime nursing, I will now focus briefly on one of her most-anthologised short stories from *Sister Woman* (1919). Titled 'Munitions!' (Sime *Sister* 26-32), this short story explores the rapid growth of the munitions industry in Montreal during the Great War and how the immense demand for munitions led to large numbers of women taking up posts in factories and undertaking the 'heavier' manufacturing duties that had always been the domain of male employees in peace time. This short story has been selected because it offers a far more celebratory, positive perspective of female employment during wartime than many of the other texts under examination in this section, especially when you place it alongside the short stories related in Nellie McClung's *Next of Kin*. It will therefore explore the ways Sime's text opens up the questions about the nature of female war work and how although many women did see these new roles as their duty and chance to prove their mettle as a 'reserve army of labour,' many women also saw these new opportunities for adventure and new experiences as outside the traditional bounds of female employment. This section will also explore Sime's representation of female workplace bonds and the unprecedented opportunities such work gave women in this period to work alongside men.

Between the years 1914 and 1919, Canada sought and gained millions of dollars worth of munitions contracts, resulting in new levels of industrial expansion across eastern Canada (J H Thompson 51). The concentration of this expansion in the eastern provinces of Ontario and Quebec was largely due to the lack of adequate steel resources further west and the extra cost and time that would have been involved in shipping munitions back across Canada so that they could be sent overseas. Canada remained the main supplier of munitions to Great Britain up until the United States entered the war in 1917, which meant that by 1917 over 35,000 women in Ontario and Quebec were producing shells for the Allies (Prentice et al 139). Women working in this industry were often required to work 'emergency' hours to meet this exceptional demand, resulting in many 13 and 14 hour days for female workers

who, although they were receiving higher wages than before the war, were still being paid less than their male counterparts (Ibid). Indeed, the lengthy hours and strenuous work was trying for many women, one munitions worker complaining to the *Toronto Star* in 1917 that '[t]hey are killing us off as fast as they are killing the men in the trenches' (qtd Frager and Patrias 77).

In *Fighting Forces*, Ouditt explores how propagandist fiction of the Great War was 'keen to develop the image of an army of plucky young women who were as much a military asset as the weapons they were making' (73). With the shortage of shells and the loss of large proportions of the male manufacturing industry to the war itself, it therefore became essential for public campaigns and popular literature to make these trades appear 'attractive, desirable and, at least in the short term, natural' (Ibid 71). Given Sime's aforementioned role in producing 'propagandist' short fiction for the *Canada Chaps* volume, it is perhaps unsurprising that she chose to return to this theme in her later collection *Sister Woman*. However, her emphasis on the sense of emotional gratification and potential for sexual contact in wartime labour that she explores in this story perhaps helps to explain why this story was not included in her original war volume and instead saved for publication after the war itself, as 'Munitions!' 'touches on a young woman's awakening sexuality in a way rarely found in Canadian stories of this period' (McMullen and Campbell Introduction 11).

In an early review of *Sister Woman* for the *Canadian Bookman* an anonymous reviewer singles out 'Munitions!' for praise, referring to the short story as 'one of the most effective presentations in modern literature of the desire of the modern woman for economic independence – and the sometimes excessive reaction when the desire is gratified' ('A Montreal' 58). Whilst this reviewer might appear to be diminishing the real sense of gratification many women gained from their work in munitions in this era, I would nevertheless suggest that in choosing to draw attention to the tale, the reviewer was aware of its extraordinary nature in portraying these emotions. Indeed, in their Introduction to the volume *New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women 1900-1920* (1991) – which includes 'Munitions!' – Lorraine McMullen and Campbell focus on the story's 'aura of social documentary' (11), and how Sime's use of third-person narrator works to 'distance the reader somewhat from the characters, disposing one to focus not so much on individuals as on the social realities of the lives of domestics and factory workers and on the consciousness engendered by such experience' (Ibid 10-11).

‘Munitions!’ opens to find Bertha Martin ‘sat in the street car in the early morning going to her work. Her work was munitions. She had been at it exactly five weeks’ (Sime *Sister* 26). As Sime’s narrator describes: ‘[s]he sat squeezed up into a corner, just holding on to her seat and no more, and all round her were women and girls also working at munitions – loud, noisy, for ever talking – extraordinarily happy’ (Ibid). Bertha’s happiness is revealed to stem largely from her newfound feeling of being ‘turned loose,’ the narrator explaining how ‘[t]hey had spent their lives caged, most of them, in shop or house, and now they were drunk with the open air and the greater freedom and the sudden liberty to do as they liked and damn whoever stopped them’ (Ibid). The boldness of these statements is portrayed as an inevitable side-effect of the ‘freedoms’ associated with munitions work: better pay, solidarity and camaraderie between workers and the ability to spend their free time however they wished without fear of breaking the bounds of female propriety and losing one’s job. The narrator continues: ‘[s]he was earning money – good money – she was capable and strong. Yes, she was strong, not fragile like the little thing beside her, but a big, strong girl – twenty-four – a woman grown – alive’ (Ibid 29). Bertha’s apparent obsession with her newfound ‘strength’ serves as a reminder to readers of the manual labour involved in munitions work, as these women were taking on many of the roles that would traditionally have been taken by men. However, I would argue that it also serves to reinforce her newly acquired sense of purpose and freedom. Emancipated from her old employment and its moral and social strictures, she is free parade her strength, to enjoy her new sense of being ‘alive.’ This is illustrated to us when Bertha meets the eyes of a co-worker: ‘[t]hey smiled at one another. Fellow-workers – out in the world together. That’s what their eyes said: Free!’ (Ibid).

McMaster argues that in ‘Munitions!’ ‘domestic work is drawn as a suffocating immersion in quiet, static respectability, set against which is the fast-moving streetcar, full of rowdy munitions women telling off-colour jokes’ (63). There does indeed appear to be a certain ‘static’ quality to the narrator’s descriptions of Bertha’s work before the factory, where she ‘had gone about her business capably. She had worn her uniform like any soldier – a white frock in the mornings and a cap upon her head, and her hair had been orderly, her apron accurately tied’ (Sime *Sister* 27). However, this sense of order and routine is ultimately revealed to be lacking, the reader being informed that ‘[t]heir horizon was so infinitesimally small, and they were so much too comfortable’ (Ibid 28). Indeed, it is only once the narrative has reinforced the lethargic quality of such work when compared with the bustling, frenetic energy of the streetcar that we learn how Bertha defected from her domestic service role – in

which she had been for ‘five long, comfortable years’ (Ibid 27) – at the urging of fellow servant Nellie Ford, who informs Bertha ‘it’s time we lived’ (Ibid 30). After these words, Bertha is portrayed as a lost cause, the desire to leave and ‘live’ creeping upon her like an ‘infection’: ‘[t]he fever touched her blood – ran through it. Her mental temperature flew up’ (Ibid).

Perhaps the most openly celebratory passage in the entire story comes near its close when the narrator relates the immense feeling of freedom Bertha feels through her ability work in what are ultimately described as rather wretched, exhausting working conditions:

[l]iberty! Liberty to work the whole day long – ten hours at five and twenty cents an hour – in noise and grime and wet. Damp floors to walk on. Noise – distracting noise all round one. No room to turn or breathe. No time to stop. And then at lunchtime no ample comfortable meal – some little hurried lunch of something you brought with you. Hard work. Long hours. Discomfort. Strain. That was about the sum of it, of all that she had gained ... but then, the sense of freedom! The joy of being done with cap and apron. The feeling that you could draw your breath – speak as you liked – wear overalls like men – curse if you wanted to. (Ibid 31)

The sense of enthusiasm in this passage is almost infectious, drawing the reader in with short sentences and exclamations that help to recreate the sheer excitement these women would likely have felt at their new opportunities – though one assumes in time the poor working conditions would have caused such labours to lose their initial allure.

Finally, I must briefly consider the element of Sime’s short story that has earned it its critical notoriety in collections of early Canadian short fiction. In “‘Gently Scan’: Theme and Technique in J. G. Sime’s *Sister Woman*’ (1992), Campbell suggests that Bertha’s pent-up vitality throughout the story is ‘displaced onto the thawing March landscape. “It was the very early spring” is the story’s refrain. To a streetcar full of girls bound for a suburban factory, the March thaw, in company with the explosives they produce, mirrors their own surging sexuality’ (47). This ‘surging sexuality’ is mentioned only briefly at the very end of the text, but the fact that such a few short lines could cause such critical attention, helps to reinforce how bold such statements were at the time of Sime’s writing:

[t]here was the Factory – the Factory, with its coarse, strong, beckoning life – its noise – its men.

Its men! And suddenly into Bertha Martin's cheek a wave of colour surged. Yesterday – was it yesterday? – that man had caught her strong, round arm as she was passing him – and held it.

Her breath came short. She felt a throbbing. She stopped smiling – and her eyes grew large.

It was the very early spring. (Sime *Sister* 32)

This short passage is filled with phrases that would have strongly bucked against not only Canadian traditions of propriety, but also against literary conventions of what could and could not be discussed in popular literature of the day. Significantly, by tying this experience – this newfound ‘throbbing’ – to the ‘very early spring’ Sime also appears to be suggesting that such incidents are only just beginning, waiting to come to full-bloom.

In summing up the sense of ‘liberty’ Bertha obtains through her new role in the munitions factory, the narrator suggests ‘[w]hat a change! What a sense of broadening out!’ (Ibid 32). I find this phrase ‘broadening out’ intriguing as it draws attention to the sense of widening possibilities and new terrains open to women during the war. However, it is important to remember that after the war, women were quickly replaced by returning soldiers, and with the munitions industry dramatically downsizing its production, many of the women on this streetcar who left their ‘comfortable’ jobs would soon find themselves unemployed, with a new sense of freedom and impropriety that would perhaps have jarred with their old professions had they attempted to return to them. Given this short story’s publication in 1919, it is unclear when exactly Sime composed this tale. Was she already aware of the fleeting nature of these women’s newly acquired sense of freedom? Did she aim to capture this rare opportunity for women to take on such liberating roles before it passed? Or was she perhaps hopeful this was the start of a new era of women’s labour free from gender restrictions and the confines of social propriety? Either way, I would argue this short story takes on a certain elegiac tone in light of what came after the war for many women, and especially in light of the far less-liberating depictions of female employment (both during and outwith wartime) detailed throughout this study.

Darrow argues in her study of the representation of French women in fiction of the Great War that '[t]he hierarchy of masculine over feminine remains firmly in place. In fact, war exaggerates it by placing the entire job of maintaining the social order upon the shoulders of gender, increasing the pressure upon men to be manly, women to be womanly' (8). Thus, for Darrow, women gain new ideological significance in war fiction, but only through an increased focus on their *feminine* skills of maternalism, nurturance and good housekeeping in a period of extreme societal upheaval. Through an examination of the representation of women's labours 'at the front' as nurses and their equally invaluable occupations back on the home front, I have explored the extent to which Darrow's reading can be applied to a Canadian literary context.

Wartime nurses, whose pursuits in peacetime were traditionally tied to an ideology of female nurturance and disinterested care, were forced to negotiate a new position for themselves in the masculinised space of the war zone. The novels under discussion in this chapter do not appear to fit with the subversive portrayals of nursing modern critics have led us to expect. Marcus argues that nurses in post-war fiction became 'forbidden, dangerous, polluted carriers of a terrible knowledge' that 'separated them from the complacent, jingoist home front and the mobile battlefronts' (124). However, as I have highlighted in Arnold's treatment of nursing in *Sister Anne!*, although Arnold's text does allow the reader access to 'forbidden' knowledge of war and men's bodies, the tone of her novel nevertheless remains largely 'jingoistic' and celebratory in tone, praising female resilience and fortitude in times of crisis and calamity. This discrepancy may largely be a result of my decision to focus on texts written during, and shortly after the war itself, as the majority of the texts that have gained extensive analysis by critics such as Marcus (which are also predominantly novels written by British and American authors) were not published until the late 1920s and early 1930s. Nevertheless, I would argue that despite their more overtly patriotic or propagandist agendas, novels written during the war can still provide us with valuable insight into cultural perceptions of women's nursing duties, and as *Sister Anne!* illustrates, clear evidence that many of these texts engaged with issues and concerns that would come to dominate later fictional treatments of war.

These novels were largely selected for this study for the ways they draw attention to the similarities, but also, at times, the stark differences, in the experiences of Canadian nurses

compared to their European sisters during the war. As Sime's figure of Lieutenant Marjoribanks from *Canada Chaps* explores, the sense of prestige and patriotism attached to Canadian women's decisions to nurse overseas remained prevalent throughout the war. The continued prominence of this jingoistic viewpoint was no doubt influenced not only by the military rank and new status offered to these women, but also, perhaps even more significantly, by the fact that their distance from the conflict itself allowed them to follow party and propaganda-fuelled lines for far longer than their European counterparts.

The potential for sexual impropriety in women's wartime nursing remains a tension lying under the surface of many of these texts: as can be evidenced in both the gentle flirtatious 'nonsense' of Peg-o' my Heart in *Sister Anne!* and the more self-serving, feeble care offered by Eva St. John in *Painted Fires*. However, this potential for sexual immodesty is neutralised in two very contrasting manners in these texts. For Arnold, repeated emphasis on her nursing characters' innate maternalism and motherly affection or 'love' for their patients works to reassure her readers that the strict boundaries of nurse/patient remain untarnished, whilst in McClung's narrative, the potentially dangerous sexuality of the 'false nurse' is only removed through physical disfigurement and a stark realignment of the character's war time priorities. However, the fact that both these authors felt it necessary to address the potential sexual immodesty of women's nursing, and their close proximity to men, suggests that there remained a strong vein of concern and scepticism about the abilities of female nurses to provide truly disinterested care that became especially exacerbated during a time of war.

My analyses of Canadian home front fiction have largely focused on the contrasting portrayal of the need for female occupation and the new labour opportunities open to women in stories set in rural and urban environments. McClung's tales of female perseverance and fortitude in times of war take a more traditional stance, with those 'left behind' always conscious of the sacrifices their male counterparts make overseas as they undertake more masculine farming labours and duties. This focus leads to a strong emphasis in McClung's text on women's need to take on new maternal roles: adopting war orphans or acting as war mothers to those soldiers without families. These women's newly acquired labours as interim mothers are endorsed and praised in the text on equal terms with those women who take to the fields and run their own tractors, as both are depicted as equally essential to the maintenance of the status quo in times of war.

However, it is important to remember that McClung's text also acts as a 'call to arms' of sorts, drawing attention to women's valuable contributions and the necessity for Canada's women to take a more active role in their society to ensure such bloodshed and such sacrifices from occurring again. Thus, whilst I would not suggest that McClung's novel questions the reasoning behind the war – all who go and serve in her text are idealised and made noble – her text nevertheless repeatedly draws attention to women's innately female qualities of nurturance and mothering that reinforce their status as 'natural peacekeepers.' By drawing attention to the duties and roles women are capable of undertaking during war time she could therefore be seen to be arguing for women to take on such active roles in times of peace to help preserve and, most significantly, *improve* Canadian society so that their future sons will never again be sent overseas to fight.

Sime's 'Munitions!' offers a stark contrast to McClung's text, not only through its setting, but through its unashamedly optimistic treatment of the new opportunities the war opened to Canada's urban female population. Her text makes no reference to the sacrifices being made overseas by the absentee men that make her protagonist's newfound employment possible. Sime's tale instead remains solely focused on how this newfound ability to take on less traditional, more masculinised roles gave many women a new sense of freedom, allowing them to escape the strictures of 'polite' Canadian society and social propriety. Whilst this text's potential radicalism or immodesty in portraying women's labours in such an unashamedly flattering light (especially given that munitions labour was in reality largely exhausting and often times extremely dangerous to women's health), could largely be justified as an extension of Sime's earlier propagandist endeavours (as evidenced in *Canada Chaps*), I would argue that such a reading ignores the subtleties of this text. By using such a popular, emancipatory figure, Sime could be seen to offer a larger critique of the limited opportunities open to women in time of peace, perhaps even suggesting that their 'improper' behaviour in the town car acts as a symptom of, or reaction to, women's traditional confinement in more 'feminine' industries, calling for such strictures to be reassessed and 'loosened' in post-war Canadian society.

Thus, whilst these texts are arguably less 'objective' than later wartime novels due to their entanglement in the propaganda-driven cultural discourses of their day, they can still provide us with valuable insight into how these discourses were utilised by contemporary Canadian authors to open up new spaces and discussion over the question of women's invaluable role in times of war. They all draw attention to the valuable contributions women

made in the war – both at the front and at home – although it is important to stress that with the notable exception of Sime’s ‘Munitions!’ they all largely utilise the rhetoric of maternalism and reinforce the value of distinctly *feminine* skills and character traits. I would therefore agree with Ouditt that “‘femininity’ in all its undisciplined plurality was more durable as a cultural formation than anything uniform could do to it’ (20) in Canadian Great War fiction of this era.

Conclusions

In a journal entry from November, 1933, L. M. Montgomery relates:

[i]n an old book today I came across the phrase ‘the new woman’ – and smiled. It is so dead now – nobody would know what you meant if you used it. Yet it was a world-wide slogan in the ‘90s – and meant a woman who wanted ‘equal rights’ and dared to think she ought to vote. To some it was a dreadful epithet; to others a boast. And now the new woman and the old woman are gone and the eternal woman remains – not much changed in reality and not, I am afraid, any happier. (qtd Gerson ‘Fitted’ 24)

I would agree with Montgomery’s assessment that the ‘eternal woman’ (epitomised in the figure of the maternal, ‘angelic’ housewife) continued to hold great sway in the popular cultural imagination well into the 1920s. Yet I find her bitter conviction about the lack of significant progress in her lifetime unconvincing, given the changes in both Canadian society and fiction between the 1890s and 1920s. By the 1920s, a wide variety of new employment opportunities were open to women, they had gained the right to vote, and they had proved their ability to act as a reserve army of labour and support the country during wartime. Although the prospect of ‘equal rights’ remained distant, women had made significant gains. However, if we consider this comment in the light of the representation of women in popular fiction of this era, this simple and widely accepted account is misleading, since the fiction reveals – and indeed responds to – a more complex situation. It questions the extent of some of women’s supposed gains, and reveals their costs.

In *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (1988) Denise Riley notes that women ‘suffer from an extraordinary weight of characterisation’ (16). I would argue that the working woman attracted more critical public attention than most women in this era, a fact that was reproduced in the popularity of this figure in the Canadian fiction. Although it can be argued that the growing cultural acceptance of women’s employment in the early twentieth century opened new narrative possibilities and character destinies to authors, I would also agree with Young that ‘[t]he cultural constraints on fictional women are, if anything, even more restrictive than those on women in the real world. Feminine modesty notwithstanding, to be of any significance in a narrative a woman must be sexual; that is, she either must be fallen and outcast or she must marry, the standard happy ending for the heroine’ (123). As Young explains: ‘[t]o be a heroine, she [the female protagonist] must ... conform to Victorian novelistic conventions of femininity: she must be

domestic, subservient, and dependent, both financially and emotionally' (Ibid 124). The fact that Young's analysis of Victorian literature can be applied to an early twentieth century context is itself rather telling of the state of Canadian popular literature in this era. However, through close textual analysis of the texts considered in this thesis I have worked to undermine the perceived conservatism of early Canadian novels, even if the majority of these novels' heroines do ultimately end up adhering to the 'novelistic conventions of femininity' Young outlines.

One of my main concerns in this thesis has been to interrogate the sustained prominence of maternal rhetoric throughout this era. Although such rhetoric could seem to reinforce Montgomery's 'eternal woman' claims, I have repeatedly illustrated that many authors argued for significant change to existing social and economic structures under the guise of extending maternal influence. In this way, potentially radical assertions could be framed in a way which was both socially appropriate and morally righteous. As Fiamengo argues, motherhood remained 'a powerful rallying cry and a potentially radical ground from which to launch an extensive critique of patriarchal institutions' ('Legacy' 160). This can be evidenced in the second chapter's farming literature in the work of Nellie McClung and Arthur Stringer, both of which focus on the struggles to maintain and support a household in conditions of extreme poverty or in the absence of one's husband (and breadwinner). Similarly, in the melodramas discussed in the third chapter, Jessie Kerr Lawson's heroine chooses to hold off on marriage and train as a nurse in order to be better able to fulfil her future maternal and wifely duties, whilst the heroine of Bertrand Sinclair's *North of Fifty-Three* is eventually saved from her potential fall into urban excess and greed by the love of her husband and the newfound purpose she gains from their offspring. It could therefore be argued that these novels were implicated in the cultural shift in 'elevated ideas of motherhood away from a domestic and reproductive imperative to the ideas of maternal professionalization and agency,' encouraging depictions of 'motherhood as a career, maternalism as a subject position' (Devereux *Growing* 28).

However, such a reading remains problematic for literature such as J. G. Sime's *Sister Woman*. The heroines of the stories in this collection do exhibit maternalism and love for their husbands, but only attain these exalted qualities following the experience of adultery, divorce and pregnancy outside of marriage. The single woman, a frequent motif in Sime's work, thus remains a troubling figure throughout this era, and novels which lacked the satisfying narrative closure of a woman giving up her employment to take up her true

profession as a wife and mother, suffered not only from poor sales but also from decidedly cautious criticism. Indeed, a reviewer in the *Canadian Bookman* wrote of *Sister Woman*:

Miss Sime has an enormous sympathy with all the great primitive motives and feelings, which probably form a larger part of the structure of life among scrubwomen than they do among the guests at the Ritz-Carlton — although this is a proposition that we put forward diffidently, and with some fear that we may be slandering the wealthier classes of society. ('A Montreal Woman' 57)

The reviewer's cautiousness about stating that the women in Sime's writing exhibit more 'primitive' emotions than the social elite is intriguing. It likely stems from the fact that the majority of these 'primitive' feelings reinforce the eternally feminine traits of mothering and enduring love for their men, and are therefore admirable. Interestingly, the heroine of Grant Allen's *The Type-Writer Girl* is largely freed from such considerations, ending her tale 'still a type-writer girl – at another office' (Allen *Type-Writer* 139), without the attendant feeling of loss or sadness that permeates much of Sime's narrative. This can largely be explained away by Allen's satirical tone; his novel pokes fun at his heroine almost as much as it delights in her newfound social and economic freedoms. Indeed, the distinct difference between these two novels in the treatment of the single woman could be seen to reinforce the discordances in the treatment of New Women on either side of the Atlantic. Allen, for all his Canadian origins, was still predominantly marketing his work for a more liberal British audience, whilst Sime's books with their clear focus on recreating the social milieu of industrialising Montreal were clearly designed to demonstrate a distinctly 'Canadian' breed of femininity to an international audience and thus reinforced the maternal rhetoric so prevalent in her adopted homeland.

Another key intention of this project was to draw attention to the fact that even the most sentimental, seemingly stereotypical romances of this era, when subjected to sustained close textual analysis, can be found to engage with and reveal intriguing interstices in the cultural rhetoric surrounding the working woman. In her study of the western Canadian working woman, McMaster argues that there are 'myriad reasons for one text to be canonised and not another, but the coincidence that saw urban themes, working-class issues, and gender politics all frequently sidelined suggests a palpable resistance to acknowledging precisely those cultural conditions epitomised in the working girl' (45). Whilst I would agree with McMaster that the majority of the heroines in the novels I have studied are revealed to be of middle-class origin, there are nevertheless clear exceptions to this general trend. Although J.

G. Sime's fiction engages extensively with the figure of the working class labourer and the female immigrant, her fiction received limited popularity in her lifetime and her stories could not be considered bestsellers. However, in the fiction of Nellie McClung the heroines Pearl Watson and Helmi Milander originate from working-class backgrounds, both suffering the social stigma of poverty at various points in their narratives, and both ultimately improving their lot in life and achieving social mobility through their hard work and moral purity. Nonetheless, McClung's fiction, though tremendously popular in this era also, as I have shown, repeatedly exhibits anti-urban tendencies, constantly praising the merits of the local rural community when faced with the potentially corrupting force of the city. It would thus appear true that the real conditions of the working girl in Canada – many of them working class, most of them living and working in the cities – remained largely unrealised in the popular fiction of this era.

Light has argued that women's romance reading is 'as much a measure of their deep dissatisfaction with heterosexual options as of any desire to be fully identified with the submissive versions of femininity the texts endorse. Romance imagines peace, security, and ease precisely because there is dissension, insecurity and difficulty' (22). It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that in a period of war and post-war transformation, and rapidly evolving cultural and moral expectations of women and their sphere, that the literature of the day chose to reinforce traditional, conservative destinies for its fictional heroines. Indeed, it is important to remember, as Radway reminds us, that '[w]hile the romantic heroine may appear foolish, dependent, and even pathetic to a woman who had already accepted as given the equality of male and female abilities, she appears courageous, and even valiant, to another still unsure that such equality is a fact or that she herself might want to assent to it' (78). Whilst Radway's work here refers to a more modern audience, I would argue that this cultural anxiety she describes can easily be applied to an earlier period in literary history when female readers would have doubtless faced great anxiety over the new opportunities available to them at the start of the twentieth century. The majority of the readers of the novels under examination would probably not have considered themselves radical or reformist, and by examining these societal changes within the framework of a traditional romance narrative, authors could inform and educate their readers on these changes without appearing to outwardly endorse potentially subversive ideas.

In her regular column for the popular newspaper *The World*, Canadian feminist Flora MacDonald Denison regularly railed against the strictures placed on women by contemporary

society. As a self-made businesswoman, she was particularly sensitive to issues of women's work and their limited access to certain professions and equal pay: '[l]abour is not defined by gender and washing dishes is no more feminine than the sending of a marconigram is masculine' ('Under the Pines'). Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated the important role popular literature played in helping to mould the cultural sex-typing of Canadian labour that feminists such as Denison so vehemently opposed. Through close readings of these popular novels as well as sustained interrogation of the sociohistorical contexts in which they rose to prominence I have highlighted the value of social reform and suffrage movements, and most significantly, the maternal feminist rhetoric of the era, in helping to shape public perceptions of the working woman. By focusing on the subversive potential of the working woman in popular fiction (not always fully realised in this period) I have tried to emphasise the value of reading such texts alongside one another to uncover parallels, but also distinct differences in the representation of female labour. My work engages with and supplements the emerging critical dialogue surrounding the status of the fictional working women in early Canadian fiction and will, I hope encourage others to undertake detailed analysis of this theme in an extended range of fiction. The working woman remained a highly contested cultural figure throughout the early twentieth century. Many authors chose to engage with this fictional heroine not only to detail the various adventures and potential moral perils of the Canadian workplace, but also to subtly subvert reader expectations and suggest moments of compromise, negotiation, or even outright revolt and refusal in their characters' journeys towards presumed marital bliss.

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