

Gendering the Nation: Nationalism and Gender in Theatrical and Para-theatrical Practices  
by Canadian Women Artists, 1880-1930

by

Christian Bock  
M.Ed., University of Osnabrück, Germany, 2003

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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in the Department of English

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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Dr. Sheila Rabillard (Department of English)  
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Dr. Misao Dean (Department of English)  
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## Abstract

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This dissertation examines the intersection of nationalism and gender in theatrical and para-theatrical practices by Canadian women artists between 1880-1930, including the works of Madge Macbeth, Mazo de la Roche, Sarah Ann Curzon, Pauline Johnson and Constance Lindsay Skinner and their historical context in order to elucidate why and how these dramatic and para-theatrical works appeared as they did, where they did and when they did. Drama and para-theatrical performances such as mock parliaments, flag drills, Salvation army spectacles, and closet drama serve an important role as discursive public spaces in which a young democracy and budding nation negotiates its gendered struggles concerning cultural hegemony and political participation. Employing postcolonial and feminist critical practices, “spoken” and “unspoken” ideologies regarding gender and nation manifested in these performances are explored and feminist, nationalist and imperialist discourses informing nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatricality are analyzed.

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## Dedication

I'm astounded whenever I finish something. Astounded and distressed. My perfectionist instinct should inhibit me from finishing; it should inhibit me from even beginning. But I get distracted and start doing something. What I achieve is not the product of an act of my will but of my will's surrender. I begin because I don't have the strength to think; I finish because I don't have the courage to quit. This book is my cowardice. (Fernando Pessoa, "Text 152" in *The Book of Disquiet*)

This account of early Canadian culture combines three fields of inquiry that have been viewed as distinct from each other: theatre history, literary criticism, and cultural studies. Academic conventions traditionally kept all three modes of inquiry apart. Thus, I am grateful for the possibility of combining them in one dissertation. And to have had the most supportive supervisors to encourage my attempt at combining these and see this project through to the end.

Most of this dissertation was written in Victoria, BC, some in Freiburg, Germany, but it began with an inspiring conversation on The Canadian between Toronto and Vancouver. An animated conversation with Dr. Eleanor Beattie about early Canadian farm radio, the NFB and the role of women shaping Canadian culture led to a journey that took me from Victoria, BC all across Canada and back.

I would probably not have completed this dissertation without my supervisor's vision, her calm, steady believe in my abilities and I cannot sufficiently thank Prof. Sheila Rabillard for her unwavering support and encouragement over the years. I want to thank Prof. Misao Dean for her support, and the plenitude of time and expertise from our initial discussions of this study through its completion.

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## Introduction

The use of the term ‘Canadian Theatre’ immediately raises a question: Have we a Canadian Theatre? Our commercial theatres depend almost entirely upon ‘road’ and ‘stock’ companies from the United States and Great Britain. This means that the strength of the Canadian Theatre is with its amateur and semi-professionals. (“What is Wrong with the Canadian Theatre” 22)

In this dissertation, I examine theatrical and para-theatrical works in their historical context to elucidate why and how these dramatic works appeared as they did, where they did and when they did; second, I employ postcolonial and feminist critical practice to explore “spoken” and “unspoken” ideologies regarding gender and nation manifested in these performances; and third, I analyse feminist, nationalist and imperialist practices that inform nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theatricality. It is my conviction that drama and para-theatrical performances such as mock parliaments, flag drills, Salvation Army spectacles, and closet drama serve an important role as discursive public spaces in which a young democracy negotiates its gendered struggles concerning cultural hegemony.

Over the last ten years that I have researched early Canadian women’s dramatic works, little scholarship on the subject has appeared in print. Since the pioneering work by theatre scholars trying to identify a corpus of Canadian works,<sup>1</sup> only a few plays by Canadian women dramatists have been analyzed, let alone published. (These examples

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<sup>1</sup> Noted here are the works of Murray Edwards, Richard Plant, Ann Saddlemyer, Sister Geraldine Anthony, Anton Wagner, Moira Day and Patrick O’Neill. Patrick B. O’Neill’s “A Checklist of Canadian Dramatic Materials to 1967,” *Canadian Drama*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1982, pp. 173-303, and vol. 9, no. 2, 1983, pp. 369-506, contain over 5,000 entries by male and female playwrights. The list, however, only features Canadian residents, not Canadians working outside of Canada such as, for example, Constance Lindsay Skinner.

include Anton Wagner's collection *Canada's Lost Plays* and Kym Bird's forthcoming anthology of Canadian women's play scripts.) The lack of scholarly attention is remarkable, given that almost every major female Canadian writer, poet and journalist between 1880 and 1930 has also written drama. This, on the one hand, points to the economic conditions under which art, and specifically drama, was written, published and produced, but on the other hand also challenges the practice of according artists canonical status limited to one specific genre.

In scholarly discussion, dramatic performances and theatrical practices often assume an imagined theatre derived from the material and economic conditions of professional theatre work (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 3). In this perspective, Canadian theatre was only realized with the establishment of a professional national theatre culture mid-century. Within the history of theatre in Canada, this master narrative traces theatre's infancy in native amateur enterprises that were established around the turn of the century in resistance to British and American touring groups and argues for artistic maturation only after the Second World War with the 1951 report of the Massey Commission and the establishment of the Canada Council of the Arts in 1957. The major stepping stones in the narrative of dramatic maturation closely resemble the often-recited narrative of national maturation. Commonly, the earliest true expression of a desire for a national Canadian theatre is found in the early twentieth-century calls for national arts and theatre as both an adornment and a condition for truly realized nationhood by public intellectuals like Vincent Massey, Bernard Sandwell and Hector Charlesworth. But Sandwell, for example, also argued in his address to the Montreal Club in December 1913 that "theatre was the realm in which a vast and ever-increasing number of Canadians acquired their

ideas and opinions” (Sandwell qtd. in Litt 323). But to his discontent, the “plays Canadians saw were selected by two groups of gentlemen from New York City” who had come to dominate the theatre touring business over the previous ten or fifteen years. In Sandwell’s opinion, this situation was unhealthy for “a nation in the making” (323). American productions purveyed interests and values that were American, not Canadian (or British, which were equally acceptable). A truly Canadian culture had work to do in improving and maturing Canadians to become citizens befitting a country with international status.

### **Canadian Theatre Practice and the Development of the Nation**

Critics have linked this idea of national development to the zoomorphic determinism of the liberal state-making enterprise that saw the ideologies of Canadian nationhood gradually develop from a late-Victorian colonial nationalism to a modern pluralistic statism (Filewod, “Erect Son” 58). In his study on theatre radicalism and political intervention in Canada, Filewod contends “that when we speak of ‘theatre’ we are always balancing a historically defined set of performances and spectatorial routines against a vaster set of practices that cannot easily defined, or even discerned” (*Committing Theatre* 1). He argues that the disciplinary practice that theatre historiography traces is often just the institutionalized theatre. If the majority of theatrical performances are never published, are only performed locally, have a limited audience and leave few traces, theatre historiography fails to account for the majority of performances as they happened outside of the porous but clearly defined boundaries of the “complex of industry, professionalism, economy, and canonicity that constitutes ‘the theatre’” (5).

My dissertation therefore focuses mainly on amateur and para-theatrical practices. Following Filewod's argument, para-theatrical practices and theatre activism along the lines of what Bertold Brecht has identified in his theory of *gest*, a dramatic spectacle as a means for human interaction and communication, are often ignored, as these rarely leave discernible traces, let alone reproducible or marketable texts (Bishop 267). Both the more institutionalized theatre with actors, stage, and audience as well as para-theatrical practical practices such as pageants, protests, fancy dress balls and parades are testimony to "a desire to articulate social visions, to express political convictions, and advocate social change" (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 3).

Many critics have focussed mainly on the growth of Canadian theatre in the years after the First World War, reinforcing the common assumption that English Canadian drama only started its coming of age in the early twenties with professional theatre companies and the Little Theatre Movement. This view neglects the importance of culture in small communities and the importance of the performing arts in small and large multipurpose halls to create community and identity. After all, Pauline Johnson's evocation of Canadian nationalism was most successful in small western communities long after urban Canada found its inspiration in international centres of culture such as New York or London. As Maria Tippett points out, from a broader Canadian perspective, most of the cultural activity before the Second World War was amateur, participatory, and integrated with community traditions and institutions. Cultural activities were associated with character formation and local cultural activities often were run on a voluntary basis by middle class community leaders such as the librarian, the church organist, the choir master, or the schoolteacher (14). For similar reasons, the ideology of moral

improvement through culture accorded women a fuller participation in the arts than in other forms of public life: “Such pursuits had social purposes congruent with middle-class woman’s role as guardian of family respectability and community moral standards” (18). The theatrical practices discussed in this dissertation focus thus on women as culture makers whose works show evidence of ideological forces operating in the process of nation-building.

During my research, I have located and analysed more than 200 dramatic scripts by often prominent English-Canadian women writers but also by many aspiring amateur artists between Confederation and the Second World War. These scripts exist as either published works in magazines or as manuscripts in major archives and libraries throughout the country--many of which have not yet been evaluated systematically and critically. Sometimes, there are only fragments of performances, second-hand newspaper reviews or textual references (as, for example, in the case of Nellie McClung’s *The Women’s Parliament*). Unfortunately, this extensive array of theatrical and para-theatrical material cannot be evaluated in one dissertation. Rather than focusing on the works of a selected number of authors, I will therefore concentrate on a wider spectrum of themes and styles to create an overview of different forms of engagement with the nation and different versions of nationalism and imperialism. In this dissertation, I am using primary sources (such as performance scripts) plus historical sources (such as reviews, news reports, and the like) that allow me to reconstruct theatrical and para-theatrical performances for which no script has survived.

My discussion draws upon critical and theoretical sources that provide terms and concepts which help to analyze the complex relationships between performances and

discourses of nationalism. Tim Edensor in *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* argues that a sense of a national identity is more often and more successfully produced and reproduced in the everyday and in the realm of amateur and popular culture than in the works of cultural elites and the dominant discourses of authoritative culture and invented traditions, as previous studies of nationalism have often suggested. He contends that performance is both an interesting site for analysis but also a useful metaphor to assess how “identities are [constructed], enacted, and reproduced, informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity” (69). Echoing Butler’s assertion that the notion of performance foregrounds identity as dynamic, he argues that an analysis of performances of nationhood and belonging cannot limit itself to page or official stage (whether this is an actual theatre stage, the ballroom or the imagined imperial stage of historical pageants, parades and enactments), but “needs to explore where identity is dramatized, broadcast, shared and reproduced, how these spaces are shaped to permit particular performances, and how contesting performances orient around both spectacular and everyday sites” (69). Accordingly, in this dissertation I argue for a need to broaden the definitions of theatrical practices to account for the variety of forms that early Canadian women playwrights and culture makers developed and employed in order to construct, contest, reproduce and challenge conceptions of identity in the intersection of nationhood and gender for women in Canada between 1880 and 1930.

My dissertation consists of four chapters. Relating late-Victorian ideas of cultural enlightenment to the political functions and possibilities of theatre and para-theatre, I argue that dramatic practices, by creating sites for staging national history, folklore and

cultural myths, can contribute to the formulation of a national ideology. With their rhetorical and semiotic features, theatre and para-theater offer effective means of exploring what is national, desirable or alien. Furthermore, because acts of performance purporting to express national values are staged in the actual presence of the community, they serve not only to make claims about national identity, but they can also gain immediate support or rejection for their attempts. Theatre, in this sense, acts as a public forum in which the audience scrutinizes and evaluates the ideas presented and assesses the validity of representations of national identity.

Following the example of queer critic Diana Fuss in her essay collection *Inside/Out*, or more recently within the Canadian critical context, Peter Dickinson's *Here is Queer: Nationalisms, Sexualities and the Literatures of Canada*, I would like to adapt their critical framework of "traveling inside out (and back again) along a Möbius strip" (6). Instead of focusing chronologically on one writer's dramatic work at a time, I have consciously juxtaposed theatrical works and para-theatrical works of different writers and sometimes works from different time periods of nation building in order to interdiscursively examine through critical analysis and historical contextualization a variety of performative strategies whereby gender and nationalism intersect in a continuously developing and changing Canadian context. This, at times, juxtaposes dramatists' iconographic representation of the nation and its history on stage and beyond with the symbolic representation of Miss Canada or other symbolic configurations of the nation, or with interrogations of national dilemmas in state-of-the-nation plays by Canadian women.

Thus, both chapters one and four focus on the performance of identity through the re-writing of history and myth. Analysing the closet dramas of Sarah Anne Curzon, the British Columbian frontier plays of Constance Lindsay Skinner and the elocutionary works of Pauline Johnson, I argue that all three dramatists carve out subject positions for women using forms and tropes that can be labelled “feminine” in societies that preferred to think of women and men as part of complementary but separate spheres – women naturally suited for the private world of the home and motherhood and men for the public world of work and politics.<sup>2</sup> All three artists not only assert different visions of distinctly Canadian cultural identities and history but also allow women to perceive themselves as active agents in the assertion and construction of private and public discourses within a budding Canadian nation. Chapter one delineates female embodiment of an Indigenous Canadian identity by juxtaposing Pauline Johnson’s dramatic performances as Indian maiden and English-Canadian lady on the Western frontier with a reading of Constance Lindsay Skinner’s British Columbian frontier drama *The Birthright*<sup>3</sup>—written to the tastes of a U.S. American audience. The fourth chapter pays special attention to politicized forms of history plays by comparing Catharine Nina Merritt’s popular 1897 loyalist play *When George the Third Was King* with Sarah Anne Curzon’s 1876 closet

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<sup>2</sup> In her study on domestic realism and the performance of gender in early Canadian fiction, Misao Dean contends that femininity in the nineteenth century was “its own kind of power, however limited, and that women grasped that power to construct themselves as authoritative” (*Practising* 10). Dean argues that early Canadian texts by women authors such as Sara Jeannette Duncan and Susanna Moodie adhered to discourses of domesticity in order to authorize their narrator’s voice: “by confirming to the ‘rules’ of femininity (as Susanna Moodie called them), women were enabled to use the limited authority which those rules granted” (34).

<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether Skinner’s original title included the definite article or not. All of her multiple drafts available in the New York Library Public Archives call the play *The Birthright*. However, reviews of the actual production as early as the one in *The Boston American* on 25 August 1912 drop the definite article. Skinner’s bibliographer Jean Barman uses both titles interchangeably. Joan Bryan’s 2005 Playwrights Canada edition calls the play just *Birthright*. In this dissertation, I am using the title with a definite article, as set out in Skinner’s original drafts.

drama *Laura Secord, Heroine of 1812*. I argue that both writers use their work to consciously emphasize the contributions of white Canadian women to important historical events in order to create relevant representations of active agents and moral decision-makers, all in accordance with late-Victorian ideology. Chapters two and three discuss the politics of imperialism and maternal feminism apparent in the plays of early twentieth-century writers like Mazo de la Roche, Sarah Anne Curzon, Nellie McClung and Isabel Ecclestone MacKay as well as in the Salvation Army spectacles in early British Columbia. In these two chapters, I analyze how women use these theatrical and para-theatrical forms to participate in public discourses and contemporary social politics by transgressing beyond gender limitations to lobby for social change as exemplified by three major reform movements (educational reform, enfranchisement and temperance). My conclusion uses Madge Macbeth's play *Scientific Salesmanship* to discuss the adaptive strategies all of these cultural works use to find support from multiple audiences by offering multiple subject positions and, nonetheless, providing transgressive roles and modes of female civic engagement in the nation building project. Taking into account that the creation of Canadian cultural artefacts was hardly a business any artist could survive on, I also examine how these artists and activists sought to reconcile the economic need to make a living with cultural, social and political activism.

As these chapter outlines reveal, I draw on different forms of dramatic and para-theatrical practises, and apply different theoretical lenses, in order to describe variations of form, content and impulse behind these sometimes outwardly diverse works and, ultimately, to illuminate how they create political and cultural agency for women in the intersectionality between gender and nation. The broadly chosen time frame allows me

not only to thoroughly consider works from an era of Canadian history that saw immense political and social changes, but also to analyze a variety of ways in which these women's works formed and were formed by the changing cultural and national imaginary. Although I sometimes allude to chronological developments, this dissertation does not attempt to write a cultural or literary history of the dramatic productions by female English-Canadian playwrights in the period it covers. Nor do I assume that a sequence of dramatic practices—whenever I choose to follow a chronological order—implies what critics have called a “narrative of progressive liberation;” rather, my analysis attempts to trace “mutations, over historical time, of an ideological system of subjection whose traces remain” (Dean, *Practising* 9). This approach allows me to identify and analyze several different subject positions within a broader sense of a Canadian identity as well as an array of embodiments of a Canada in the making. Some of these positions consciously challenge and revise commonly held assumptions about the intersections of gender and nationalism within the context of Canadian nation making; some appear more confined within the restricted structures that were granted to late-Victorian and Edwardian Canadian women.

### **Reconstructing Early Canadian Amateur Theatre and Canadian Audiences**

The idea of representing the nation in the theatre and in para-theatrical practices, of writing for and from within a representative audience that will in turn recognize itself as gendered and national beings on stage and in public, offers a compelling if ambiguous idea of discursive participation in processes of national and gendered identity constitution and construction. However, critics contend that the problematic relationship between

theatre and nation (as well as theatre and gender) remains particularly opaque because the two fields have been summoned to explain each other and have at times served each other as descriptive sources (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* x). Theatre, as Martin Esslin has suggested, teaches audiences “codes of conducts, its rules of social coexistence” (29). All drama is, in accordance with this argument, a political event (29). Raymond Williams in 1960 famously exclaimed: “to understand society, we have to look at its culture, even for political answers” (Williams 29). In Williams’ view, “in any society, in any period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective” (38). Such a dominant culture infuses multiple domains of everyday life. Its dominance, in part, is based on its ability to become common sense in everyday life. It is continually confirmed in multiple dimensions of ordinary experience. Although a dominant culture infuses everyday life, its dominance is never complete or uncontested. But does that in turn mean that all performances act politically? And how conscious is the political in performances? If we assume that nationalism and gender are consciously and unconsciously learned, performed, re-iterated and re-enacted, in which way do the dramatic works for early Canadian women writers reproduce common notions of national identity? Feminist theory acknowledges that all cultural productions are created in unequal power relations between men and women. “Women in [Western] cultures experience themselves and their lives in terms of and in response to masculine centred values and definitions” (Cornillon 113). Following this line of reasoning, to what extent can artists, performers and writers intervene in the intersecting discourses of gender and nationalism that they staged? And how much subversion does an audience

accept? Do these theatrical acts have the power to resist and re-signify established avenues?

Reading an earlier text, especially a text that is not bound to the printed page, comes with its own pitfalls. Raymond Williams argues that literature cannot be studied apart from its contexts, an approach which includes a broad understanding of the materiality of cultural production—its reception, institutionalization, and consumption—as opposed to a merely textual or aesthetic understanding of culture as “the ‘embodied spirit of a People,’ the true standard of excellence [...] the court of appeal in which real values [are] determined [...] the normal antithesis to the market” (Williams 51-53). But the heterogeneous body of material that can be recovered and the materiality of performative texts (insofar as this can be reconstructed) only partly help to illuminate the diversity of issues that early Canadian women writers faced in their cultural context. Several plays discussed in the following pages were staged, but never published, or—in the case of flag drills, performances that included dance, and the Salvation Army spectacles—photographic and descriptive records exist but no script survives. They were performed but never transcribed in detail. Nellie McClung’s influential *Women’s Parliament* only exists in fragments and as a description in her autobiography. Sarah Anne Curzon’s *Laura Secord* was written and published as a closet drama—to be consumed in private, not in public.

Warkentin and Murray have asserted that in order to appreciate early Canadian cultural production, one has to argue for an inclusion of all discursive material: “a wide linguistic and symbolic world” to “take us outward from our position as scholars of the purely or independently ‘literary,’ to a consideration of the way in which literature, and the larger

category we will call ‘discourse,’ are constructed by society” (7). How does a critic frame this multi-dimensionality of cultural production when Michael Peterman in his 1997 introduction to a special issue on *Writing Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada* cautions against misconstruing the past:

[...] the preoccupation with theory-driven criticism and with value systems in which the contemporary is privileged over the flawed and politically incorrect views that characterized our past has led to the favouring of trend-governed approaches, approaches that often engage in either calculated misreadings of new-world experience or an uninformed and historically irresponsible rendering of that past. (3)

As polemical as Peterman’s criticism of contemporary approaches to historiographically informed research in Canada’s earlier cultural production may have been, his call for a responsible rendering of the past grounded in historical research has been echoed several times.<sup>4</sup> While part of this introduction is intended to foreshadow the themes in early Canadian women’s cultural work on stage and beyond, suggest the varied institutional treatment of their dramatic production and highlight the particular context of Canadian culture in which they were created, it is also designed to situate this study in relation to recent scholarship and clarify the critics’ negotiation between postcolonial and feminist approaches to text and a historically sensitive reading.

### **Feminist Historiography and Early Canadian Women’s Theatre**

As in all historical investigation, questions of bias and method are as much a part of the interpretation as the history itself, and a historical issue can only truly be seen when a spectrum of approaches is used to shed light upon it. The last two decades of scholarly

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Heather Murray (2003), Misao Dean (1991), and Sylvia Söderlind (1995).

commentary upon Canada's past have intensified debates about the political implications of the interpretations made of women's cultural history. Feminist criticism in particular, as Janice Fiamengo has demonstrated, has invested considerable energy assessing early Canadian women's cultural productions as acts of resistance, subversion and liberation (277). While the feminist recovery of women's achievement in Canada began in the spirit of celebrating heroic foremothers, it has wrestled in the last decade with the racism, classism and other discriminatory tendencies of these important figures. Fulfilling the continuing need for revisionist work not only to further establish the early cultural production of women in Canada and to reassess women's writing that has previously been analysed according to a masculinist tradition, third-wave feminist critics have complicated the now popular representation of writers like Nellie McClung by pointing out their ideological shortcomings.<sup>5</sup> "Defensible and perhaps necessary," Fiamengo

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<sup>5</sup> Various studies have engaged in the discussions around the ideological convictions of early Canadian women writers. Cecily Devereux's study on Nellie McClung, *Growing a Race: Nellie McClung and the Politics of Eugenic Fiction*, investigates in detail the ideas of leading figures such as Emily Murphy and Nellie McClung and the politics of criticism that surrounds their work. Heralded as two of the most influential women of the Canadian reform movement (see, for example, Jack Granatstein's *MacLean's* article "100 Most Important Canadians in History"), the record of achievement for both women is long. As members of the "Famous Five," they successfully campaigned for the enfranchisement of women on a provincial (1916 in Manitoba) as well as on a national level through the 1920 Dominion Election Act. Reaffirming women's suffrage in Canada and providing women with the eligibility to hold office, they played a central role in the constitutional and national legislation of gender and citizenship that led to a reinterpretation of the British North America Act to include women as persons. However, despite their reform work to liberate women from oppressive conditions and, in Nellie McClung's own words, "to serve and save the race" moving all people towards a better Canadian nation, McClung and Murphy are also representative of the repressive ideas of "white Canada" based on notions of race and racial superiority. Critics have suggested that after 1880 in most national contexts, "ethnicity and language became the central, increasingly the decisive or even the only criteria of potential nationhood" (Hobsbawm 102). The eugenic movement, as Cecily Devereux argues, became one of the underpinning ideologies of British imperialism after 1880 that sought to preserve the valuable characteristic of good British stock while populating colonized territory with nationally identifiable settlers (Devereux 7). Nellie McClung actively promoted eugenics in Canada. In her view, "controlling reproduction—on the basis of eugenics—was crucial to liberating women, improving social conditions, protecting what seemed to her to be weaker and needier members of society, and maintaining social economic strength" (12). Emily Murphy was also in support of the eugenics movement. Her 1922 book, *The Black Candle*, is frequently cited as a prime example of anti-Asian racism prevailing during the period. It instructs the reader about the dangers of drug trafficking for Anglo Saxon dominance. In *The Back Candle*, Murphy portrays a rising opium culture in the Western provinces and warns her readers against the consequences of drug addiction. She blames the increase on the "fertile yellow races" (17) only to point out two pages later that recent scientific studies have linked drug abuse to impotence (19). Clearly, anyone concerned with the

concludes, “both idealizations and disavowal have a tendency to skew our critical emphasis, leading to responses of deference and moral righteousness” (277). In such circumstances, criticism is in danger of becoming what Nick Mount identifies as an evaluation with “largely implicit political praise or censure” (78).

### **The Inevitable Question of What Makes a Work a Canadian Work**

All works discussed in this dissertation are all at once unquestionably Canadian but yet pose unique critiques of Canadianness and the discourses that shape the intersection of gender and nationalism. They raise questions about the field of early Canadian women’s drama and cultural work in a larger context of Canadian literature, Canadian cultural criticism and feminist postcolonial critique, as the classification of material as Canadian (or in this case: English-Canadian) adds further difficulties. It breeds limitations in general and conjures the problematic history of Anglo-Canadian cultural nationalism, by privileging the category “Canadian” or specifically “English-Canadian” over other modes of analysis. It implicitly reinstates the idea of a nation-state as a legitimate and coherent social entity. The qualifier English-Canadian conjures the romantic nationalist imagery of a homogenous culture which posits the idea of an essentialist national identity. Critic Etienne Balibar calls this Canada’s “fictive ethnicity.” He argues that fictive ethnicity is

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future of the British stock would therefore embrace the politics of temperance and prohibition. Both McClung and Murphy thus did not differ in any significant way from other first-wave feminists working within the imperial framework (see, i.e., Valverde 1992; McClintock 1995). The discussion surrounding both women writers and activists and their legacy peaked in 1998 around the placement of a monument to the Famous Five on Parliament Hill (Ghosh 10). Devereux thus concludes that while second-wave feminism struggled with “questions of maternity” as a position from which to speak embraced in the first wave’s maternal feminism, the third generation of feminist critics wrestles with the uneasy association of race and motherhood. She cautions that “if imperialism is the locus for the emergence of a radical politics of maternal feminism, it is also the central problem for the late twentieth century and early twenty-first critique of the first wave [...] Their idea of motherhood was not only reductive and essentialist and (in second-wave) terms ‘conservative’; it was also embedded in a politics of nation- and empire-building, or racial difference and, inevitably, racial superiority and eugenics” (28).

the way in which a nation represents the narratives of its diverse people in one unified imagery as if they form a natural community: “No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized—that is, represented in the past or in the future as if they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interest which transcends individual and social conditions” (224). In that sense, the modifier English-Canadian subsumes a problematic series of concepts within a naturalized signifier that gives no indication of the discrepancies that are glossed over. It is only through the process of problematizing a dominant and powerfully normative category like English-Canadian that critics can learn to understand how these cultural politics of dominance and erasure are invented and reproduced (Mackey 3).<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1990s, Canadian critics have addressed what Davey has named as “CanLit’s continuous crisis.” “The nation,” he argued, “is being continuously discursively produced and re-produced from political contestation” (24). Any study of an aspect of Canadian cultural production therefore becomes a complex study beyond the parameter it sets for itself. If the theatrical and para-theatrical works of early Canadian women produce, re-create, rewrite and subvert national identity and cultural memory, how does one approach what critics have called Canada’s double historical legacy as colony and colonizer? Taking context and materiality into account, how does the postcolonial critic remain faithful to the political context in which the works were written? How does one account

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<sup>6</sup> Recent academic work on the dominance of English-Canadian cultural nationalism includes Eva Mackey’s *House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (2000), Sunera Thobani’s *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*, and Daniel Coleman’s *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2007).

for the contradictory spaces early Canadian women writers inhabited? Daniel Coleman cautions critics to withstand the notion of liberal civility that underlies all notions of white Canadianness and encourages reading with a “wry civility” (4).

### **Postcolonial Interrogations of the Position of the Critic and the Construction of the Nation**

In *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*, Maria Tippett argues most private and amateur art organizations that came together to make music, produce drama or paint during the period under discussion, while being aware that they were not completely detached from society, did so for their immediate community or “as an avenue of expression for themselves” (Alexander in Tippett 54). “Few such groups,” as Maria Tippett explains, “turned their attention outwards to matters of education, patronage, cultural policy, and public entertainment. And still fewer were motivated to create a unique culture for English Canada” (9). And yet, Matthew Arnold’s conception of an all-embracing culture rich with all the impulses towards social, artistic and spiritual refinement permeated general attitudes.

Critics such as Tippett clearly identify a late-Victorian educational impetus in all early Canadian literature, theatre and other forms of culture. This raises the questions of how aware female artists were of the political nature of some of their works. Some of the plays discussed in this dissertation seek political or social gains, such as McClung’s *Women’s Parliament*. However, although many of Pauline Johnson’s performed pieces criticized white Canada for its “treatment of the red Indian” (Johnson, “As It Was in the Beginning” 127), Johnson would have not considered her writing ‘political.’ This leaves critics with another conundrum. How aware were the women writers under discussion

here about their own position, the political nature of their art works and their own agency?

One of the founding articles of postcolonial studies is Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In the article, Spivak—challenging the colour and class blindness of Western academics—categorically insists that 'the subaltern cannot speak' (308). Interrogating in the field of both 'representation' and 'representability,' she draws attention to the complicated relationship between the knowing investigator and the (unknowing) subject. She questions how a critic can "touch the consciousness of the people, even as we investigate their politics" (285). In this sense, she asks if a post-colonial critic is unknowingly complicit in the task of imperialism by trying to reconstruct the agency of their research subject. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak encourages but also criticizes the efforts to locate and re-establish a "voice" or collective locus of agency in postcolonial India. While Spivak is arguing from a highly sophisticated Marxist position—critiquing the critique within which she operates—her essay remains an important and uneasy reminder of the reflective and unstable positions critics inhabit in ascribing agency, as in the case of early Canadian women's dramatic and para-theatrical works, to those who may only be partially aware of their own agency, and more importantly, may be complicit with imperial and national discourses.

Aside from a careful consideration of the position of a critic that postcolonial theory helps to circumscribe, this school of literary theory has lately declared the nation as analytical category outmoded. It has shifted in recent years from "engaging in the process of 'imagining' the nation," and then "embarking on what is seen as a much more sophisticated examination of identity and hybridity" within the constraints of a particular

national discourse (Szeman 26) to Arjun Appadurai's command that "We need to think ourselves beyond the nation" (Appadurai in Chatterjee 34), to most recently Hardt and Negri's space and nation annihilating Empire and the cosmopolitics of a global civil society. These critics have argued that we have moved beyond the nation state to a globalized society. Looking at contemporary politics, this does not hold true. Indeed, as San Juan, Jr. points out, paradoxically, today the complex "system of nation-states still function as seemingly viable institutions of everyday life" (11). It is therefore even more crucial to interrogate the "apparent naturalness of modes of understanding and enacting national identity" (Edensor vii), as the nation has still tangible political consequences long after it has been decried as an outmoded system. The works discussed in this dissertation help to illuminate the ways in which Canada as a nation is represented and imagined in the works by early Canadian women writers that helped naturalize a sense of national identity through the staging of "beliefs, assumptions, habits, historical characters, representations and practices" (Billig 6), which in turn helped (re)produce national identity that is still at work one hundred thirty years later.

It is therefore of importance to understand how the nation is performed in everyday culture. As an imagined nation in constant reproduction, the Canada early Canadian women playwrights and culture makers envisioned existed simultaneously in a complex colonial, postcolonial, imperial position that was equally part of various nationalist sentiments. The divergences in their visions and positions may be best captured by phrasing taken out of Sara Jeannette Duncan's 1886 article following the negotiations for Confederation. While bemoaning that "we are still an eminently unliterary people," she nonetheless fondly calls the envisioned unity of the provinces "our present imperfect

autonomy” in which representations of nation and gender are imbricated in the exigencies of an imperfect present (Duncan qtd. in Fiamingo 46).

### **Performing Nationalism and Gender Within the Context of a Canadian Identity**

Critical paradigms of the seventies and eighties have suggested that Canada’s national narratives, the stories of its “becoming,” have been shaped largely by a series of dualities: French and English, wilderness and garden, North and South, and hinterland and metropolis. More recently, with new developments in the field of contemporary critical theory and cultural studies, Canadian scholars have started to examine certain assumptions about themselves, their national narratives and their literary histories.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ajay Heble, “the new contexts of Canadian criticism have forced Canadians to expand their repertoire of contradictory experiences to include, for example, a consideration of the tensions between some of the following: race, class, ethnicity, and gender; nationalism and globalism; postmodernism and postcolonialism; Canadian studies and postcolonial theory; Canadian, Native, and Postcolonial contexts; subaltern or oppositional voices and hegemonic or media-constructed narratives” (Heble 87). The transformation of Canada's unified story into a multitude of competing traditions and histories has emerged from a variety of sources, including feminist criticism, the voices of First Nations peoples and the stories of Canada's immigrant peoples who have striven to assert their own hybrid identities and the existence of their own histories.

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the canon debates between Robert Lecker (*Canadian Canons: Essays in Literary Value and Making it Real: The Canonization of English-Canadian Literature*) and Frank Davey (Davey devotes a chapter of *Canadian Literary Power* to what he calls "The Collapse of the Canadian Poetry Canon"). See also Smaro Kamboureli’s *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* and E.D. Blodgett’s *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada*.

Though these restatements acknowledge the impact of gender on the re-imaginings of national narratives, general theories of nationalism, albeit acknowledging that nations have historically constructed themselves as gendered institutions (e.g., Nagel 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997), have paid little attention to the intersections of gender and nationalism. Yet men and women historically have had different and gender-defined relationships to basic conceptual categories in nationalist discourses such as ‘family,’ ‘nation,’ and ‘state.’ Geoff Eley and Ronald Suny acknowledge that “we [...] need to consider the gendered dimensions and meanings of nationalist discourse more seriously, for this remains an astonishing absence in most of the scholarly literature, whether general or particular” (Eley and Suny 27). And while several aspects such as the philosophical roots and ideological manifestations of nationalism (e.g., Gellner 1993, Kohn 1967), the ethnic origins of nations (e.g., Smith 1981), the influences of economic development, political elites and state-building (e.g., Anderson 1991, Hobsbawm 1990) and the cultural dimensions of nationalism (e.g., Anderson 1991, Bhabha 1990) have received critical attention, the relationship between gender and nationalism has been neglected in the most commonly cited texts on nations and nationalism.<sup>8</sup>

Ernst Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983,1991), Eric Hobsbawm’s *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Anthony Smith’s *National Identity* (1991) and Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1990) all address ways in which nations are constructed and imagined. In doing so all

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<sup>8</sup> Given the wide range of approaches to nationalism and the different issues addressed in the multiple texts on nationalism, it is not surprising that academics are not in accord about the various definitions of nation, national identity and, in particular, nationalism. Some schools of thought see nationalism as based in profound patriotism and politicized citizenship (see, for example, Billig 2005, Greenfield 1992); other scholars argue that nationalism constitutes the promotion of the culture of an ethnic group or the politicization of ethnic identity (Said 1994, Smith 1991, Cook 1974).

five male theorists rely on an analysis of a multiplicity of identities that shape the political identity of the nation and its citizens. With varying methodologies, they are trying to identify how an individual sense of self and individual experiences are connected to the development of a collective national identity. However, they all treat nations, nationalism and national identity as non-gendered phenomena and their gendered and gender-neutral uses of language reflect the absence of any consideration of gender in their studies.

I would like to draw attention to and, for the remainder of this dissertation, take over Anthony Smith's useful distinction between the terms nation, nationalism, and national identity. For Smith *nationalism* refers to a specific ideology and movement that is nonetheless closely related to *national identity*, a multidimensional concept that includes specific language, sentiments and symbolism (14). However, "while for analytical purposes it is necessary to distinguish the ideological movement of *nationalism* from the wider phenomenon of *national identity*, we cannot begin to understand the power and appeal of nationalism as a political force without grounding our analysis in a wider perspective whose focus is national identity treated as a collective cultural phenomenon" (vii).

Intervening in the shortfall in common theories of nationalism, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias have recognized five major ways in which women participate and are implicated in nationalism (7). As active agents of nationalism, they identify women as the biological reproducers of members of national collectives, as participants in nationalistic struggles as well as active educators, transmitters and producers of national culture. In a passive role, women function through restrictions on sexual and marital relations as

reproducers of the boundaries of national groups, and symbolically they signify national difference. Following Elleke Boehmer's insight that men are commonly represented as metonymic with the nation whereas women are typically construed as symbolic bearers of the nation and thus denied any access to national agency, in "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," Anne McClintock interrogates the trope of the national family in its representation of spatial, temporal and hierarchical relationships and argues that narratives of nationalism are symbolically figured as "domestic genealogies" (63). For her, "All nations depend on powerful constructions of gender" (61) and borrowing Anderson's definition of nation as "imagined community," McClintock explores how national political institutions and national systems of cultural representation help sanction the "institutionalization of gender difference" (61). For her, the family trope allows for a naturalization of social and racial hierarchies "within a putative organic unity and interest" and a way in which social distinctions "could be shaped into a single historical genesis narrative" of zoomorphic evolution: "Since children naturally progress into adults, projecting the family image on to national and imperial 'Progress' enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree (64). However, despite the potentially active involvement in national projects that Yuval and Davis ascribe them to, McClintock contends that female representations are regressive and male representation progressive. She points out that the relationship between race, gender and nationalism can be seen in the British colonization of South Africa, in which white middle-class men were seen as the agency of national progress, whereas women were seen as the "anachronistic humans." Additionally, the racial difference between black and white was represented through the relationship

between parent colonizers and filial colonized. Women's political identity is limited to a supportive and auxiliary role and their political agency constituted in the ideology of motherhood. McClintock concludes that a gendered division of national agency prevails in the sense that men have agency in political and economic realms whereas women's agency is confined to the moral and spiritual realm as the keepers of tradition.

Certainly, in the case of Canada the discourses of motherhood as the keeper of culture have enabled women to enact limited agency within the discourses of nationalism and imperialism and to progressively extend their role into the public realm. However, what complicates McClintock's dichotomy of gender within the trope of a national family is Canada's construction as either male or female. To illustrate this, one needs only to look at the two popular symbolic embodiments of the nation as Jack Canuck and Miss Canada in the period under discussion. The earliest references to Johnny or Jack Canuck date back to the 1830s when he was used in reference to French Canadians (Adcock). With his first appearance in the satirical magazine *Grinchuckle* in 1869, he became the physical representation of a proud Canadian and was often portrayed as a simple but proud northern lumberjack. Miss Canada appeared as early as 1870 in the *Canadian Illustrated News*. Similar to other national tropes such as Britannia or Marianne, she was often depicted as a Greek goddess and embodied morality and virtue. Both symbolic representations were frequently evoked to present Canadian values, on stage as well as in popular magazines. Indeed, Edith Lelean Groves' 1927 popular pageant *The Wooing of Miss Canada* symbolically marries both figures on stage, merging both feminine and masculine values of nationhood. Responding to the fairy godmother's question of what arguments he has "to advance for your union with Canada," Jack Canuck as suitor of

Miss Canada replies that they share the same ideals of nationhood: “Her development as a nation, her future growth, her progress in the realms of commerce, of education, of literature, of art. I am strong, I am vigorous, I would safeguard her interests” (Grove 14).

### **Performance as Practice: Gender and Nation in the Theatre and Beyond**

In a survey of studies evaluating nineteenth-century and early twentieth century Canadian drama, women playwrights have not received much critical attention and have been relegated to the sidelines as enthusiastic amateurs a long way from the centres of theatrical culture. With the exception of Canadian playwright Sarah Anne Curzon and a handful of others, who have been examined by Celeste Derksen, Alan Filewod, Moira Day and Kym Bird,<sup>9</sup> previous studies of early Canadian theatre have either neglected women’s contribution to dramatic developments in both English and French Canada or dismissed the particular characteristics of plays by women. Michael Tait has infamously argued that “of all the branches of Canadian literature, nineteenth century drama has received least attention for reasons that are entirely understandable” (Tait 5). Tait’s analysis is characteristic -- one among many articles that attempt to critically evaluate early drama in Canada: “Formlessness, ineffective characterization, pretentious moral attitudes, lack of stylistic distinction, stupefying prolixity, together with other unfortunate qualities vitiate most of the serious attempts at drama in Canada between 1860 and 1914” (5). Similarly, women’s cultural contributions to early Canadian nation-building have long been dismissed and have only in the last thirty years received attention (Henderson 15).

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<sup>9</sup> See in particular Celeste Derksen’s PhD thesis on women’s comedy, Kym Bird’s leading study *Redressing the Past: The Politics of Early-English Canadian Women’s Drama, 1880-1920*, and Moira Day’s articles on Gwen Pharis Ringwood or on women playwrights and the early Canadian Prairie Theatre.

Thus, most critics continue to downplay the significance of women's social concerns and cultural contributions and their significance for the creation of a coherent national culture and identity on the stages and streets of a developing nation. Such studies continue what Carole Gerson 30 years ago termed "the still prevalent [...] critical embargo of 'feminine' concerns" in literary and historical criticism. These "'feminine' concerns," or in other words artistic attention to social and domestic issues, are demoted as 'sentimental'" and subsequently ignored (47). And even though Early Canadian literature has been an established academic field since the early eighties, critics still fail to attend to the significance of women's social concerns and how they manifested themselves in dramatic and para-theatrical discourses. For example, as Celeste Derksen points out,

by criticizing the fact that early (women) playwrights in Canada adopted British forms, that they appreciated conventionality over innovation, that they had little contact with the realities of the stage, or that they employed stereotypes rather than idiosyncratic characters, criticism has failed to give credence to what these playwrights [and cultural activists] were actually doing. (*Female Subjects* 14)

Derksen concludes that "[T]his kind of criticism hinders examination of feminist and nationalist practice in dramatic discourse and fails to consider how women playwrights and writers manipulated conventions, dramatic forms and expectations for their own purpose" (16). It is therefore of ongoing importance to include early-Canadian woman culture makers in contemporary discussions on the making of a unique Canadian identity. Viewed as cultural scripts, the theatrical and para-theatrical works discussed in this dissertation show how the intersection of 'gender' and 'nationalism' was used strategically to achieve agency in discourses women did not generally participate in. It is

my conviction that these women's cultural works are as relevant for an understanding of Canadian identity today as they were one hundred twenty years ago.

### **Carrie Davies' 1914 Murder Trial in the Context of National and Imperial Discourses**

At first glance, it may seem surprising to conclude my introduction about how discourses of gender and nationalism played out in early Canadian women's theatrical and para-theatrical practices between 1880 and 1940 with a discussion of an early-twentieth-century murder trial. But I would like to discuss the theatricality of the trial and the performativity of the protagonists as its melodramatic plot and cast of characters allow me to circumscribe the complex subject positions and complicated cultural, social and political forces that enable the work of early Canadian women cultural makers and at the same time limit the agency they can ascribe to the characters they invent for the stage or claim for public personas beyond the stage.

On February 8, 1914, shortly after six o'clock in the evening, eighteen-year old Carrie Davies shot her employer Charles A. Massey on the doorsteps of his house in one of Toronto's fashionable districts. Even though the young English girl, who had been a servant in the Massey household for two years, admitted the murder and was subsequently tried, she left the Criminal Assizes Court on February 26 exonerated from all stigma of crime by a jury of twelve men and was formally acquitted and discharged by Chief Justice Sir William Mulock. The judge is reported to have announced the verdict "you are now a free woman" with tears in his eyes. Carrie Davies, before leaving the crowded courtroom, thanked the judge and the jury for their merciful treatment ("Carrie Davies Freed" 1).

All three major papers, *The Globe*, the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, and the *Toronto World*, reported on the Massey murder and ran extensive features on the trial. And while the article in the *Toronto World* the day after the arrest was somewhat hesitant to characterize the participants as the cast of the melodramatic courtroom drama the trial was to become (“‘Bert’ Massey Was Murdered by Domestic” 1), *The Globe* already insisted that the murder was of sensationally dramatic and personal interest:

As [Charles A. Massey] mounted the veranda steps he was suddenly faced by his servant girl, Carrie Davies, who stood in the doorway. As he was about to cross the threshold the girl, without uttering a word or giving her employer a chance to defend himself, drew a revolver and fired. The first shot went wild, but the second entered the left breast. (“Carrie Davies Tells” 8)

Davies, the eighteen-year-old servant from Bedfordshire, England, had shot Massey in front of witnesses and had made a confession immediately after her arrest. She resembled, as commentators in the *Toronto Star* explained, “the picture of working-class respectability [while Charles Massey resembled] the prototype of a wealthy cad” (Strange 160).

Charles ‘Bert’ Massey came from a well-known and respected Toronto family. His grandfather, Hart Massey, had acquired the family wealth through a farm equipment enterprise, which Walter Massey, in whose memory Massey Hall was built, expanded to a worldwide enterprise. The Massey clan were well-known philanthropists. Charles Massey, in contrast to his respected upper-class Methodist family, was well known for other things. A sales agent for York Motors and fond of racing cars, *The World* depicted him as “quite popular figure among the society set” (“‘Bert’ Massey Was Murdered by Domestic” 1), while *The Globe* commented that he was “well known about town” and

“took much enjoyment out of life” (“Carrie Davies Tells” 8). *The World* did also not fail to mention that he carried a diamond stickpin picking up his newspaper on the evening of the murder—a symbol of vanity in the eyes of the newspaper audience (“‘Bert’ Massey Was Murdered by Domestic” 1).

In contrast to this display of playboy manners, Carrie Davies was characterized as a pure and righteous working-class heroine of melodramatic proportions. After her father, a veteran of the Boer war, had died, her impoverished mother had sent the oldest of four daughters to service in Canada to support the family in England. On the night of the murder she was carrying \$30 in a letter addressed to her family. During the trial she also confided that she had managed to pay back her passage of \$45 and send home an extra \$5 per month out of her wage of \$16. A model of piety and praiseworthiness, the young girl had briefly seen a young man who had signed for military service shortly after they had met. The public agreed that a “writer of melodramas could hardly have created a more virtuous heroine” (Strange 161).

According to the witnesses, Charles Massey had behaved with propriety towards the servants in the household until a weekend in early February 1915, when his mother was away. On Friday evening, according to Carrie Davies, he got drunk at a dinner party and made lewd remarks to her. Later that weekend he made several attempts to kiss her, tried to wrestle her onto a bed she was making and urged her to take a ring from him. After a visit to her sister and brother-in-law, during which she confided in her relatives who, in return, advised her that her womanly duty was to protect her innocence, she took a revolver from her master’s house and shot her master as he came up the path from his Monday evening walk. In her trial, Carrie Davies confessed that she had shot Charles

Massey as a matter of feminine honour. His several attempts had convinced her that he would have been successful eventually in his attempts to take advantage of her. To protect herself from disgrace, she had to take drastic measures. After the shooting she went right up to a detective, to whom she confessed in a straightforward and concise manner.

In her essay “Wounded Womanhood and Dead Men: Chivalry and the Trials of Clara Ford and Carrie Davies,” historian Carolyn Strange analyses the highly publicized trial that ensued after the murder and argues that Clara Davies was exonerated on the basis of dominant ideas of chivalry. The media, together with Clara Davies’ lawyer, constructed a narrative that relied on dominant notions of gender, class and melodramatic patterns, which in turn affected the outcome of the legal proceedings. Strange emphasizes the notion of chivalry and gender stereotypes that underlie the legal and public discourses surrounding the trial. Common notions of gender behaviour expected a gentleman in Victorian and Edwardian time to protect the defenceless and inferiors.<sup>10</sup> In Carrie Davies’ case that meant that due to the discourses of gender, class and nationality, several lawyers offered their service to the wronged English servant, the Toronto Local Council of Women rushed to her aid and Torontonians working-class members of British origins organised in the Bedfordshire Fraternal Association launched a collection for a legal defence fund on Davies’s behalf (Strange 163). Davies’s brother-in-law decided to rely only on the help of the BFA and hired Hartley Dewart as legal advocate. He and the executive committee of the BFA, Carolyn Strange explains, “considered it a matter of

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<sup>10</sup> For an extensive discussion of Victorian notions of chivalry and the rise of chivalric practises and ideas before the Great War see Mark Girouard’s *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (1981) and Alice Chandler’s *A Dream of Order* (1971).

pride to shoulder the burden of Davies's defence without the help of the 'ladies of the upper stratum.'" (171).<sup>11</sup> The type of chivalric justice that marks Carrie Davies's trial therefore

[...] perpetuates female and male stereotypes since it upholds equally the ideals of female frailty and masculine heroism; at the same time, it reaffirms the class and race privilege of the men who wield the power to protect and the option of pardon. (151)

To use melodramatic terminology here, the female lead character, after successfully protecting her innocence in the absence of male protection, in this sense, now becomes a foil for the male characters in the trial; they determined her fate by following a melodramatic script. Carrie Davies was unable to defend herself the moment she confessed the murder in public and stepped into the male public domain. And while the lawyers, the jury and the judge are active agents in writing the melodramatic subtext, the reliance on theatrical structures also disguises Carrie Davies's lack of agency.

### **Performance, Performativity and Melodrama as Cultural Script**

Sensationalism and pity for the sufferings of others are, according to critics, markers of nineteenth-century melodrama (Harris 44). In particular romantic melodrama, with virtuous heroines in distress, heartless male villains and strong heroes to the rescue, enjoyed great popularity with nineteenth and early-twentieth century theatre audiences.

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<sup>11</sup> Class in this sense is as much part of the discourse surrounding nationalism as gender is. However, it is less part of the mythmaking and representation of nationalism and national identity. William H. New in *Landslide* explains that class for Canadians "is a problematic category [...]: it is associated with education (though not uniformly with grammatical accuracy), with money (though not uniformly with taste), and with position (though not uniformly with birth or family). Nor is it fixed in character or permanently passed from generation to generation. And yet an adopted version of a fixed class-taste connection can sometimes govern cultural perceptions" (84). I will address the specific discourses surrounding class and gender in the light of Canadian nationalism in the following chapter.

One generic variance in the battle for virtue is the moment when the plot twists and the heroine is left without the possibility of rescue. Generic conventions allow her in this case to take justice into her own hands (47). A poor girl improperly treated by a rich villain could therefore, in the absence of male protection, turn to self-defence.

Both the media and Carrie Davies's lawyer relied on this melodramatic structure to report on the case and to set up her defence. Melodrama, as the most popular dramatic genre in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, relies on representational foils as characters. The heroine's unblemished character, ethnicity and youthful innocence helped to construct a case in which, ideologically speaking, imperial values, Canadian morals and national honour were at stake. The fact that she killed Bert Massey in broad daylight was undeniable; furthermore, in setting up her defence, lawyer Hartley Dewart emphasized the gravity of her doing. While the crown counsel argued that Massey had merely made advances that were not sufficient justification for murder, Dewart tried to convince the jury that such an unspoiled and innocent character with upright upbringing could not see any other means of escape but to take drastic action: "Never before had there been such a charge against an innocent and honourable girl fighting against unequal odds and a treacherous assailant" (Dewart in *Strange* 172). In addition to this reference to stereotypical melodramatic plot of the case, he repeatedly referred to the defendant as "the little girl" in fatherly fashion.

Until the Second World War, late-Victorian ideas discouraged female participation in the public sphere. And even though in 1892 one Clara Martin opposed the oppressive norms of nineteenth century Victorian society to become the first woman in Canada and the British Empire to be admitted to the practice of law, the legal realm was up to the

Second World War solely the arena of patriarchy.<sup>12</sup> Developing the defence in a way that matched the narrative structures and clearly identifiable tropes of melodrama, Dewart addressed the jury and the judge. Taking into account that most jury members were white males over fifty from respectable families, Dewart suggested that the public was obligated not only to protect the victim but to right the wrong of the misdeed done to her, especially, as in the case of Carrie Davies, if neither father nor fiancé was able to stand up for her. In his final defence, Hartley Dewart concluded that taking a girl's greatest possession through brutal assault constituted a barbarian act:

The attack gave the girl only one alternative [...] If she did not defend herself against that man, she would have been a fallen woman, an outcast, one more sacrifice. Let that sink into your mind. *It was not manslaughter. It was brute-slaughter.* (Dewart in *Strange* 174, emphasis given)

Carrie Davies doubled in Dewart's script as both the archetype of the fallen woman and the innocent maiden that needed to be rescued. His crafted defence made the means by which Carrie Davies sought to protect herself and the actions that the court should take look inevitable.

Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* describes "the triumph of moral virtue over villainy, and the consequent idealizing of the moral views assumed to be held by the audience" as two central themes underlying the melodramatic imagination (47).

Melodrama, according to Frye, exists within a mass-cultural framework, and could easily function as "advance propaganda for the police state" if it were taken seriously. By idealizing strong justice and a righteous sense of morality melodrama, Frye argues,

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<sup>12</sup> Constance Backhouse discusses the life of Canada's first female lawyer Clara Martin in her chapter "Lawyering: Clara Brett Martin, Canada's First Woman Lawyer."

comes “as close as it is normally possible for art to come to the pure self-righteousness of the lynching mob.” However, Frye believes that “a protective wall of play” surrounds the genre and prevents the audience from taking the melodramatic plot too seriously.

However, looking at the implications of the Massey murder’s cultural script at work seems to contest Frye’s notion of a “protective wall” and questions the slippery relationship between theatrical acts and the actions of the law.

Peter Brooks, in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, finds melodrama acting forcefully in society, reflecting the socialization of the personal. He sees in the melodramatic imagination unremitting conflict, possibly disabling, excessive enactment, and ultimately clarification and cure. Brooks argues that it is similar to our experience of a nightmare, where virtue is seemingly helpless in the face of menace. “The end of the nightmare is an awakening brought about by confrontation and expulsion of the villain, the person in whom evil is seen to be concentrated, and a reaffirmation of the society of 'decent people'" (Brooks 204). Even though critics have noted the importance of melodramatic structures, two very different definitions of the genre have evolved: a description of melodrama as social ritual and as an ideological tool. The ritual model is described as a “society perspective” while the argument that genres like melodrama are ideological tools is referred to as the “production of a cultural perspective” (Kapsis 68-69). Both critical approaches demand a broader discursive analysis, as melodrama relies on both a description and prescription of mainstream cultural values. Thus, melodrama should be viewed critically as a “broadly discursive mode, function, form and effect” because its meaning is socially and historically produced in a wide variety of media, narrative structures and aesthetic forms” (Cunningham 354).

Melodrama was the most popular dramatic form throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Relying on characters that do not resonate with authenticity but embody normative larger-than-life types of heroes and villains, melodrama argues that virtue is a constantly embattled value. The positive characters represent a carefully defined value system in which good triumphs over evil in the end. These heroic characters offer "roles which, though informal, have become rather well conceptualized and in which there is a comparatively high degree of consensus" (Klapp 52).<sup>13</sup> "The plight of the heroine, 'made desperate by the insensitivity, deceitfulness or villainy of men'" (Harris 44), not only lends dramatic tension to structurally simple tales, it also enables the spectator to identify with the social values epitomized in the characters.

Melodrama attracted audiences from all classes as it came to signify "democratic drama," relying on sensationalism and exaggerated forms of pity for the sufferings of others. Critics condemned the form as sensational, sentimental entertainment for the "masses." However, they also noted that "[M]elodrama had become one of the established modes of thinking [in Victorian times] and [an] expression that extended well beyond the theatre" (Postlewait 231). Postlewait states,

[W]e might entertain the idea that melodrama is not an early stage of modern realistic drama (or any other kind of drama). [...] As a concept and a practice, it has its own achieved form, fully developed and immensely popular since the end of the eighteenth century. (55)

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<sup>13</sup> Orrin Klapp argues in "Heroes, Villains and Fools, as Social Types" that melodramatic characters offer "roles which, though informal, have become rather well conceptualized and in which there is a comparatively high degree of consensus" (54). For Klapp, heroes and villains are stock characters within a culture and provide models that people try to approximate. As such, these stock characters represent "basic dimensions of social control in any society."

In addition to the cultural gesture that melodrama represents, it also presented a venue in which the cultural, economic and political issues of a particular time and space could be transformed into public discourse.<sup>14</sup>

What marks the case of Carrie Davies as exceptional is its reliance on melodramatic mode, its language and structures of theatricality, and its representations of gender, class, nationalism, and imperialism. It can be read to explore some of the contours of early twentieth-century Canadian culture; it reveals how strongly structures of dramatic narratives are embedded in everyday life—especially the use of melodramatic and comedic patterns in both a prescriptive and proscriptive sense and the prominent foregrounding of gender imagery in public discourses on nationalism and imperialism. In Carrie Davies’s defence, lawyer Hartley Davies makes his plea for his defendant by appealing to the national and imperial duty of the members of the jury, a duty that he describes thus: “We have placed upon ourselves as Canadians the duties of trustees and guardians for girls who come from home such as this [English girl] to Canada” (Dewart in *Strange* 173).

It is important here to note the context to the trial to understand the strategy of the defence. The first year of the Great War saw an increase in nationalist sentiment brought

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<sup>14</sup> In this sense, melodrama, indeed all dramatic structures, become more modality than genre. I adopt here what Fredric Jameson in the *Political Unconscious* calls a “semantic theory of mode” (108). In contrast to a “syntactic” approach to literary categories, which is descriptive and taxonomic, a semantic understanding in Jameson’s sense prioritizes an idea of its form as inherently meaningful. It insists that modes make a statement or propose a concept about our social relationships to one another and the world(s) we share. Jameson points out that various genres such as comedy, tragedy and romance actually function as modes since each implies a distinct, fundamental relationship to the world. Historian Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe* develops a similar notion of modality, calling them “tropological modes,” which, he argues, “underlie and inform” the work of major nineteenth-century historians (ix). Mode, White argues, is a “prefigurative” element that precedes the text and enacts a message in accordance with the mode of its composition. Thus writers, in White’s view, do not employ a mode as much as work from *within* it.

on by Canada's decision to support the British war effort through its own troops. When Britain declared war on the Triple Alliance in 1914, Canada as a British colony was automatically considered to be at war as well. Prime Minister Robert Borden offered assistance to the U.K. in the form of Canadian troops, which Britain quickly accepted. Of a nation of eight million people, more than 600,000 enlisted over the course of the war. Sir Wilfred Laurier, Canada's Opposition leader in 1914, voiced the popular Canadian opinion when he declared: "It is our duty to let Great Britain know and to let the friends and foes of Great Britain know that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart and that all Canadians are behind the Mother Country" ("Sir Wilfred Laurier"). Politicians, the media, education and volunteer institutions generated nationalistic images of unity, patriotism and homogeneity. In an effort to promote the war, Canadians were encouraged to enlist, to raise funds and sell government bonds and to show and campaign for public support. Canadians, according to its cultural nationalists, were to establish their own autonomy, culturally and politically.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the general rise in nationalism, different political groups emphasized slightly different values in the ongoing process of nationalistic mythmaking. In addition to what historians have called the competing nationalisms of English and French Canada,<sup>16</sup> other nationalistic schools of thought were competing for prominence in the first two decades

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Vance, Joan Sangster and Douglas McCalla argue that certain standard myths about the Great War and its influence on Canadian nationalism were already in place during the war and firmly rooted in the public imagination in the interwar period. These ideas include the standard interpretation that Canada came to maturity during the First World War, that Canadian nationalism was born in the trenches, and that Canadian women found liberation through war work (MacKenzie 4).

<sup>16</sup> Ramsay Cook and Craig Brown have analysed the clash between French-Canadian and English-Canadian nationalisms during the First World War on the grounds of cutbacks in French language education, the different attitudes towards volunteering in the war and ultimately the conscription crisis. See Cook 1976, 1985.

of the twentieth century. And even though all of these competing forms of nationalism assumed that “the people whose ideas they expressed possessed a distinctive national character which was the product of racial inheritance and social training, environment and historical experience” (Berger, “The True North” 18), their goals, creed and future vision for the country differed. English-Canadian imperialism, which fuelled the First World War during the first war years, sought to strengthen the imperial ties, while liberal and cultural nationalists campaigned for a growth of constitutional nationality through responsible government.

Several competing forms of national and imperial discourses are played out on the stage of Carrie Davies’s trial. The Bedfordshire Fraternal Association, chosen by her brother-in-law, became the principal defender of the embattled heroine. It asserted the grounds for her defence using loyalist and imperial reasoning. Made up of recent British emigrants to Canada, they tried to raise funds by

appeal[ing] to every Englishman, Welshman and soldier, to every British subject who is worthy [of] the name to give the price of a cigar or a glass of beer and not let this scandal be upon them of a poor, friendless girl condemned because she was too poor to bring out the evidence in her own favour. (Anonymous contributor to the *Toronto Star* cited in Strange 163)

The rhetoric used to describe the unchivalrous attack and the following appeals to the public are reminiscent of the imperial sentiment that motivated Canada to join the war.<sup>17</sup>

Imperialism was strong in English Canada in the decades before and in the early years of the First World War. The newspapers and public organizations reminded Canadians that

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<sup>17</sup> Interesting to note here is that Desmond Morton suggests that for the most part the men who volunteered to go to war in its early stages in 1914 were recent British immigrants. Evaluating enlisting records, he explains that “for the most part, the crowds of men who jammed into armouries were neither militia nor Canadian-born” (Morton, *When Your Number’s Up* 9).

Canada was part of the empire and thus had to actively support the mother country in a just war which Britain had tried to prevent. The war in these inculcations was presented to the public as a masculine event and a romantic commitment glamorized by the notion of sacrifice (Sugars and Moss 143). Organizations such as the Imperial Daughters of Empire and the Young Women's Christian Association, who also showed their support in the trial of the British servant, campaigned for a strong female support role on the home front in loyalty to the empire and in defence of Anglo-Saxon values in the face of a Teutonic aggressor. While men were portrayed as the "Just Warrior," women were addressed as moral mothers of the nation who would sacrifice their sons to the cause.<sup>18</sup>

Both women's organizations, the BFA and her lawyer fashioned Carrie Davies in an allegorical role that reflected the expectations the public media had generated for a young woman supportive of the war cause. Honourable soldiers were fighting in the trenches against the enemy in a battle to uphold British values and honour. Female British subjects raised hundreds of thousands of dollars through organizations like the IODE, volunteered in organizations like the Red Cross or for the registration of citizens, assisted in the production of clothes, bandages and other goods for the military and declared from public platforms that only selfish women would "hold back their husbands, fathers and brothers" (Maroney 96). Women were expected to "keep the home fires burning" (95) and to preserve, as "mothers of a superior race" (Devereux, *Growing* 12), British values.

Other women's organisations, like the Toronto Local Council of Women, who also offered their help and support in Carrie Davies' defence, commented on the case in a

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Nellie McClung's popular wartime novel *Next of Kin* (1917), which portrays the popular attitude towards the war as a regenerating "comeback of the soul." However, McClung's suffrage manifesto *In Times Like These* makes pretty clear her sense that such sacrifice should not be valorized.

rhetoric reminiscent of what historians like Carl Berger define as liberal-nationalistic tendencies (Berger 17). The organization had over time observed rather mild retaliations for men who committed moral offences. In their fight against failures to uphold consistent standards of morality, The Toronto Local Council of Women had a standing committee on Equal Moral Standards that lobbied on principles of maternal feminism<sup>19</sup> for social reforms to protect both the home and public spaces from moral threats (Mackintosh 30). They also provided legal aid to women charged with crimes, men who were jointly charged with women, and certain family law matters. While women were not enfranchised during the early years of the war, organizations like the Toronto Local Council of Women and the National Council of women used the overlapping rhetoric of maternal feminism and patriotism to advance their cause. Women as sacrificing mothers were a key theme in their publications and speeches, but their activities and rhetoric also extended the role of white middle-class Anglo-Saxon mothers by encouraging them to become nation builders. They saw no contradiction between the traditional role of women at home and participation in public life. Their actions in the public sphere were no more than an extension of their role in the private sphere. The war would prove their worth as citizens through their participation in the common struggle and would lead to a new era for the Canadian nation. The war, The National Council of Women claimed, had created a new sisterhood that drew women together and erased differences of wealth, class and status. In their view, Canadian women were creating a new “soul of the nation” and

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<sup>19</sup> Maternal feminism is the term that has been used by scholars to describe the ideology that is closely linked to the suffrage and temperance movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Infused with the language of domesticity, it called upon women to define a public role for themselves as women, sisters and mothers so as to improve society. See, for example, Devereux 2005, Fiamengo 2007. The theatricality of their causes and their use of drama is the topic of a later chapter.

contributed to a “new conception of the state” (*Women’s Century* qtd. in Sangster 159). And even though their ideas were not vastly different from the ideas similar British organizations extolled, the nationalist proclamations were distinctly Canadian in the way they distinguished themselves from their American counterparts (Litt 340). In an effort to aid Carrie Davies in her defence, the TLCW offered the services of a prominent defence lawyer, services which were rejected by Carrie Davies’ brother-in-law, who preferred the help of his own national and class compatriots. The difference in nationalistic discourse that the organizations that offered their aid to Carrie Davies represented might not have been obvious to the people involved, but nonetheless operated in the background of the trial.

The fact that Canadian soldiers were fighting on Europe’s battlefields in turn meant that there were no men to protect the poor innocent girl. All possible protectors were either dead or fighting on Europe’s battlefields. Lawyer Hartley Dewart in Carrie Davies’s defence made sure to explain to the jury that her fiancé was also abroad fighting for British values and thus emphasize the vulnerability of the servant girl, who performed her duty on the home front by waiting patiently for her enlisted fiancé and supporting her English family. His defence speech thus became an exercise in patriotism: “While this girl’s lover is at the front fighting for the honour of Britain, this girl was fighting just as strongly for the principle which *is* the British Empire—honour” (Dewart in Strange 174, emphasis given). In accordance with the patriotic argument, she therefore had the right and duty to defend these values in the face of barbarism. The melodramatic tone simultaneously acknowledges the seriousness with which society views gender transgression but also justifies it in the light of patriotism.

Moreover, Carrie Davies's appearance discursively embodies the Canadian values both nationalistic and imperial discourses established. Canada, young virtuous fledging of an honourable mother country, was rushing to defend civilization's values. As the *Toronto Telegram* pointed out, Davies was virtuous because of her shy manner and her sensible clothing. Her corporeality represented the way imperialist rhetoric imagined the young colony itself: "The slight, girlish figure in its long brown coat and black velvet hat [...] was in the midst of a number of well dressed, care-free women [...] More like a mild and gentle Sunday School pupil did she look, very subdued and sorrowful" (*Telegram* qtd. in Davies 162). Carrie Davies's costume allowed for the allegorical comparison to a young country surrounded by less morally virtuous nations and confirmed Canada's self-image in the role of a dutiful young servant, depicted in her embodiment of the virtues of a symbolic Miss Canada.

Critics argue that nationalistic mythmaking and the expression of it in popular discourses of national identity are crucial: "[...] the most salient political function of national identity is its legitimation of common legal rights and duties of legal institutions, which define the peculiar values and character of the nation and reflect the age-old customs and mores of the people" (Smith, *Nationalism* 16). But beyond identifying the ideas and pressures of chivalric justice as part of the mythmaking process lie more difficult and compelling questions: what it means for the lawyers and heroines to write melodrama around the issues of agency, gender and nationalism and what it means that these melodramatic structures write them. How would Carrie Davis have written the trial if she had more agency in the discourse? Even though I am able to identify the limited authorship she had in the plot, the theatricality of the event opens questions about

performance and performativity. Would Carrie Davies have chosen a similar unfolding of events and a similar resolution of the conflict on an actual stage? Would the audience have accepted the story as a fictional play by a woman author in 1915? Why is the strategic use of this intersection of a gendered and national performativity prominent both in different forms of drama written by female English–Canadian authors before the Second World War as well as in public discourses such as this melodramatic trial? What options and limitations did the commonplace asserted by Archibald MacMechan in the 1920s--“that Canada’s credentials for nationhood rested on ‘the image of a woman, young and fair, with the flush of sunrise on her face’” (MacMechan in Henderson 13)--hold for Canadian women writing drama and participating in cultural para-theatre? These are broadly the questions about gender and nationalism, cultural agency and activism that will guide my analysis in the following chapters.



**Fig. 1.** Cover of Edith Lelean Groves' 1917 pageant *The Wooing of Miss Canada*. Groves, Edith L. *The Wooing of Miss Canada*. McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1917.

## Chapter 1: Performing the Boundaries of Race, Femininity and Belonging

For the talent segment [...] I shall dance for you, in savage splendour, the 'Dance of the Sacrificial Corn Maiden,' and proceed to hurl myself over the precipice, all for the loss of my one true love, CAPTAIN JOHN WHITEMAN.  
(Monique Mojica, *Princess Pocahontas and the White Spots* 19, emphasis given)

This season I am going to make a feature of costuming for recitals—always an interesting topic with ladies, but I am beset with difficulties on all hands. For my Indian poems, I am trying to get an Indian dress to recite in, and it is the most difficult thing in the world. (Pauline Johnson in a letter to Lighthall qtd. in Strong-Boag and Gerson 110)

The discourse of imperial motherhood that informs the national narratives of Anglo-Canadian nationalism is a prominent feature of amateur and professional theatrical performances in nineteenth-century Canada. One prominent feature that marks these often overly didactic late-Victorian works, though, both in print and on stage, are explicit acts of moralizing, and moreover particularly female, benevolence. In order to trace the lingering influences and language of Empire on the performance of imperial motherhood, I will discuss the significance of imperial benevolence in Constance Lindsay Skinner's 1906<sup>20</sup> British Columbia frontier drama *The Birthright* and juxtapose its imperial ideology and treatment of the indigenous other with Pauline Johnson's stage persona and her poetic performances, in which she appeals to imperial benevolence to be accepted as Mohawk into the community of nation builders of Canada. The racial tension exploited by both Skinner and Johnson is especially revealing in light of post-

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<sup>20</sup> Although multiple typed, edited and handwritten drafts exist for the play, if not otherwise stated and in order to be consistent, I will be making reference to Skinner's copyrighted 1906 version of *The Birthright* as adapted by Joan Bryans in her 2003 Playwrights Canada publication.

confederation nationalism, with its increased exploitation of First Nations cultures through appropriation and eradication of First Nations culture, and in turn the ideological indigenisation of white settlers to create imaginary ties with the land (see, for example, Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* 12ff. and Francis, *The Imaginary Indian* 17ff).

British imperial culture acquired its power to shape culture, its authority, in many respects through theatricality. Critics argue that beyond its military, economic and political aspirations the British Empire was foremost a cultural project that had to be continuously performed. The empire sustained its imperial connection through theatrical entertainments, both on the stages and music halls in the colonies and at the imperial centre, and also through public performances, patriotic expressions such as military parades, flag drills, historical pageants and celebrations in order to foster empire unity and loyalty. “For it was not only the space and voice of the colonial other that had to be elided or usurped to stage the discourses of empire, the political and cultural imagination of the lower classes had to be captured and made to work for the empire as well” (Hays 68). For example, during the festivities for the Diamond Jubilee, Queen Victoria was celebrated in a service organized by the Sons of England in every major city in every colony. During the festivities, congregations sang “God Save the Queen” simultaneously in every Canadian time zone in order to emphasize what the *Victoria British Colonist* termed “A vivid panorama of the march of the Empire upon which the sun never sets” (“Eve of the Jubilee” 1). The four-day celebration in Victoria, BC included not only a parade and a commemorative service, but also a military review of the local Royal Navy garrison, lacrosse and baseball matches, fireworks and a “Grand Spectacular Extravaganza of the Carnival of Madrid” (1).

In his essay “Representing Empire: Class, Culture and the Popular Theatre in the Nineteenth Century,” Michael Hays argues that during the Victorian age the middle- and upper-class imagination was shaped by fiction; the imperial theatrics with their emphasis on the melodramatic imagination captured the imagination of the lower classes. Only towards the end of the Second British Empire did the imperial discourse pervade culture enough to overcome class differences and submerge them in a unifying fantasy of imperial adventure that could be staged for everyone to enjoy (70f.). John M. MacKenzie makes a similar argument in *Propaganda and Empire*. He asserts that the theatrics of empire served to create a worldview for British subjects central to their perception of themselves (2). Popular culture, theatre and music halls served to display the grandeur and spectacle of imperialism and translate them into melodramatic struggles between good and evil, “a strongly non-intellectual tradition in which characterization, subtle emotional nuance, or philosophical problems” were suppressed in favour of moral imperatives that illustrated the evolutionarily advanced state of British civilization (2). Tracing the cultural taste for spectacle through the Victorian age by emphasizing class patronage, MacKenzie argues that a middle- and upper-class taste for spectacle and melodrama became more acceptable after the great Imperial exhibition. He equates a general taste for melodramatics with the demise of power and influence towards the end of the Victorian age and argues that pageants, parades and melodrama became the preferred representational mode of empire across classes as late as the end of Queen Victoria’s reign (53).

Canadian imperial ties were highly theatrical as well. Although professional actors and actresses were often socially suspect (see, for example, Barish 297 or Evans 64), amateur

theatrical and para-theatrical activities of a certain morally uplifting nature were not limited to certain social classes but encouraged in order to bring Western civilization as well as morally acceptable entertainment to Canadian cultural backwaters. Thus, the culture makers, philanthropists and audiences of Canadian drama were mostly of middle- and upper-class Anglo-British descent with an almost missionary conviction. In *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission*, Maria Tippett identifies the nineteenth-century Anglo-Canadian amateur cultural organizations as influential forces in creating Canada's artistic communities and promoting an image of the country as a culturally thriving and morally uplifting nation (8). She argues that the different types of entertainment that these middle-class amateur groups produced are a reaction against popular American touring companies performing in town halls and saloons, which were viewed as potentially morally corrupting for wider audiences and lower classes. These forms of amateur theatre and para-theatre the cultural Anglo-Canadian elite produced have therefore often been viewed by contemporary critics and current scholars as "self-consciously literary, detached from the theatrical realities that only live performance can provide, and distracted by foreign models," as Eugene Benson and L.W. Conolly in the *History of English-Canadian Theatre* assert. "[...] Canadian poetic playwrights succeeded in only satisfying themselves and a few of their literary peers" (Benson and Conolly 14).

Alan Filewod contends that much of the nineteenth-century dramatic writing, with its coded assumptions about class and belonging, must be read within the larger context of imperial pageantry (*Performing Canada* 4). Defining imperialism as both an ideological construct and an historical experience that continues to shape the conditions in which

Canadian culture is practised and Canadian consciousness is formed (“Erect Sons” 56), he argues that all types of dramatic expression enact British imperialism. Filewod’s perspective reveals a wide spectrum of work that participates in a mise-en-scene of empire, ranging from the more poetic and literary dramas like Charles Mair’s *Tecumseh* and Sarah Anne Curzon’s closet dramas *Laura Secord*, *The Heroine of 1812* and *The Sweet Girl Graduate* to the developing taste for historical recreations and military drills. Consciously monumental, plays, recreations and drills are a “legitimizing part of a broader theatre culture in the empire played as spectacle” and “function as pageants that rehearse the mise-en-scene of Imperialism by citing and restaging contemporary practices of military performance and in doing so ‘upload’ popular spectacle into the field of literary value” (12). In this sense, Canadian theatre and para-theater can be read as a civilizing and moralizing force, a didactic instruction to strengthen the best qualities of the Empire in the developing Canadian nation.

Beyond the display of imperial power, and in the Canadian context, the civilizing and morally uplifting qualities ascribed to imperial theatrics, critics have identified another important aspect of imperial spectacles: the display of a hierarchy of races (MacKenzie 24). In their display of who belongs to the imperial family, imperial theatrics comment on the racial makeup of the British Empire and its politics of inclusion and exclusion of a future civilization. In this chapter, I would like to examine the imperial theatrics of race as used in theatrical and para-theatrical productions, by first looking at Canadian versions of imperial pageantry that included First Nations to see how the hierarchy of nations was envisioned in a Canadian context before looking specifically at the use of the Indian maiden by two Canadian dramatists to explore how racial and ethnic identities are

imagined for larger political purposes, are put on display and thus belonging to the imperial family is contested.

Relying on melodramatic structures and easily identifiable moral alignment, MacKenzie argues that all imperial theatricals serve to subsume ethnic and racial conflict into a colonial paradigm and to consciously reinforce the relationship between the overseas extensions of the imperial centre (28). As Daiva Stasiulis and Rhadha Jhappan remind us, the values and institutions of a white settler society like Canada must constantly be replenished via “importation of British ideas, goods, fashions, institutions, and cultural and economic practices ... in order to facilitate the development of a morally and physically healthy settler population, and later citizenry based on ‘love and loyalty to Canada and the British Empire’” (97). In particular, the treatment of alterity on the Canadian imperial stage is of interest, as it creates a space for female playwrights to test the boundaries of inclusion within and exclusion from the imperial family using and sometimes exploiting the stereotypes of “Playing Indian” (Deloria 2).<sup>21</sup> Stereotypical depictions of First Nations characters date as far back as early seventeenth century historical pageants. During the late nineteenth century, they had become a staple feature of music hall entertainment and touring shows like Buffalo Bill Cody’s Wild West show, a circus-like extravaganza that toured widely in the United States, Canada and Europe. And while in the melodramatic pieces of most female playwrights like Isabel Ecclestone

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<sup>21</sup> A note on the terminology referring to Indian, First Nations, First Peoples, indigenous and aboriginals is necessary here. I am using Indian in accordance with conventions of post-colonial and indigenous critique to refer to the hegemonically constructed stereotypes of First Nations through the colonizer’s gaze and variations of First Nations, First Peoples and indigenous to refer to, especially in the case of Pauline Johnson, the agency and control over representation that First Nation subject should have for themselves. See, for example, Helen Hoy’s self-positioning as reader and critic in *How Should I Read These? Native Women Writers in Canada* (2001).

MacKay the frontier is ideologically emptied of any traces of First Nations, some Canadian dramatists like Constance Lindsay Skinner and Pauline Johnson used the stage to test the boundaries of inclusion into the imperial family through the rhetoric of imperial motherhood and its moral duty concerning what Domenic Alessio terms the cultural imperative to “domesticate the heart of the wild” (239).

In order to discuss how female playwrights and performers are using the stage to discuss boundaries of inclusion and exclusion into the imperial family, I am juxtaposing the stage performances of the self-proclaimed Mohawk-English “half-blood” Pauline Johnson with Constance Lindsay Skinner’s 1905 stage drama *The Birthright*. At first glance, their works could not be more different. Johnson wrote and staged dramatic performances and poetry recitals as both an English-Canadian lady and Mohawk princess in a self-designed costume for a Canadian audience. Born in 1877 on a Hudson’s Bay fur trading post and inspired by Jack London’s wilderness stories, Constance Lindsay Skinner drew on her upbringing in remote British Columbia to write plays, journalism and poetry that explore frontier life, First Nation culture and encounters between settlers and First Nations, but mainly for an U.S. American audience. Critics of both Johnson and Skinner have focused primarily on the notion of authenticity of presentation as well as on the connected issues of agency and appropriation. As Alexandra Kovacs points out in “Renegotiating the Most Difficult Thing in the World,” while critics agree that Pauline Johnson’s recited material expresses strong disapproval of the stereotypical depiction of the “Indian Girl” (with a particular distaste for overly generalizing representations), her “collage” (Gerson and Strong-Boag 221) or “bricolage” (Collett 160) of a piecemeal Indian costume provides critics with a dilemma in trying to assess Johnson’s theatrical

choices (Kovacs): some critics ( see, for example, Milz) focus on the constructed nature of Pauline Johnson's stage persona. Sometimes explicitly but most often implicitly they accuse her of selling out; that is, despite the conflicting gestures of spoken word and costume, they accuse her of promoting the stereotype of an exotified Indian maiden on stage for economic reasons. Others read the way Johnson's costume played into the stereotypical expectations of audiences as a version of "playing it back" or "reverse appropriation" (see, for example, Landau or Gerson). These two perspectives attempt to justify the fact that Johnson was not performing a more realistic (or according to a critic's view a more authentic) indigenous representation that Johnson had argued for in her prose work. Other critics judge her for a theatrical fantasy that they see as inauthentic and demeaning. In flipped perspective, criticism directed towards Skinner is similarly divided over the politics of representations of First Nation characters. The most successful collection of poetry that Constance Lindsay Skinner published during her lifetime, her 1930 *Songs of the Coastal Dwellers*, has been rightly dismissed as appropriation of First Nation Heritage (Barman 38). However, the material used for her 1905 play *The Birthright* relies on autobiographical experiences in her upbringing with close childhood friends. Critics do not doubt the real-life connection to the material but take offence at its racialized depiction of the racial hybridity of the main character and the play's depiction of Native/non-Native relationships. At the same time, Relke and Barman also argue that Skinner successfully appropriates First Nation material to discuss and advance women's causes. Similar to the tensions over Johnson's political legacy, this then creates a conflict for critics whether to praise Skinner for the progressive nature of her presentation of female sexuality or criticize her for her exploitation of the likely exaggerated stereotype

of the Indian maiden. As Relke concludes, “Even though [Skinner] distances herself from her material by disguising it as Indian experience, within that Indian metaphor she does attempt to treat the subject of female sexuality and self-determination with far more directness than is usually found in women’s literature of the period” (14).

Rather than just focussing on the authentic or inauthentic depiction of indigeneity, my analysis of both works follows two lines of inquiry: one the one hand, I will explore how, using the liminal nature of performance, both *The Birthright* and Pauline Johnson’s “Indian acts” explore the permissive boundaries of inclusion into the imperial family through the rhetoric of imperial motherhood and a language of benevolence. I argue that the language of benevolence within the discourse of imperial motherhood allows for a discussion of racial politics (in the case of Johnson) and the advancement of sexual politics of New Woman drama (in the case of Skinner). On the other hand, I am interested in how audience interest and response shape the theatrical work of both artists. While Pauline Johnson’s stage persona aligns her with the ideological values of British femininity and seeks the colonizer’s benevolence to be included in the imperial project despite her indigenous background, Constance Lindsay Skinner’s melodramatic heroine Precious Conroy fails to appeal to the notion of imperial benevolence that would have potentially prevented the fate she suffers in the 1905 version of the play. Unable to overcome the racial barriers of the Canadian frontier set up by the advancing British civilization, Conroy is excluded from a white society that formerly included her in the fabric of the outpost of empire; however, she in turn questions the sexual politics that underlie the racial discourses. In the case of Pauline Johnson’s self-fashioned performances as both civilized female patriot and Mohawk princess, the concept of

imperial benevolence is successfully appealed to using the language of imperial gratitude for inclusion in the fabric of the developing Canadian family, dominion and nation.

However, in order to understand the strategic appeal, it is important to examine ways in which the concept of an imperial family of nations was a popular trope on stage, in print and in para-theatrical performances such as pageants and parades.

### **Canadian Historical Pageantry and the Display of a Family of Nations**

The most visible performance genre which reflects and, arguably, influences the conditions of imperialism and settler colonialism is the spectacle, and it is also the most explicit in its display of staged relations among the constituting groups of Canadian settler society. With their grandeur and pomp, imperial military spectacles and historical pageants were a popular form of performance to shape the consciousness of the public. Although their lineage extends back to spectacles of Renaissance princes and medieval royal entries, spectacles and fêtes,<sup>22</sup> historical pageants offer a participatory public space, in which contested historical events can be acted out with the participation of the public: “History c[an] be made into a dramatic public ritual through which the residents of the town, by acting out the right version of their past, could bring about some kind of future social or political transformation” (Glassberg 12). Pageants, in this sense, are regulatory readings that create and stabilize what Benedict Anderson terms “imaginary communities” by recruiting the audience as performers. “Because pageants offer no room for critical negotiations, they offer a parade of icons that progressively accumulate as a narrative embodiment of the (presumably) consensual ideology shared by the audience.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Barbara Hanawalt and Kathryn Reyerson (eds.), *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, 1994.

Authenticity is provided by the exercise of power that requisitions and mobilizes the pageant in the first place” (Filewod, *Performing Canada* 13).

H. V. Nelles sees the beginning of historical pageantry in Canada in the 1908 Tercentenary of Quebec, the 300th anniversary of Samuel Champlain’s landing on the shores of Quebec. At the initiative of Governor General Earl Grey, leading British historical pageant director Louis Napoleon Parker was hired to direct a recreation of Canadian historical events to consecrate the Plains of Abraham as a historic site to subsequently symbolize a harmonious union of two founding peoples in one country united under the Imperial Crown (392). With 4,771 participants (including 100 recruited First Nations families) and an initial budget of CAN\$155,000, the staged historical events depicted in chronological order Jacques Cartier’s act of possession of New France, Champlain’s arrival in Quebec, Mother Marie de l’Incarnation, Madeleine des Verchères and Adam Dollard in the Battle of Long Sault, and, after a mock battle, Montcalm and Wolfe exchanging honours on the Plains of Abraham before marching united across the field to “O Canada” and “God Save the King” (404). Nelles concludes that despite its contentious content, “the pageant overcame sceptics with a narcotic combination of music, a mass cast, colour, staging, a dramatic setting, and a stirring finale” (403).

Nelles notes that the First Nations actors enjoyed the greatest popularity as they, in colourful costumes, fulfilled the exotic expectations of vanishing nobility and brute savagery. In particular, he emphasizes the versatility of their roles in the pageant, all within the constraints of representing the natural, the spirit of the land:

They could be used in Christian symbolic terms as terrible foes bringing God’s retribution. They could bring a genuine tremor of fear to the play; at the same time, they could be menials, functioning as the stage crew sweeping the huge

carpet onto the field for the Henry IV court scene. Their wild dancing counter-balanced the measured civility of the pavane. Their [background] presence, singing, dancing, smoking, looking after children, hunting and guiding, served like a Greek chorus as a mordant commentary on the drama being enacted. (412f.)

While the pageant intends to illustrate the imperial progress of the founding of Canada in the chronological order of events, and thus, as history progresses, conjures the idea of a vanishing race and relegates the third founding force the imagined past to the sidelines of the stage, the audience found the First Nations actors and their show far more interesting. Rather than serving as a tacit social commentary in the background of the staged history as Nelles views the First Nations actors their stage presence and skills allow them to woo the audience. Unintended by Earl Grey and Lascelles in their vision of a pan-Canadian nationalism focused on two of the founding nations, to the public the First Nations presence and their skills as trained actors who knew how to work the crowd and play into the expectations of exoticism, was the most interesting part of the pageant. Although relegated to the sidelines of history by the pageant's narrative of progress, their exoticism and their skills allowed the actors to "to present themselves as peoples with a history and a claim to the future [of the Canadian nation] deserving of consideration too" (413).

Alan Filewod broadens the narrow definition of pageants Nelles is working with and includes in his discussion of English-Canadian nationalism as an imagined theatre the first theatrical ceremony staged by the French invaders. Marc Lescarbot's 1606 masque *Le Théâtre de Neptune en la Nouvelle-France* is an imaginary but continuously influential point of origin in the theatre of colonization of Canada (*Performing Canada*

XI). In the play, the god Neptune, in the company of tritons and Indians<sup>23</sup> who recite praises of the colonial leaders and sing in chorus the glory of the king, welcomes the commander of the French colonial empire, Jean de Biencourt de Poutrincourt et de Saint-Just, to Port-Royal. In addition to extending the notion of the historical pageant to reception ceremonies and public masques, Filewod also draws attention to female complicity in the imperial project through his discussion of Lady Aberdeen's staging of an imperial version of national history in three historically-themed costume balls in 1896: one in the Queen's Theatre in Montreal that included a series of *Tableaux Vivants* representing significant Canadian scenes of historical importance that concluded in a re-enactment of Confederation and a patriotic speech by the Governor-General, a lavish Historical Fancy Dress Ball in the Senate Chambers in Ottawa, and a Victorian Era Ball in the Toronto Armouries aiming to exemplify the Empire's artistic accomplishments. Filewod points out that all three balls were a "staging not only of an imperial version of national history but of the structures of power that formed the Canadian pseudo-aristocracy" (15). It is interesting to note that all the performances mentioned--as much as they negotiated the French-Canadian and Anglo-Canadian relationship with the Canadian Dominion--also consciously cast and staged First Nations as actors and minor characters supporting imperial progress.

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<sup>23</sup> The use the term "Indian" here reflects the usage in the works discussed. For a more detailed discussion on the use of the terms "Indian" and "First Nations" in this dissertation, see Footnote 21.

## The Language of Benevolence and the Staging of Race Relations

Imperial ties are not only explicitly celebrated in patriotic performances that illustrate the desired family of nations within the imperial context, but also play an important albeit subtler role in the creation of characters who extend their hand in staged acts of imperial benevolence. Benevolence serves both as an obligation and an important common attitude in a civilizing mission through a British imperial identity forged in opposition to the imperial other. The notion of benevolence as key to the understanding of the British imperial project informs in a lasting manner the colonial project that is the Canadian nation. It is a major structural component of Anglo-Canadian nationalism and informs the language of social reform, and the struggle for female equality and political participation, as discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation as part of the race-making enterprise of English-Canadian superiority and in the third chapter on the theatrics of social reform.

Daniel Coleman makes a similar argument in his 2006 study on popular literature and Canadian nationalism. He argues that English Canadian whiteness has been modelled upon a specific form of British imperial civility, a form that is a uniquely settler-colonial project. To him, popular literature is used by "educated elites and reform-oriented lobby groups" to "create fantasies of national character" and "shape popular views *in advance* of the pedagogies of the state" (Coleman 36, emphasis given). Coleman concludes, "White Canadian culture is obsessed ... with the problem of its own civility" (5). He defines civility as "the temporal concept of progress and the moral-ethical ideal of orderliness ... demonstrated by cultivated, polite behaviour (most commonly modelled on the figure of the British gentleman [or gentlewoman]), which, in turn, made these

concepts fundamental to the production and education of the individual citizen" (Coleman 10). This "isochronous" (12) understanding privileges British modernity over the development of other civilizations (which are consequently considered "less advanced"). It places societies and individuals whose outlook or conduct does not conform to this worldview as in need of education and "improvement." This benevolent education is freely given and becomes a prerequisite for inclusion into the national family.

To Coleman, fetishized British white civility was formulated and popularized by means of (at least) four allegorical figures that he identifies in late-nineteenth-and early-twentieth-century Canadian writing (211), which are all organized around white Christian masculinity: the Loyalist brother, the enterprising Scottish orphan, the muscular Christian, and the maturing colonial son. However, he does not extend his analysis to female figures such as "the imperial mother" within "the imperial family." Nor does he give her role additional thought or look at other cultural expressions beyond the novel. He simply argues that most texts offer a heteronormative conclusion to the homosocial allegories by the sudden recruitment of women and the substitution the substitution of the matrimonial for the fraternal bond (Coleman 47-48).

The remainder of this chapter traces how British imperial ties and ideologies of motherhood become the female version of enabling forces Coleman identifies in the struggle to civilize the Empire and how they provide the 'mother of the race' agency and a performative subject position in the public realm, a position allowing her to sympathize and to enact her female duty to morally educate the nation and participate in the discussion of the future of both the empire and the developing Canadian nation. At the

same time, this agency allows female playwrights to question the ideological boundaries of race and sex of the imperial centre in the liminal space that the theatrical stage offers.

### **The Question of Race and the Popularity of the Indian on Stage**

Scholarship on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Canadian women's history, according to Jean Barman, "[...] is [often] still dominated by a mythic pioneer woman who came from elsewhere to face the challenges of a new land. Mostly, she was White, but regardless of colour, she brought with her a culture, a way of life, that she transplanted onto the new landscape" ("Invisible Women" 168). If the existence of this norm is, according to Barman, infrequently questioned, the boundaries of belonging to this cultural hegemony are frequently contested and reinstated. Given the realities of personal relationships, mixed marriages, or so-called "country marriages," dramatic writing became one popular genre to discuss the purity of race and issues of belonging in the figure of indigenous and mixed-race mothers on stage.

The popularity of the Indian on stage is a very visible aspect of the function First Nations culture was allowed to play in the development of Canadian nationalism and narratives of imperial progress. The period from Confederation to the end of the First World War saw an unprecedented number of First Nations performers in romanticized, stereotypically Indian roles in North American popular culture. L.C. Moses has termed this popular appearance of the Indian 'on stage' "show Indians" (8). Prior to Hollywood movies, no other entertainment medium was as successful in creating the image of an "Imaginary Indian" in the popular imagination as the touring Wild West Show. Daniel Francis argues that the show's popularity reduced the image of the Indian in the public

perception to a “Plains-style Indian” with a tomahawk and headdress (94). Secondly, the Wild West Shows presented a male Indian who was an aggressive and bloodthirsty warrior in conflict with white settlers, but seldom featured First Nation women. “Some of what they saw was authentic,” writes L. C. Moses, “but audiences were not encouraged to see Indians as a people with an advanced civilization or as a group deserving treatment that was any different from what they were receiving” (47). In playhouses, Indians also appeared in different forms of theatre, as diverse as religious mystery plays and popular melodramas. While melodramas featured “Indian characters” as evil villains, mystery plays used “Indians” for didactic purposes to morally educate the audience. The roles of “Indians” on the stage were generally played by white actors (Goldie 183). It is also important to note that while the contemporary popular literature stereotypically exploited the image of the Indian maiden, the popular image on the stages was male.

In their essay on “The Fractious Politics of a Settler Society,” Stasiulis and Jhappan expose the faulty assumption that the British imperial centre regarded white settler women as little more than reproducers of the future empire, nation and race (see, for example, Roberts, 1979 186). They attest that (despite the inherently colonial, racist and sexist policies that restricted them through male-ordered marriage, property and labour laws) white Canadian women became as New Women “key players in the ‘moral reform,’ assimilationist and eugenics projects regulating working-class, single, Aboriginal and non-British immigrant women” and men (97). Novels, short stories and drama written by New Women have often been linked to sentimentalism as a dominant expression of Victorian literature (see, for example, Gerson 34) and thus cast aside without assessing their political relevance. Although often limitedly ascribed to the social

reform movement, most of nineteenth-century Canadian writing has been read by critics as addressing concerns about the nature of community. As Janice Fiamengo writes, “the stories it tells are about threats to the community, the loss of affective ties, the conditions under which sympathy can flourish, the regeneration of the social, the means of accommodating difference in society, and ultimately the relationship between individuals, their community, and the nation” (“In This Canada” 20). Cecily Devereux points out that the parallels between the social reform discourses and the imperial ideologies of maternal feminism are too striking to discount the influence of New Imperialism on the New Woman and her social commentary (“New Woman, New World” 175). Furthermore, the morally superior nature of women assumed by the social-Darwinist vision of imperial progress allowed English-Canadian middle- and upper-class women to perform public acts of benevolence as part of their civilizing calling. As Chris Tiffin and Helen Gilbert show, outward acts of benevolence were used to justify European colonialism. Benevolence provided the colonizer with moral authority to include, assimilate or exclude on the basis of race and render these symbolically violent acts as beneficial practices that advance culture in British settler colonies. Benevolence, they point out, “bespeaks of goodwill, but it also speaks inequality. It involves the willingness and power to give, but it also involves demands and obligations that are sometimes complicated and unwelcome” (“Burden or Benefit” 4).

A predominantly liberal view on economic development shaped the development of the Canadian dominion and nation. This attitude informed British imperial policy throughout the nineteenth century (Henderson 12). Despite the widely-held belief that charity only increases dependence; benevolence was an idea integral to imperial progress in so far as

socially more progressive societies equalled economically more productive colonies. Within the system of colonial dependence, strategic acts of benevolence to improve social matters thus in turn would increase the revenue colonies produced. This “Liberal view of colonialism positioned it as a process that ... was ultimately grounded in good principles of liberty and progress, which would advance colonized societies” (Gilbert and Tiffin, “Burden or Benefit” 5). Furthermore, as Patrick Brantlinger notes in “A Short History of (Imperial) Benevolence,” the successful implementation of benevolent projects at the height of imperial Britain depended on the degree to which they overlapped with the new ideas of economic liberalism. Examining the abolition of slavery in 1833, the attempts to convert Aboriginals in Australia and the relief efforts during the Irish Famine of 1845-1850, Gilbert and Tiffin assert that only the abolition of slavery was successful, as it found an ally in the prevalent economic thought (14).

First and foremost, however, benevolence has to be read as a performative act and one that is often associated with female kindness. Moreover, the act of benevolence is of interest to scholars of performance theory and social interaction in that it constitutes a public performance that needs to be witnessed to achieve its full meaning and install its set of obligations between the parties involved. In a more political context of Canadian colonialism, appealing to benevolence in a public performance is an indicator of a successful imperial project, as it subjects the colonized to the colonizer’s mercy. The colonizer in turn can assess benevolently whether the colonized can be included in the imperial family of nations. Performing within the ideological constraints of imperial motherhood, with its emphasis on benevolence and mercy as markers of civility and progress, allows a non-white female imperial subject to align herself with the racially

superior colonizer by asking for benevolence, and then to serve as the recipient of benevolent acts of racial acceptance offers female agency and a subject position in the nation building project. Appealing to white superior benevolence for a non-white female is a form of alignment with the colonizer, an act that seeks inclusion into the imaginary family of race that constitutes the fabric of Canada's imperial project.

Thomas King's introduction to the anthology *All My Relations* informs its readers that up until very recently, the majority of Canadians saw Natives only through the eyes of non-Native writers and politicians "and, while many of the [contemporary] portrayals have been sympathetic, they have overall been limited in their variety of characters, themes, structures, and images" (xi). White constructs of Indigenous women variously portrayed them as creatures of nature, temptresses or femme fatales, Indian princesses, easy squaws, or suffering helpless victims;<sup>24</sup> their sexuality and reproduction were core concerns for nineteenth-century policy makers. Janice Acoose argues that indigenous women were stereotyped as good as long as European interest was furthered by some kind of 'liaison': "Before a so-called good Christian white man could have relations with an Indian woman, however, she had to be elevated beyond an ordinary indigenous women's status" and be accepted into the imperial family (Acoose 43). In most historical references, such Indian women were thus accorded the status of royalty in order to elevate them beyond the common and to create an ideological connection between marriage and connection to the land. Furthermore, the shadowy, lusting archetype of "the bad indigenous woman or squaw provided justification for imperialistic expansion and the subsequent explorers', fur traders', Christian missionaries', and nation builders'

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed discussion of various portrayals of Native Women in Canada, see also Acoose 74ff.

agenda” (44). Early Canadian poet and deputy superintendent general for Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott coined the most vivid image of the stereotype of “a squaw” in his sonnet “The Onondaga Madonna.” Scott’s sonnet portrays an Iroquois woman in racist language steeped in fears of miscegenation. As Lisa Salem points out, “Scott uses the mother and child tableau in ‘The Onondaga Madonna’ to represent, not the hope and promise of the Madonna and Christ-child of Christian iconography, but the impending death of the Indian race through miscegenation. The woman's savage blood, which carries the legacy of her cultural history, is ‘mingled with her ancient foes’ (1. 5), and thus her child, who is of mixed blood and ‘paler than she’ (1. 11), carries not the hope of new life but ‘the latest promise of her nation's doom’” (1. 10) (Salem n. pag.). No longer a member of a viable culture, “The Onondaga Madonna” becomes a metaphor for the cultural and physical reproduction of Native societies that in the perception of the dominant culture were doomed to vanish through assimilation.

Despite their now acknowledged role as “keepers of the culture,” very few accounts of Aboriginal women before the late-twentieth-century recognized their status and responsibility. Nor did the then widespread view of First Nations women as savage and promiscuous represent them as deserving the uplift of imperial benevolence. According to Carole Gerson and Veronica Strong-Boag, the

[...] efforts to control female sexuality, especially that of  
 Aboriginals, stood near the heart of imperial Canada. The  
 cultural and physical reproduction of Native societies was  
 systematically undermined by persistent portrayals of  
 women as inadequate and degenerated wives and mothers.  
*(Paddling 24)*

Furthermore, it was the role of the Canadian state to encourage and assist the process of assimilation into white society:

The goal of federal Indian policy during Scott's time was the eventual disappearance of Native peoples as a separate and distinct race, and this was to be accomplished not by race extinction but by gradual assimilation with their fellow citizens. Assimilation was the ideal, and it was considered the duty of the federal government to oversee the transition of the Native peoples from "savagery" to "civilization."  
(Salem n. pag.)

One important influence on how the identity and sexuality of Native women have been perceived is the Indian Act (1876, 1951). The Indian Act sets certain legal boundaries of status for First Nation females. The central issue that has historically preoccupied First Nations women regarding the Indian Act is that of membership. Provisions that determined who was and who was not 'Indian' appeared already in the 1867 British North America Act, which stated that a First Nation woman who married a non-Native man lost her "status" and her privileges as a Native person. These regulations were changed in the 1951 Indian Act by adding further restrictions for Native women. A new section stated that a Native woman who married a Native man from another band was, regardless of her wishes, legally transferred to her husband's band (Jamieson 11). Special regulations controlled the perceived lack of morality in Native women's behaviour. For example, Section 72 of the 1876 Indian Act gave the officials the power "to stop payment of the annuity and interest money of any woman having no children who deserts her husband and lives immorally with another man" (qtd. in Jamieson 199). Instead of being penalized for their mixed marriages, Native men were in fact rewarded. Their non-Native wives were given Indian status. The unfair legal treatment of Native women under the Indian Act relies on the stereotype of the 'easy squaw' and up until recently economically and legally disadvantaged Native women. Native women's identities were thus entirely contingent, dependent upon the agendas of both Native and non-Native men and

removable by the stroke of a pen. The removal of status, while fundamentally economic in effect, also controlled Native women's access to their communities and the cultural support these communities offered.

Despite all of the federal government's efforts to promote the transition of the Native peoples from "savagery" to "civilization," focusing specifically on Native women, Scott's "Onondaga Madonna" also reveals a contemporary white Canadian anxiety about the slow pace assimilation would take. Although the child's pale complexion represents the "waning" of his mother's race, evidence of his "pagan" (1. 4) blood remains as "the primal warrior gleam[s] from his eyes" (1. 12). Scott, like most white Canadians was convinced that assimilation was in the Native peoples' best interests. However, he recognized that it would take several generations before the process of civilization could be considered complete and worried about the potentially dangerous and violent impact the remaining 'savage' characteristics in the blood of children of interracial marriages would have.

### **Constance Lindsay Skinner's *The Birthright*, Cultural Appropriation and New Woman Politics**

Although focusing on the frontier experience of the British Columbia wilderness, Constance Lindsay Skinner's plays, radio dramas and journalism present an interesting challenge if read as a dramatic account of the B.C. frontier experience, the relationship between First Nation and white settler culture, and the Canadian nation building project, as the plays are clearly written for a U.S. American audience. Her work treats with nostalgia an imaginary imperial frontier and its ideologies of race and motherhood at the same time juxtaposing them with the progressive artistic desires of a modern New

Woman writing for a late-Victorian U.S. American artistic culture that found inspiration and liberation in what this audience saw as the female equivalent of the noble savage, a liberated figure truer to nature that constituted a challenge to the rigorous Victorian norms of womanhood. In this sense, the staging of frontier melodrama allowed Constance Lindsay Skinner to imagine an already romanticised, exotic space that nonetheless allowed for a transgression of identities by including (of what has become the clichéd description in Canadian literature of) a “country marriage” as part of the play’s initial conflict and resolution. In this section, I want to argue that her work participates in the Canadian nation building project and illustrates the imperial politics of race and sexuality at the same time as it questions sexual politics from the perspective of a New Woman. It does this through cultural appropriation and playing to the taste of progressive U.S. American theatre audiences.

The frontier that B.C.’s first recorded playwright conjures up for her audience is nostalgic and, although based on her own upbringing, far removed from genuineness. Born near Quesnel, B.C. in 1877, Skinner spent her youth on a Hudson Bay outpost. Her experience informs her play *The Birthright*, which is set on the North Western frontier of British Columbia in the late 1800s. The play follows the story of Precious Conroy, an orphan who after being “properly” educated in a finishing school in California, returns to her great uncle’s home, a mission outpost in Northern B.C. Precious does not know that she is the offspring of a marriage “à la façon du pays.” Nevertheless, she is, as stage directions suggest, “at times reserved and mysterious as if half consciously touched by influences hidden from the more prosaic whites.” Skinner equates Indianness with the romantic stereotype of natural artistry unspoiled by civilization and ‘primitive in nature’

and establishes the paradigmatic opposites of poetic primitivism and prosaic matter-of-fact white culture. Precious feels the natural need to create “primitive” art. The sculptures of a nude with poppies she constructs in her foster parent’s living room push the boundaries of a conservative colonial society.

The plot of *The Birthright* commences with every intricacy a melodrama can offer: the man Precious fell in love with in California, whose life she saved, and who turns out to be her cousin; the return of Precious’s long-thought-dead father who tries to take advantage of the minister and exposes his daughter Precious to her heritage as a ‘half-breed;’ love rivalries between Precious, the minister’s son Dick and the woman he is supposed to marry as well as between Precious, Dick and Luis Prince, the other half-breed living close to the mission. Precious tries to ‘go white’ and strays with Dick into the bush in a ploy to force him to marry her as her foster father campaigns to legally acknowledge country marriages and force mixed-race couples to marry. In the final stand-off between Precious’s villain father and Dick, the minister’s son is unable to defend Precious against her drunken father. Dick refuses to marry the pregnant Precious.<sup>25</sup> At the end, Precious answers her true calling, leaves white society behind and runs off with Luis Prince, the other half-breed in the play and the only person who truly understands her.

Constance Skinner uses every possible stereotype about the noble and ignoble savage available around the turn of the century: i.e., the violence, the poetic nobility of primitivism, the lack of morals. Her conscious use of all the derogatory tropes identified

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<sup>25</sup> Although the audience’s first assumption is that Dick is the father of Precious’ child, the play never explicitly states that.

by Terry Goldie plays into the notion of separate races that can be identified and distinguished by character as well as genetics. Her characters become a paradigmatic display of race, gender, and class on the nineteenth-century frontier, and its emphasis on racial purity. As Precious's foster mother puts it in the play, "no matter what one does, the wild blood will show itself" (4). No matter how much Precious appeals to her adoptive parents, using the language of imperial benevolence, her plea falls on deaf ears. However small in proportion, Aboriginal descent was to be abhorred and the cultural and physical reproduction of Native societies was systematically undermined by these persistent portrayals of women as inadequate and degenerate wives and mothers. Skinner's "half-breeds" on the frontier act on unrestrained sexuality and instinct, a savage force that becomes even less controllable through the practice of intermarriage, or miscegenation.

In her study on race, gender and empire-making in early British Columbia, 1849-1871, Adele Perry's description of the colonies resembles the fictional Hudson Bay outpost in Skinner's play. Perry argues that "racially plural, rough and turbulent, British Columbia bore little resemblance to the orderly, respectable white settler colony imperial observers hoped it would become" (3). The white, male colonizers formed a homosocial culture within the larger (mostly aboriginal) population of the colony; due to the scarcity of white women their heterosexual relationships were often mixed-race. Perry argues that, as early British Columbia "fell short of Victorian standards," the colonial administration's racial anxieties, their concern for the maintenance of population health, their fear for a general lack of morals and abuse, and their aspirations for a viable and distinct British-Canadian culture encouraged regulatory and reform efforts in order to create and control "an

orderly, white settler colony anchored in respectable gender and racial behavior and identities” (3). Colonial discourse built upon its representation of First Nations women as dangerous by constructing mixed-race relationships as an active threat to white men’s fragile moral and racial selves (58). Although, as Perry points out, happy mixed relationships were common (as, for example, in the marriage of B.C.’s first Lieutenant Governor Sir James Douglas and his wife Amelia), and often these happy unions “challenge[d] that nineteenth-century discourse that predicted doom for all relationships forged across racial lines” (62), the official view was that mixed relationships were deemed to imperil the healthy development of a colony and a country in the making.

Skinner’s play *The Birthright* presents several differing views towards interraciality as the play explores ideologies “around interracial unions between Native and non-Native people in Canada and their intergenerational conflict, while simultaneously signifying the fear of miscegenation” as a subtext (La Flamme 72). Brought up in a foster family, Precious, despite her odd behaviour of creating primitive art, running wild through the woods and having a temperamental personality, initially passes as white. In melodramatic fashion, the play reveals that she was sent away for schooling to avoid the shame and discrimination which would occur should the secret get out that she is part Native, a fact of which Precious is unaware. In this sense, Precious’ character becomes an “ideologically formed complex signifier” (La Flamme 74), an embodiment of the fear of racial contamination at the heart of colonial policies and a threat to white society. As Perry points out, “Marriage was constructed as the ultimate bulwark maintaining appropriate racial segregation; breaching it imperiled not only individuals, but society as a whole” (68). The offspring of interracial marriages was seen as dangerously violent,

sexually promiscuous and morally debased by nature, as depicted in Precious Conroy's untamed ways. Furthermore, racially mixed marriages and the sexual allure of First Nations women were viewed as "especially dangerous for white men, whose appropriate behaviour and identity would guarantee an orderly settler colony" and who may, in the solitude of the Canadian wilderness, become morally corrupted and "savage" themselves (69).

Furthermore, the minor white characters in the play represent the different prevalent attitudes as well as the strategic reform efforts towards white-Aboriginal relationships and their resulting offspring. For example, Reverend Robert MacLean, Precious's stepfather, initially represents a more progressive view towards mixed-race relationships as he lobbies the colonial administration to pass legislation "aimed principally at white men [...] who have taken up their abode with native women or the descendants of native women, to marry these women legally and through the church" (8). His hypocrisy is exposed when he discovers that his own son wants to marry their Métis foster daughter Precious. When challenged, he espouses all commonly held white Canadian stereotypes about the 'lusting squaw'. He reads Precious's love interest as a threat to white racial superiority. Her interracial desire suggests that her soul is tainted "black with unpardonable sin," and he tells her to "Go back to your mother's people! There is your place—there—where your lawless blood calls you" (54). While Mrs. MacLean, the benevolent missionary's wife, is at the outset of the play of the view that a good, white Christian upbringing can tame Precious' wild and uncivilized manners and initially defends Precious against accusations from overtly racist neighbours, she too panics when faced with the prospect of her son marrying her stepdaughter, convinced that "no matter

what one does, the wild blood will show itself" (4), equating miscegenation with loose morals, sexual promiscuity, a tendency for alcohol abuse and other common vices.

At the end of her play, overcome by madness and "the call of her blood" (63), scorned Precious stabs the minister's son dead, is swept up by her second suitor, Métis Louis Prince, who she had rejected before, and runs off with him into the wilderness to a mythical voiceover: "But Kalista heard the voice speaking from afar: 'I will be a mighty hunter in a country of my own' .... And Yagoot, the swift and white was his. And he found the dream was true and Kalista lives forever in his mountain with Yagoot." Thus, Precious is shown giving in to her true Indian nature (69). According to Michelle La Flamme, this type of ending is typical for "passing narratives." After the revelation of the dark secret of their mixed-race origin, a common Victorian melodramatic trope, characters are granted an ideologically acceptable ending of either committing suicide or going into exile (78), a choice of ending that continued well into the late twentieth century. Although a young, pregnant Indigenous woman who is humiliated, threatened with physical abuse, and exiled from civilization is a common trope in the genre of frontier plays and narratives (albeit couched in the play's resolution as a Nootka myth), *The Birthright* nonetheless seems to have challenged contemporary ideologies with its historically accurate depiction of relationships between Native women and European men, and scandalized its audiences. Despite her pleading for acceptance and the white society's benevolence, Precious's sexuality and untamed nature strain the limitations of sex, race, and class and thus prevent her acceptance into a colonial family. Her half-breed position compels her to cross every boundary: social conventions of dress, speech, and etiquette.

Dealing openly with the issues of race and female sexuality was a risky business for any playwright in Skinner's time. Skinner's biographer Jean Barman writes that Skinner's own upbringing with her childhood friend Maggie Alexander inspired the play (Introduction IV). According to Barman's research, Maggie Alexander's father was a Hudson Bay officer married to a half-Aboriginal mother. After her mother's death, Maggie came to live with the Skinners as Maggie's father wanted his daughter to grow up "with educated and refined people." In a letter in 1930, Skinner describes Maggie as "the only sister I ever had, the daughter of dear friends of my parents, who adopted her and brought her up with me" (Skinner qtd. In Barman *CLS Writing* 50).

Skinner wrote pseudonymously about Maggie Alexander's experience in a 1901 article in a Vancouver newspaper and in two short stories "Under the Shadow of the Pines" and "The Home-Coming of Marie Pierre." The newspaper article was published and, according to Skinner, not only scandalized her parents but caused several readers to write letters of protest to the editor. The short stories were rejected by a Toronto publisher for their "insincerity and lack of morals" in the depiction of their mixed-race characters. The publisher's advice to Skinner was for her "to come to Ontario for a time where she will find ideal girls and faithful lovers" to write about (qtd. in Barman *CLS Writing* 37). Instead, Skinner turned Maggie Alexander's experience into a play. However, there are no records of any attempts to produce *The Birthright* in Canada.

When she went to Los Angeles in 1903, she found a better market for this type of frontier fiction and started capitalizing on her B.C. upbringing. The successful publication of her short story "The Home-Coming of Marie Pierre" in the Los Angeles-based magazine *Out West* in 1903 (about a young Métis woman returning home to a Hudson's Bay outpost

after eight years in a convent school) as well as her writing and the production of other plays in artistic collaboration with Herbert Heron Peet between 1903-1910 seem to have given Skinner confidence to revisit *The Birthright*, which exists in several drafts in her archives<sup>26</sup> and which she copyrighted in 1906.

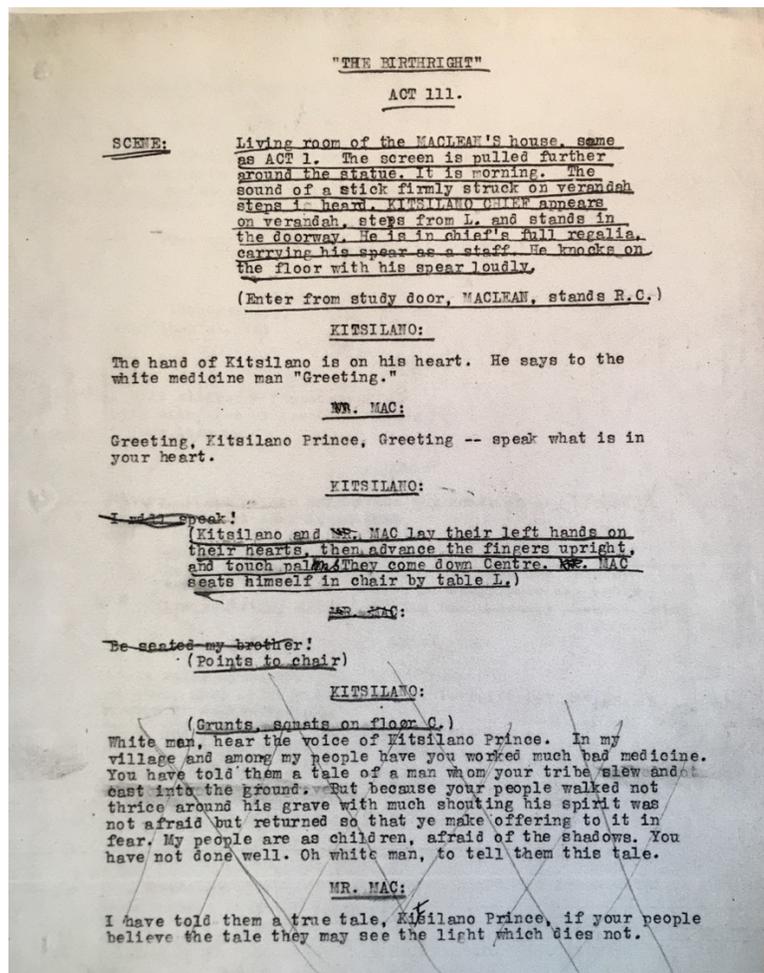


Fig. 2. Skinner, Constance Lindsey. *The Birthright*, Act III. Draft. Undated. NY PL Archive

<sup>26</sup> While reviewing the Constance Lindsay Skinner papers at the MSS. & Archives Section of the New York Public Library, I counted four typed but heavily edited drafts of the play. Given the notes on the scripts, most of Skinner's energy was spent on finding a proper ending. Differing from the current edition's ending, other versions end the play with just the murder or have additional scenes with additional Indian characters added. Jean Barman suggests that many of these alterations were done in order to market the play to potential producers. She quotes a 1908 letter from Herbert Heron to Skinner, in which he congratulates her for rewriting the ending in order to make the audience more sympathetic to Precious's plight: "I'm glad to cut out [Chief] Kitsilano's scene. I never thought it was up to the rest of the play. You say Precious has more of the audience's sympathy now. That is also good. And more Louis Prince is an improvement" (Heron qtd. in Barman, Introduction vii).

Roger Hall points out in his discussion of the popular taste of U.S. theatre goers at the turn of the century that frontier drama was gaining both interest and acceptance in mainstream theatres across North America in the early twentieth century, and this public interest in the mythical frontier was condoned by more serious theatre critics. Trying to make a living from her journalism, her playwriting, and her work in writing popular histories, novels and short pieces for print and radio, Skinner drew heavily on her upbringing and on the frontier myth to cater to the tastes of her audiences.<sup>27</sup> And although the frontier play was popular with theatre-goers, it was considered morally questionable; *The New York Herald*, for example, condemned the entire genre of frontier plays that had evolved over the nineteenth-century:

All of these plays are bad in an intellectual sense, and some of them are bad in a moral sense. They no more come within the sphere of true dramatic art than the picture of a pound cake on the door of a Broadway stage comes within the sphere of the art of painting. (qtd. in Hall 22)

Constance Lindsay Skinner edited *The Birthright* several times in order to create a dramatic work that would appeal to popular tastes, theatre managers and production companies. This proved difficult. Potential producers initially considered the play “a little too modern and also too daring in the handling of its original theme.” In particular, interracial romances tended to be sidestepped rather than confronted directly on the stage as in *The Birthright*.

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<sup>27</sup> As Chad Evans explains in *Frontier Theatre: A History of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainment in the Canadian Far West and Alaska*, the popularity of the frontier setting for the theatre did reach its peak in the 1890s in both Canada and the United States and would last throughout the first half of the twentieth century. With the closing of the official frontier by the US census, the decline of the gold rush in the Northwest and British Columbia’s entry into the Canadian Confederation, the frontier became part of the popular imagination (Evans 16). In particular, the frontier presented the perfect setting for the melodramatic taste of the U.S. American turn-of-the-century theatre-goer whom Skinner sought to appeal to (see, for example, also Skinner’s journalism, historical novels and juvenile histories of discovery and colonization).

Believing in her play, Constance Lindsay Skinner used her position as drama critic for the *Los Angeles Examiner* to interest well-known theatre producer David Belasco in her play, but his interest did not lead to a production (Barman vi). She succeeded, however, in selling the rights to theatre mogul J.J. Shubert in exchange for five percent of gross receipt for productions in Chicago and Boston. *The Birthright* played as a J.J. Shubert production in 1910 in the Garrick Theatre in Chicago and then in Boston in 1912. *The Sunday Boston American* announced the forthcoming production on August 25, 1912 in glowing prose. It praised its “Originality of viewpoint and a vigorous, colourful style.” The author was credited for her “knowledge [of the subject] and her sincere and sympathetic attitude towards the dramatic and histrionic” presentation of the protagonist’s plight (“Boston to See ‘Birthright’”). The announcement’s language is revealing, as it ascribes to the play authenticity in its representation of the western frontier and credits its author with female sympathy for the plight of the protagonist, who can be viewed by an audience with benevolence. As the Vancouver *Sunday Province* reports in its 1910 feature about “Cariboo Connie,” Skinner markets herself “as a far-far Westerner, born in a gulch in a gold rush in the Cariboo district, raised in a tiny village on the high bluffs of the Fraser... [I am the] daughter of a pathfinder and grand-daughter of a pioneer and all that means in every drop of my blood” (“Cariboo’s Connie Skinner ‘Makes’ New York”).

Although a production was planned to open at the Shubert West 44<sup>th</sup> St. Theater in New York City by the fall of 1912, it did not open. There is no further indication of attempts to stage it until March 1916. Correspondence between J.J. Shubert and Skinner, however, indicates a catch, as he demanded changes to the play to suit the female lead.

Furthermore, he proposed that the actress's husband "have a free hand in making the adaptations" (Letter from Shubert to Skinner March 1916). For doing so, the proposed co-author, who according to Shubert had had several Broadway successes, would receive half of Skinner's royalties. Skinner declined. Like many of her fellow writers, she had to make ends meet and thus declined, for mostly economic reasons, as Barman suggests. Nonetheless, her artistic pride was hurt. In correspondence with Canadian Arctic explorer and fellow expatriate Vilhjalmur Stefansson several years later, she complains that "in 1916 Shubert offered me USD 250 & immediate production of a play of mine if I would put a certain decadent tint through the fabric of it; &, tho I was up against the wall hard [for money], I turned it down without regret" (Skinner qtd. in Barman vii). Skinner carefully negotiates the desire to be recognized as a serious artist with the importance of generating a stable income, as so many of her female peers did, and in this tries to find a balance between artistic expression and economic necessity (Gerson, "Business" 109).

Susan Cummings Miller points out that the artistic preoccupation with the imaginary frontier was not only driven by the taste of turn-of-the-century audiences for a romanticized view of the past. It was also emblematic of a generation of progressive U.S.-American women writers who, similar to "Cariboo Connie", used the transgressive setting to challenge gender assumptions (17). While trying to conform to conventional melodrama, the action of *The Birthright* exposes in the supporting characters all the prejudices and hypocrisies of the day: the restricted late-Victorian ideals for women, the societal limitations for emerging New Woman artists, the colonial ideology of benevolence towards racial otherness, the missionaries' bigotry expressed in racist ideals and the colonial saviour complex. Skinner's *Precious* is unable to conceive that due to her

mixed parentage she has less birthright than others. The focus on the frontier allows Skinner to test the limits of representation and to question the humanity of the treatment of women, First Nations and Métis in the social context the frontier setting provides, a perspective more closely aligned with the reality of mid-nineteenth-century life in British Columbia than popular melodrama would conventionally allow. The nostalgic border between civilization and the unknown is re-imagined in Skinner's play as a space in which to challenge the relationship between female and male, culture and wilderness, self and other, as well as white, First Nation and Métis. At the end, Skinner's evocation of the Western frontier as melodrama leads to a common response in the audience according to their expectations of racial relationships, especially when, as Terrence Craig argues, "most early twentieth-century Canadian examples [of writing about race] fall into the ... category ... of the unconscious or semi-conscious repetition of popular ethnic stereotypes" (Craig 23) rather than using the vehicle of fiction for deliberate racial theorizing. Skinner's subversive presentation of racial and gender attitudes is inherently modern. However, although she sought to strike a balance between satisfying the desire of U.S. American audiences for a nostalgic representation of a Canadian colonial past and expressing herself as a New Woman artist treating challenging subjects, she achieved neither commercial success nor the artistic recognition she had hoped for.

### **Pauline Johnson's Stage Persona and the Politics of Imperial Motherhood**

The intersection of gender and aboriginality played an important part in the Canadian and U.S. American imagination of the frontier and, in the Canadian case, the future of imperial progress. Nonetheless, the way aboriginal femininity was treated on stage by

playwrights such as Skinner differs significantly from E. Pauline Johnson's self-authored stage persona. In Johnson's short story "As It Was in the Beginning," her heroine Esther makes a revealing statement: "They account for it by the fact that I am a Redskin. They seem to have forgotten that I am a woman." In the short story that was narrated by Johnson during her stage performances and published first in the 1899 Christmas edition of *Saturday Night* and later in the *Moccasin Maker*, the statement is uttered by a young Cree girl named Esther who is taken away from her people to a mission school and years later kills the white man whom she loves but is not allowed to marry (Johnson, "Moccasin" 144). The utterance, taken from the Anglican creed "As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall ever be" serves both as the opening and last sentence of a story about forceful assimilation, passion and betrayal. Johnson artfully plays with biblical allusion and ambiguity whether the crime of passion committed at the end of the story (the unfaithful lover and representative of white society is killed in his sleep with a poisoned arrowhead) is caused by the protagonist's "female nature" or "Indian nature." The protagonist's comment points to the complicated relationship of gender, nationalism and race in the context of imperial belonging. The Canadian audiences that came to see Johnson's elocution evenings expected to hear Indian oratory and lore. Furthermore, the fictional utterance can be taken as a comment upon the way in which Johnson navigated imperial discourses of racial inclusion and exclusion and made the stage a platform to appeal for imperial benevolence to First Nations by strategically performing stereotypes of Western and "Indian" femininity that emphasized common notions of imperial motherhood. Johnson was the only example of a Native woman on a Canadian stage before 1978 in charge of her own theatrical persona in performance. In this section, I will

examine the ways in which Johnson, a writer and entertainer of Mohawk and English heritage in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, constructed dialectic relationships between self-authored representation and audience expectations by adapting culturally determined images of exotic ‘Indianness,’ feminine moral superiority and imperial motherhood in her writings and stage performances. Using these culturally determined performances in recitals, Johnson’s elocution practice, her rhetoric and the theatricality of her stage persona appealed to imperial benevolence, mimicked a successful process of assimilation and allowed her to step outside the constraints of gender and race to explore discourses of Indian and white relations, New Woman politics, Christian ideals, and imperial patriotism. Moreover, these strategies enabled her to claim a public platform to lobby against the common assimilation practice in favour of an inclusion of Canadian First Nations into the imperial family. Manifested in her writings and performances is the rhetoric of both the colonizer and the colonized.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The assessment of indigenous theatrical expression by a white academic is contentious and fraught with difficulty. In his essay “Averting the Colonizing Gaze,” Canadian critic Alan Filewod discusses his position as non-indigenous critic outside the discourses indigenous playwrights create: “I can’t write about native theatre; all I can write about is my response to it. When I watch native theatre I see my own gaze returned; my watching is an appropriation, even when it is invited. As the colonizer I am a visible presence in these plays” (17). Filewod, as a non-Native critic, recognizes that he is not part of the Native cultural background those performative texts construct and address. Consequently, he feels unable to engage with the material for fear of inscribing his non-Native ideological biases upon it. Similarly, Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* hesitates to interpret the content of indigenous literature. On one hand, he suggests that the methodology he has developed to analyze non-Native constructions of the indigene could be useful in examining indigenous cultural practise. On the other hand, he worries that any engagement by non-Natives necessarily entails judgements about whether indigenous cultural practises are authentic expressions of culture (217). Both Filewod and Goldie fear a replay of colonization in the critical engagement with indigenous expression. By refusing to interpret these texts, these two white academics hope to avoid the ideological violence they see as inevitable consequence of non-Native interpretations.

The fear of speaking for (and ‘over’) the indigenous writer cannot simply be dismissed: it has been consistently reinforced by indigenous intellectuals and artists in both Canada and New Zealand. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education, explains that “the word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary,” and is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (*Methodologies* 1). In the field of Native Canadian theatre, there is a corresponding distrust of academic interest. “Not a week goes by,” writes Drew Hayden Taylor, at the time the Artistic Director of Native Earth Performing Arts, that we don’t get a call from some university or college student/professor doing research on native theatre in Canada. And each time I put the phone down I struggle to suppress a shudder” (qtd. in Appleford, *Indian Act* 49). The position of a non-indigenous person examining indigenous artistic expression – my position as a white, European male – in this climate of distrust has become a suspect one. The position holds the opportunity for and the danger of

Johnson was aware that to make her voice heard, she had to present herself and her material to ensure that audiences would listen voluntarily. Furthermore, in order for her to survive as an artist, her truth and authority had to be recognized and ‘sought out’ by popular demand. The subject position that Johnson created for herself in her performed works became what Mary Louise Pratt calls “autoethnography.” “Autoethnography,” writes Pratt, “refer[s] to instances in which the colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” (7). Johnson, who self-identified as Mohawk, Indian, and Canadian, engaged with the popular Eurocentric and academic discourses of her day, which constructed Indians as Other. Her performances exhibit qualities consistent with Pratt’s description of autoethnography: “partial

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romanticizing, cultural ignorance, and colonization through the erasure of “differences between and within diverse post-colonial societies [and through] the assumption of endless substitutability and comparability of postcolonial texts” (Mukherjee 7).

Robert Appleford and Alan Filewod identify two dangerous ways of reading indigenous plays and performances: first, indigenous works risk being read as verisimilar documents of indigenous life and reality. Filewod argues that in the process of reading theatrical texts the gaze of the non-indigenous ‘outsider’ merges with the gaze of the indigenous ‘insider,’ “permitting the colonizer to assume the posture of the colonized” (21). This minimizes the political and social distance between the two positions and permits the ‘outsider’s gaze’ to perceive the performed indigenous construction on stage as an authentic documentation:

The problem of white reception of aboriginal theatre is a problem in the dialectics of decolonisation and reinscribed colonization, in which voices of cultural affirmation and resistance are received by white critics as a testament of authentic and unmediated reality, which, in critical response, disallows the agency of resistance itself. (Filewod, “Receiving” 364)

Through this process of receiving indigenous performance as authentic document, colonial binaries are reinscribed, and the performance is at risk of losing its oppositional power. Secondly, indigenous plays risk not being read at all by white critics – if reading is defined as critical and evaluative exercise. This retreat response would neglect a vital part of resistant cultural expression and thus render indigenous theatre invisible to white audiences.

The dynamics found in a postcolonial reading of indigenous texts are also relevant for the application of the term ‘feminism’ to historical and contemporary indigenous cultural practise. Many white feminist literary theorists omit discussions of indigenous women’s writing for the fear of being accused of appropriation. Others are afraid that ‘speaking about’ merely substitutes ‘speaking for’, and so simply do not speak at all about women’s artistic works. Thus, the relationship between feminist theory and indigenous women’s art is an uneasy detente. What unites feminist inquiry and indigenous women’s writing is a focus on the relationship between the female subject and the external forces that either engender the female subject or prevent it from discovering its own essential ‘subject-hood.’ These parallels offer a starting point for a self-reflective critical examination. Following Robert Appleford and Alan Filewod’s advice, I believe that any study of indigenous artistic expression must begin at the site of reception with an emphasis on the desire and ideologies that influence a non-indigenous perception of First Nation’s theatrical practise. “By foregrounding these desires, it becomes impossible to reify the constructs of the theatre as self-authenticating truth and to immerse oneself uncritically in the enacted words” (Appleford, “Relations” 234).

collaboration with and appropriation of the idioms of the conqueror” (Pratt 7). Critics often see this collaboration in the choice of texts Johnson performed, her costumes, and the dramatic structure of her performance, and they accuse her of exploiting stereotypes and capitalizing on liberal guilt about the repression of First Nations. Their accusation fails to account for the fact that Johnson, similar to many of the authors and dramatists discussed in this dissertation, had to make a living through her artistic undertakings. Gerson and Strong-Boag point out “as a part-Native woman developing an independent career in a socio-political world dominated by powerful White men” (112), Johnson transgressed all boundaries, “encompass[ing] the Native storyteller and the European artist, the middle-class lady and the bohemian spirit” (180).

Born in Brantford, Ontario in 1861 as the daughter of a Mohawk chief of mixed ancestry and a white mother, Johnson lost her father in 1884 from injuries he had sustained earlier while stopping illegal timber trade on the Six Nations Reserve. The Johnson family had to vacate the Chiefswood mansion on the Six Nations reserve after her father’s death, so they rented it out and moved to Brantford. As her biographers point out, E. Pauline Johnson was expected to marry and have an active social life in Brantford society, but by 1891 no young man had proposed (Keller 19). To earn money, Pauline wrote poems and prose. An 1890 letter quoted by Gerson and Strong-Boag makes little effort to hide Johnson’s requisite ambitions, but it also reveals her political agenda:

I am willing to consent to anything legitimate, that will mean success in the end. Not that I ever expect that success to mean Fame. I have not the ability ever to command a wreath of bays, but I have a double motive in all my work and all my strivings—one is to upset the Indian Extermination and noneducation theory—in fact to stand by my blood and my race. The other is that I am not a millionaire—aye, I am as the proverbial Church Mouse.

Someday I hope to see something of the great world—to travel the Holy Land—the old world—the Rockies—the far west, and to do that one must work. (qtd. in “Introduction” xvi)

Johnson’s wishes certainly came true, as she had an unusually successful career, publishing six collections of poetry and short stories, countless articles, short stories and poems in literary and popular magazines, as well as performing in town halls and drawing rooms all over Canada, Britain and the United States. Her often gruelling touring circuit between 1892 and 1909 – which included performing in a pub in Barkerville; Steinway Hall, London; Jerry Boyce’s saloon in High River; the Methodist Hall in St. John’s, Newfoundland; bandshells along the Chautauqua and Lyceum circuits of the prairies and the American Midwest; a makeshift hay barn in Soda Creek; cable stations on the straits in Nova Scotia; and Harvard University, Cambridge – guaranteed her a stable income (McRaye, “East and West” 37). Her long-time stage partner and manager Walter McRaye speculates that Johnson’s income from her poems during her lifetime did not exceed more than five hundred dollars (38). In contrast, their two-night engagement at the Kelly Hotel in Barkerville in the summer of 1904 made 720 dollars. A good indicator of her popularity, the price of admission varied between a dollar and two-and-a-half dollars.

In order to explain her success and to assess if, to what extent, and how far her performances allowed for a cultural subversion of long-established negative stereotypes of First Nations, I would like to examine her practice of performing her own writing in front of audiences. I argue that the subject positions she created for her readers, audience, and characters through a conscious slippage between discourses have to be taken into account. The racial attitudes towards Indian women held by the white audiences she

performed for, the rise of the New Woman, the popularity of imperial motherhood and increased post-Confederation nationalism not only influenced her work and the reception of her audiences, but are also crucial in assessing elocution as a vehicle of performance for giving voice to contemporary issues unusual on a Canadian stage at the turn of the twentieth century. As she performs at the intersection of gender and race, seductive savagery in costume and subject matter in the first half of her stage shows is carefully mitigated by the Victorian evening gown and the patriotic speeches in the second half. Her dramatization should be read as more than merely a strategy of containment that allows her to voice criticism about the treatment of First Nations through consciously performing the process of assimilation promoted by the government policies and reserve land occupation acts of the 1890s and indicated in the structure of her recitals and the significant change of costume during her performance. It is the language of imperial motherhood and its appeal to benevolence that not only give her agency, but also allow her to situate herself and other First Nations metonymically within the imperial family as members of the Canadian dominion.

Surprisingly, a holistic postcolonial investigation of Johnson's performance practice and politics has yet to be published. Explanations for this phenomenon are threefold: interest in Johnson's legacy after her 1913 untimely death arose amid the resurging nationalism of the late 1920s and encouraged Mrs. W. Garland (Ann) Forster to pen the first biography of Johnson called *The Mohawk Princess*, relying on information gathered from Johnson's family members and her stage partners. As her later biographer Betty Keller bemoans, and Gerson and Strong-Boag in their extensive research work on Johnson confirm, Johnson's last partner-manager, J. Walter McRaye, and her sister Eva

both falsified information about the poet and performer and, in Eva's case, burned Johnson's personal papers in order to preserve a romantic and commodified image of the Indian poetess who transgressed and mediated cultural codes and restrictions. Additionally, the next generation of cultural taste-makers immediately following Johnson contributed significantly to a distorted image of the Indian princess in popular culture. As Strong-Boag and Gerson assert, "The rise of modernism in Canada coincided with the increasing commercialization of the image of the Indian maiden" (*Paddling Her Own* 124), leading to a reframing of Johnson within that paradigm in the attempts to commemorate her in the 1920s and '30s. Additionally, Johnson and her admirers fostered the notion that she was primarily a poet. In order to avoid the socially and morally questionable label of actress, especially as she was unmarried, Johnson went to great lengths to maintain social propriety as a lady on-stage and off-stage. Her performances were often linked to the art of elocution, a genre of drawing room entertainment suitable for respectable females, as it was perceived as educated, academic and genteel. To distinguish herself from other touring circuit elocutionists like Mrs. Siddons, Sara Lord Bailey, Agnes Knox, Mrs. Cadwell, Maggie Barr or Mrs. Frank MacKelkan, her advertisements and posters carefully called her a "Poet-Entertainer," "The Mohawk Author-Entertainer" or "The Indian Poet-Reciter." It is interesting to note that in a memorial tribute and interview with Isabel Ecclestone MacKay, Johnson describes herself as "dramatic reciter" (274), sidestepping all other racial or artistic labels given to her. All advertising also emphasized that unlike most other elocutionists of the time, Johnson recited only original material. Finally, her inclusion into the echelon of Confederation poets through her contribution to W.D. Lighthall's 1889 collection *Songs*

*of the Great Dominion*, the anthology's ongoing canonical status as a milestone in the development of a unique Canadian poetic expression and an academic uneasiness about the commodified pan-Indian exoticism of her popular stage shows have often led (especially among those critics who consider poetry a higher art form) to an emphasis on her written work at the expense of her dramatic recitals. For example, as early as Hector Charlesworth's 1882 *Canadian Magazine* review of Johnson, favourable critics started calling Johnson "Canada's greatest and most representative poetess" (479). Thus, ten years before her first stage appearance, critics started to separate her poetic work from her other artistic endeavours. The distinction made between performance as a popular form of entertainment and poetry as serious art is also apparent in the less smitten 1895 *Saturday Night* review of her collection *White Wampum*. While the anonymous reviewer admits that her verse "has a freshness and simple melody, a delicate fancy and a sincere if somewhat obvious sentiment which gives it an assured place in the affections of Canadian readers," he concludes that:

A considerable portion of Miss Johnson's verse is in the ballad form, dealing largely with Indian themes. And while admitting the interest of such poems and their possession of dramatic quality, which makes them admirably fitted for the purposes of recital, I cannot regard them as her most successful work. ("Canadian Poetry")

In view of the lingering negative reputation of working actresses in the late-Victorian period and the difficulty in defining the niche that "the woman who read her own poetry" with her public recitals created, the careful wording in the review is illustrative of a mediation of artistic genres, propriety and nationalist interests. An examination of the advertisements for her recitals reveals that the composition of her stage shows, even though avoiding stigma by emphasizing the word recital in the title, strongly resembles

the variety program popular in music halls throughout the nineteenth century. Teaming up with both local talent and touring musicians and entertainers, her shows feature, in addition to her dramatic monologues, musical interludes and popular music hall sketches like “Major McStinger’s Mechanical Arm” and “How Billy Atkins Won the Battle of Waterloo” (Keller, *First Aboriginal Voice* 25). At the beginning of her professional recital tours, she worked with Owen Smily, a trained stage artist with five years of British music hall experience. Johnson’s biographer Keller describes Smily as a master of ventriloquism and dialects who “delighted his audience by imitating the drone of Scottish bagpipes” (Keller, *Pauline* 67). As early as her recital in Hamilton in December 1892, the two also collaborated in one- or two-act dramatizations of Pauline Johnson’s prose work; for example, “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” drew rave reviews as the finale of the evening (“An Evening with Canadian Poets”). The collaboration lasted, except during Johnson’s first visit to Britain in 1894, for five years and included several train tours through the Maritimes, Ontario and Western Canada. After an unsuccessful solo career, exploitation by various managers, and a long-term illness, in 1902 Johnson hired Walter McRaye, a comedian and reciter of William Henry Drummond’s poetry fifteen years her junior, as stage partner and manager. Their partnership lasted until she retired from the stage in 1909. In a letter to a friend, she expresses her own unease about playing to the public:

More than all things I hate and despise brain debasement, “literary pot-boiling,” and yet I have done, though I sneer at my own littleness at doing so...The reasons for my actions in this matter? Well, the reason is the public will not listen to lyrics, will not appreciate real poetry, will in fact not have me as an entertainer if I give them nothing but rhythm, cadence, beauty, thought. (Johnson to O’Brien, qtd. in Keller, *First Aboriginal Voice* 50)

Furthermore, as Gerson and Strong-Boag point out, all accounts of Johnson's career and art are inevitably complicated by "the reportage and vested interest of those who wrote about her, by her own various self-representations on stage and in her writing, and now by feminism, post-colonialism, and the developments in First Nations culture" (*Paddling* 102). She was already a well-established poet with about sixty publications in the Dominion's well-established magazines *Saturday Night* and *The Week* as well as in the *Brantford Courier and Brantford Expositor*, *Dominion Illustrated*, *Outing Magazine* and, south of the border, in the *Weekly Detroit Free Press*. Both Johnson's and Liberal organizer and fervent cultural nationalist Frank Yeigh's accounts of her first recital at the Toronto Canadian Literature Evening on January 16, 1892 are indicative of the colourful mythology surrounding her persona, with personal, colonial, patriarchal and nationalist interests at work. While the legendary evening organized and sponsored by the Young Men's Liberal Club partook in building an 'imaginary community' to legitimize a native Canadian literature within the British tradition and in strengthening imperial ties by using a rhetoric of nation building, the selection of poems read (like Agnes Maule Machar's "The Mystic Singer" or William Wilfred Campbell's melodramatic piece "The Mother") was not overtly nationalistic. As Mary Elizabeth Leighton explains, the promotion of Canadian nationalism did not rely on explicit expression of Canadian identity through verse, but rather on the gathering and celebrating of native literati ("Performing Pauline" 143). A letter by Archibald Lampman read out at the evening in which he expressed his regrets about being unable to attend reinforces this notion: "such a meeting of writers and readers may do some little thing toward increasing that national spirit and enthusiasm of which Canada, I believe, stands more in need than any other country on earth" (Lampman

qtd. in “An Evening with Canadian Poets”). The illustrious list of poets who read at the event includes most of the ‘poets of the sixties’: William Wilfred Campbell, Susan Francis Harrison, Duncan Campbell Scott, Agnes Maule Machar, and William Douw Lighthall.

Johnson’s choice of material stood out among the rather lyrical works chosen by her fellow poets. Often cited as one of her most impressive pieces of dramatic monologue, Pauline Johnson recited “A Cry from an Indian Wife,” a lament of a Native woman whose husband is going off to fight alongside the Métis in the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. Johnson presented the audience something they did not expect: a rendition of the recent politically thorny issues of the Northwest Rebellion, told dramatically and unapologetically from a female First Nation point-of-view. According to Walter McRae’s recollections, Johnson’s recital was the only one that received an encore and, due to stellar reviews and public demand, subsequently led Yeigh to organize her first public recital in Toronto’s Association Hall on February 19, 1892. Johnson was already a practised performer, having joined the Brantford dramatic society in 1884 and having appeared in several amateur theatricals before 1892. Leaving audiences with “an indescribable thrill” (Stevenson 83), Johnson’s new kind of dramatic monologue “A Cry from an Indian Wife” starts out *in medias res* with the lament of an Indian wife directly addressing her husband:

My forest brave, my Red-skin love farewell;  
 We may not meet tomorrow, who can tell  
 What mighty ills befall our little band,  
 Or what you’ll suffer from the white man’s hand?  
 (*Feather* 18, 1-4)

The monologue's dramatic persona challenges the white settlers pursuing the genocide of the Native peoples in Canada. The speaker begins by harshly criticizing the settlers for taking away the material resources the indigenous peoples relied upon. The critique is soon taken back and rhetorically moderated through emotional appeals. What seems like a speech for the departing husband becomes throughout the text an inner monologue in which the speaker, self-interrogating and self-interrupting, alternates between advocating the causes of the dispossessed Natives and expressing sympathy with the Euro-Canadian settlers. The ruptures and shifts within these two perspectives create dramatic tension: "There is your knife ... Go; rise and strike... Yet stay..." (*Feather* 18: 5-12). Moreover, while the melodramatic composition seeks empathy for an unnamed First Nations mother and wife trapped powerlessly in masculine warfare, it gives momentary voice to a subaltern figure silenced by colonial history before yielding to divine and colonial destiny.

Records suggest that the dramatic monologue's original ending differs from later published versions. Strong-Boag and Gerson note that the original ending in the 1885 version of the poem simply read "O! Heart o'verfraught—O! Nation lying low--/God, and fair Canada have willed it so," creating a potentially subversive ambiguity in punning on three meanings of the word "fair" as just, light-skinned, or favourable, easily missed by sympathetic readers. Whereas in a dramatization, the reciter uses tone to convey her intended play of multiple meanings, the political position Johnson intended to express

was easily dismissed by sympathetic readers who instead might conclude that suffering is the lot of the female sex.<sup>29</sup> In response, in later editions Johnson added additional lines,

Go forth, nor bend to greet the white man's hands,  
By right, by birth we Indians own these lands,  
Though starved, crushed, plundered lies our nation low ...  
Perhaps the white man's God has willed it so.

(*Feather* 18: 58-62)

For Gerson and Strong-Boag, these lines “assert Native rights by reiterating the original ownership to the land and identity as nation, followed by a challenge to the white man’s God,” in order to explicitly render the difference in experience between speaker and reader. Moreover, the strategic lack of closure appeals to the notion of benevolence by portraying a proud mother and wife in undue suffering.

In its review of the Canadian Literature Evening, the *Globe* enthuses that Johnson’s dramatic voice is “like the voice of the nations who once possessed this country, who have wasted away before our civilization, speaking through this cultured, gifted, soft-voiced descendant” and subsequently identifies her as speaking for all First Nations: “the race that has gone speaks with touching pathos through Miss Johnson” (“Canadian Literature”). Leighton points out that reviews frequently conflated all cultural differences among First Nations despite their different cultures and histories and subsumed them into one vanishing race. In her analysis of representations of “the Indian Poetess” in the periodical press between 1892 and 1895, Mary Elizabeth Leighton reads Pauline Johnson’s dramatic performances of the “practised elocutionist” against both the

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<sup>29</sup> Strong-Boag and Gerson cite a “Sonnet in Response to an Indian Wife,” published in *The Week* in 1885, eradicating the racial difference in experience by generalizing that sorrow is the lot of a woman’s sex, whether “white woman or squaw” (Strong-Boag and Gerson, *Paddling* 150).

hegemonic public views of First Nations identity and the emergence of a distinctly Canadian identity fostered through the arts. She suggests that Johnson's poetry and self-representation were strategically positioned within these identificatory limitations, "staging both the process of assimilation and the constructedness of the binary categories that this process assumes through rhetoric and costumes" (147). She points out that "whereas her nationalist devotees read her poetic inscriptions of Native identity as the swansong of a dying race whose death might nobly permit the emergence of a distinctly Canadian identity ... her poetry was strategically positioned within the conventions of this conflated notion of Native identity in order to underscore Native experience of land-rights infringements and assimilation policies constructed by the government" (148). Yet in Leighton's view, despite Johnson's deviations from common representations of the vanishing Indian in her initial performance, even without costume and elaborate staging that later became her trademark, Johnson is valorized as a contributor to Canada's imaginary origins—both literary and national—and thus paradoxically her Native identity becomes "subsumed under and subsequently effaced by its Canadianness" (151). Certainly, the reporters and collaborators constructed her performance within the containment suggested by contemporary representations of Native identity. On Johnson's first major performance Frank Yeigh writes:

Knowing of her promising talent as a writer, an opportunity came to test her elocutionary powers at a Canadian Author's Evening away back in 1892, arranged by the young men's liberal club [...] in strict truth, the evening was dragging a little and interest lessening when the 'Indian Princess' was introduced [...] She glided rather than walked to the platform, her dark eyes flashing nervously and her sinewy form, the essence of gracefulness, representing the acme of physical rhythm and motion [...] Thrilling was the effect, dramatic the appeal of this dark-hued girl who

seemed to personify her race [...] Tekahionwake leaped into fame that night twenty-five years ago, a poetry reciter, in declaiming a few verses ... (qtd. in Gerson *Paddling* 102)

Yeigh's statement offers only the common explanation for Johnson's success, emphasizing an eroticized image of seductive alterity and melodramatic suspense to account for Johnson's enthusiastic reception on the stages of Canada and Europe. Gerson and Strong-Boag conclude, "Yeigh's so-called discovery of Johnson fits into the colonial paradigm in which he performs the role of patriarchal European explorer while she served as feminized indigenous 'virgin land' awaiting his intervention and identification of her value" (*Paddling* 103).

Passionately imperialist and an outspoken Canadian nationalist, the stage persona that E. Pauline Johnson constructed for the audiences and that they and her managers expected from her referred frequently to virtues and strengths of a Canadian nation in the imperial fold. The attitude in her poems expressed that "nothing worthier could be said of a man than that he had been born in Canada, under the British flag," but she perceived herself as Indian "by law, by temperament, by choice, and by upbringing." She wrote: "My aim, my pride, my joy is to sing the glories of my own people," and so she did according to Western standards in a Western cultural tradition (qtd. in Petrone 84). Likewise, critics and the public admired traits in Johnson's performances that they believed to be distinctly Indian. Her stage presence and her rhetorical skills were thought to derive from Native traditions of oratory. "The image of Indian leaders giving eloquent speeches around council fires was deeply ingrained in the White imagination" (Francis "On Pauline" 346). A certain simplicity was also described as typically Indian, reflecting the innocence of peoples uncorrupted by modern civilisation. To her audiences, her poems corroborated their Indian origins, not only in content but also in style: "Her

singing sense she did not get from her white blood,” remarked a critic. “It is too evidently the product of the swinging paddle, the choral dance of the red man” (qtd. in Francis “On Pauline” 347). Critics and audiences perceived in the natural style of her poetry – most poems are written in iambic pentameter and thus to a degree mimic natural English speech – an intense passion for nature and justice that supposedly characterized all Indians. Even her long-term stage partner Walter McRaye reinforces that paradigm in his recollections:

Pauline Johnson was a natural entertainer, unspoiled by any school of elocution, and equally effective in her dramatic Indian poems and in her dulcet canoeing verses. Her bright skits, full of satire at some foible of society, gave her an opportunity for the display of the power of mimicry of which she was mistress. (“Pauline Johnson and Friends” 65)

The success of her initial performance led Frank Yeigh to organize Johnson’s first tour, with 125 additional “Evenings” in church halls and venues throughout Ontario in the fall and winter of 1892/93. Johnson was marketed as the “only living woman who recites her own poetry” and thus brought the stereotype of a gentler, less savage ‘Indianness’ into venues of higher cultural performance such as theatres and drawing rooms. This cultivated and gentle persona drew the audience’s attention, as it differed from the popular but stereotypical renditions of Indians of Wild West shows and burlesque melodrama (Johnson qtd. in Ruoff 17).

In the first part of her show, she recited poems with ‘Indian’ content like “The Cry of an Indian Wife” in a self-designed costume:

This season I am going to make a feature of costuming for recitals – always an interested topic for ladies, but I am beset of difficulties on all hands. For my Indian poems I am trying to get an Indian dress to recite in, and it is the most

difficult thing in the world. [...] I have written to chief [unreadable] about getting some bead work done on my dress, and to several N.W. Reserves, for bear teeth necklaces, etc., but if you see anything in Montréal that would assist me in getting up a costume, be it, beads, quills, sashes, shoes, brooches or indeed anything at all, I will be more than obliged to know of it; my season begins Oct 20th, so I must have my costume at that date, but I want one that is made up by feminine work. (Johnson to Lighthall, 18 September 1892, qtd. in Gerson *Paddling* 110)

Johnson apparently did not possess Native clothing of her own, and even if she had, critics would have argued that they were not ‘Indian’ enough for her performances. Her performance costume, later labelled by her fellow poets and critics as ‘correct,’ made no effort to replicate the actual clothing of any specific Native group.

She wore an asymmetrical buckskin dress that was embellished with various symbols of Native cultures, including fur pelts, Iroquois silver medallions, her father’s hunting knife, and a bear claw necklace. According to her sister, the original buckskin fringe on the right sleeve of the dress came from the Northwest, and the “rest of her Indian costume and her silver brooches were copied from a picture we had of Minehawa” (qtd. in Gerson *Paddling* 110). Based on a European artist’s rendition of Minehaha, a fictional Indian maiden in Longfellow’s dramatic long poem “Hiawatha,” the costume highlighted the self-conscious and constructed nature of her stage identity. According to Carole Gerson, Johnson “knew how to play to settler audiences’ expectations of stage Indians by adorning herself with an eclectic combination of tokens of nature that connote the noble savage” and “Indigenous cultural artefacts that suggest the primitive warrior” (*Paddling* 110). Furthermore, her bricolage may be considered what Jean Baudrillard discusses as a successful simulation of reality (5). According to Baudrillard’s discussion of simulations that leave the reality principle intact, Johnson’s Indian stage presence was made more

‘real’ through the use of Mohawk articles, cultural artifacts from other First Nations cultures, and elements of the ‘imaginary’ Indian constructed and recognized by her white audience so that she appeared “hyper-real.” She met audiences’ demand for “the real thing,” a phenomenon identified by Umberto Eco in *Travels in Hyper Reality* (9).<sup>30</sup>

Contemporary scholars of Johnson’s work struggle to understand the “difficulty” Johnson describes in her letter to Lighthall in the construction of her costume (Johnson to Lighthall, 18 September 1892, qtd. in Gerson, *Paddling* 110) since they struggle to read her choices as either “authentic” or merely “theatrical,” a critical paradigm that fails to recognize Johnson’s agency and relies upon conventional associations of the indigenous creator or performer with expectations of authenticity (Appleford, *The Indian Act* 23).

Kovacs draws our attention to the fact that Johnson herself preferred the label “correct” in discussions of her Indian costume over others such as “genuine” or “authentic” that have conventionally been used to assess Johnson’s choices. Furthermore, Kovacs also draws attention to Victorian conventions of dress by discussing what “precedents of ‘correct’ Indian dress already existed’ in the colonial imagination that might have influenced Johnson in her choice of costume components” (Kovacs, “The Most Difficult Thing”). Using photographic records of Lady Aberdeen’s 1896 Fancy Dress ball, she argues that these theatrical spectacles formed the national imagination of Canada’s historic past and thus that the costumes worn became a measure for historical accuracy in

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<sup>30</sup> In her dissertation “Suiting Herself: E. Pauline Johnson’s Constructions of Indian Identity and Self,” Erika Aigner-Varoz goes as far as to argue that the complex dialectical tensions with her own background, her stage performances and the politics of her time became internally persuasive: “As Johnson added to her costume and her writing repertoire, she learned more about her own and other tribal cultures, and identified more closely with Indians in general ... Her awareness of and experience with such tensions provided a canvas upon she opted to manipulate her identity, persona, and subject matter; she intentionally used the hyper-real in order to assert the real” (4).

the public imagination. She quotes an 1887 guide to *Fancy Dress Described, or what to wear at Fancy Dress Balls*, that describes a historically accurate costume for an

“American Indian” as such:

Indian dresses should come veritably from the country and are of great variety. North American Indian Queen for fancy dress wears a brown satin cuirass bodice and skirt, or black cloth embroidered with red, yellow and white bordered with cut leather fringe; sandals: a diadem of coloured eagles’ and vultures’ feathers; birds’ wings in front and bead jewellery. It is best to obtain the real leather dress with its coloured glass and bead embroidery and the feather headdress from the country. (Holt qtd. in Kovacs)

Kovacs concludes that, in carefully choosing all elements of the costume, Johnson gained authority by emphasizing how she was “especially fitted by nature” to portray the historic figure of a Mohawk Princess (*Everywoman’s Guide* qtd. in Kovacs). Johnson’s language in her letter to Lighthall in which she discusses the construction of the costume itself is revealing, as it draws attention to Victorian regulations of dress, the notion of historic realism and the construction of gender and agency: “For my Indian poems, I am trying to get an Indian dress to recite in, and it is the most difficult thing in the world. Now I know you know what is feminine. So you can tell me if the ‘Indian Stores’ in Montreal are real Indian stores, or is their stuff manufactured?” (Johnson to Lighthall qtd. in Strong-Boag and Gerson 110).

Although Johnson’s “Indian Dress” has become synonymous with the national memory of the “Indian Poetess,” critics often overlook the fact that Johnson’s use of two distinct dresses contributed to her fame in her time. Indeed, it is the second part of her performance in a British evening gown that is as important to Johnson’s appeal for inclusion in the imperial family through the language of benevolence. To her audiences’

ongoing astonishment, the second part of her performance consisted of patriotic poems to the Queen and country and of humorous sketches. These pieces were performed in a classic Victorian evening dress, which allowed her to maintain Victorian propriety, conform to the general Victorian expectations of femininity and emphasize the progressive development from Indian princess to civilized member of Canadian society.

Recuperation of indigeneity and the romanticising of the noble savage as a dying race are frequently identified as the two strategies used by white settlers to subsume First Nations identity. Historians and cultural critics highlight that Europeans felt it necessary to eradicate Native structures and values in the new settler colonies in order to establish their own culture and, hence, to deny the idea of literate and historically conscious Native cultures (Turner 5). Helen Tiffin describes post-colonial cultures as “inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity” (“Counter-Discourse” 17). That impulse was motivated by the historical construction and reconstruction of identities and places of the colonized peoples by the recognizable codes of Europe and by the establishment of a European historical and fictional record, in which the figures of language itself – tropes, forms, themes, myth – operate not as cultural expression but as cultural control (“Recuperative” 27f.). If, as Mary Elizabeth Leighton suggests, the bricolage of costume, the structure of Pauline Johnson’s stage show with its costume change from Indian maiden to Victorian lady, as well as the subject positions for First Nations she develops in her poems enact containment within the structures of a dominant culture by “staging both the process of assimilation and the constructedness of the binary categories that this process assumes” (Leighton 142), these

changes of costume at the same time expose Johnson's act as *mise-en-scène*. The staging, as much as it plays through costumes to the popular expectations of a late-Victorian audience, allows for a form of strategic contamination through the body. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins examine two distinct strategies in which – especially in female-authored postcolonial drama – different subjectivities are expressed by means of the body. They observe that subject (de)construction is either expressed through 'role-doubling' or 'role-splitting.' In the case of role-doubling, a single actor performs several different characters. The method of role-splitting describes an actor who performs several different personae. While role-splitting, according to Gilbert and Tompkins, expresses the split subjectivity of one character, with the method of role-doubling the actor 'splits' into several different subjects. Both methods undermine any attempt to view the performance as naturalistic. Thus, they illustrate the gaps between the performing body and the performed subjectivities. Gilbert and Tompkins conclude that this method is frequently employed by women in colonial and post-colonial drama:

Women in particular employ these forms as they benefit the identity often fractured by multiple discourses. The performer [is thereby able] to express parts of his/her self kept hidden in more public situations. The variety of subjects that this kind of drama generates helps redefine self and identity as the body metamorphoses into new, more varied personae. (232f.)

Even though critics have pointed out that Johnson's contemporaries were reluctant to admit that her evening gown was as much a costume as her Indian maiden outfit, "the simultaneity of her identity as 'Indian' and 'poetess' both guarantee[d] the authenticity of her voice" (Leighton 148). Despite this limited agency, for her critics the underlying assumptions of successful assimilation policies and the contemporary nationalist ideology

that insisted upon the possibility of a unified Canadian and imperial identity seemingly “undermined the validity and specificity of Johnson’s position as a Native woman” (Leighton 149). Additionally, the frequent depiction of the tragic, suffering Native woman both in her poetry and on stage adds another level of unease for postcolonial and feminist critics who try to assign agency to the subject position she invents for her stage persona. E. Pauline Johnson’s frequent criticism of the unfair treatment of Native Peoples is constructed in her writing as an open-ended moral dilemma for the settler audience in order to appeal, often via a comparison to maternal feelings, to imperial benevolence. Her heroine in “A Cry of an Indian Wife” certainly submits herself to the mercy of the colonizer. At the end of “A Cry of an Indian Wife” the Wife has to conform to a tragic closure emphasized by the strategic use of ellipsis:

though starved, crushed, plundered, lies our nation low ...  
Perhaps the white man’s God has willed it so.  
(*Feather* 18:61-62)

African dramatist Wole Soyinka argues that displays of an isolated tragic figure evoke sympathies in the audience for the situation of the indigene:

The spectacle of a lone human figure under a spotlight on a darkened stage is, unlike a painting, a breathing, living, pulsating, threateningly fragile example of this paradigm. It is threatening because, unlike a similar parable on canvas, its fragility is experienced both at the level of symbolism and in terms of sympathetic concern for the well-being of that immediate human medium. (qtd. in Appleford, “Desire” 21).

Although the audience’s emotional response may be a powerful tool to raise awareness, the ideological conceptions that underlie the generic formula of ‘indigenous tragedy’ mar the overall effect. Chippewa writer Gerald Vizenor sees the tragic mode of representation as a cultural expression of the worst aspects of a social scientific approach, which seeks

to create “a tragic monologue in isolation” rather than a holistic vision of community (9ff.). The “isolation of individuals” and the “narrative closure” that occur in tragedies depicting Indigenous people do not reflect an organic living culture but conform to the notion of a “dying race.” However, Vizenor’s analysis refers to a tragic vision in printed literature or on stage but unmitigated by the presenter. In contrast, Johnson’s performances of “Cry” and of “A Red Girl’s Reasoning” which she performed (with her stage partner) *in a Victorian evening gown*, and which often constituted the finale of the evening (“Canadian Literature: An Evening with Canadian Authors”), created subversive ambiguity rather than following the strategy of containment as suggested by her critics — even when these, as Leighton argues, chose to ignore their powerful message in favour of a tragic vision of a noble but vanishing race.<sup>31</sup> If in print, as Strong-Boag and Gerson point out, “the effect of a poem such as ‘A Cry from an Indian Wife’ was confined to those who noticed it in the newspapers in 1885 and 1892, and those who read it again in *The White Wampum* published in 1895. ...[I]n performance, [the poem becomes a] confrontational dramatic monologue, highlighted in reviews as the climax of the evening, [less contained] and repeated hundreds of times to thousands of Canadians” to great effect (*Paddling* 114). They add that the question of whether the aesthetic pleasure provided by her performances overrode its political aim remains unanswerable and that her reviewers displayed “greater comfort in praising her stage skills than in acknowledging her challenge to European hegemony” (*Paddling* 115).

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<sup>31</sup> Leighton argues in her review of representations of Johnson in the periodical press that “Audiences of Johnson’s performances thrilled to her evocations of Native experience and injustices, which they were able to read as relegated to the past. Instead of acknowledging the ways in which Johnson’s performances hinted at the performability of identity, they interpreted her change of clothing as a barometer of her assimilation and the diminution of the threat that massed Native peoples, dissatisfied with such injustices, might have posed” (159).

Charlotte Gray points out that Johnson's "evening gown was as much a theatrical costume as the native outfit" (160). With regard to her change of costume, Rick Monture argues in "'Beneath the British Flag': Iroquois and Canadian Nationalism in the Work of Pauline Johnson and Duncan Campbell Scott" that Johnson's choice and succession of costumes was meant to "symbolize the process of Native assimilation into Canadian mainstream society" (123). In a cultural environment anxious about miscegenation and the slow process of assimilation, Johnson served unwittingly as a successful example of the politics of assimilation pursued by the Canadian government. Indeed, in this sense, the way her performance was structured mimicked the process of assimilation and allowed her to thrill the audience with tales of adventure and violence, and to subsequently defend her people, voice criticism and dispel the stereotypes of the "Indian squaw" before becoming a successfully assimilated member of the British empire.

Johnson's own account of her first performance, here filtered through a posthumously published interview with fellow novelist and playwright Isabel Ecclestone MacKay, differs significantly from Frank Yeigh's, as she modestly emphasizes the natural genius of her performative and feminine qualities that led to her success:

She had been invited to a meeting of Canadian authors in Toronto, a meeting at which each author was expected to read a piece of original work. Everyone knows that many very good writers read very badly, and the young Indian girl's fire and freedom of delivery came as a pleasant surprise ... 'I had no training,' said Miss Johnson, 'but I was young and ambitious and full of love for the work. So I said I would try. The success of the first performance decided me—and I have been a dramatic reciter ever since.'  
(275)

Rather than focussing on her racial identity, Johnson's recollections coyly emphasize her theatrical genius. Furthermore, her account of what she describes conforms to

expectations of late-Victorian modesty for women, as her description of the watershed moment hides the fact that she was already a published and well-known poet and glosses over the fact that for Johnson commercial success was a necessity. While her skilled oratory, often attributed by reviewers to her First Nations heritage and presumed as ‘natural’, is emphasized as key to her success, it may also be indicative of a change in the audiences’ tastes in dramatic style from an overly-exaggerated late-Victorian melodrama to a more realistic form of speech and theatrical gestures favoured towards the turn of the century. Indeed, when Johnson turned to more melodramatic acting in her first solo tour of 1899, the reviews were scathing. A reviewer in the *Vancouver Province* criticizes Johnson for

show[ing] a fault which she seemed to have slipped into...that of relying on gesture and forceful delivery for effects of vehemence rather than by more intimate study, obtaining the best results through intellectual means and aiding her own cause by suggestion of reserve. (“The Indian Poetess” 8)

Three years later, after she teamed up with comedian and elocutionist Walter McRaye, the same *Vancouver Province* reviewer is more positive about by Johnson’s performance:

Those who have heard Miss Johnson on the occasion of her former visit must be greatly impressed by the marked change which two or three years have brought about in her stage manner, her pose, and even her delivery. Not that she has depreciated in any of these points, but there is an air in all of them that is more professional and perhaps less charmingly ingenious. (“An Enjoyable Entertainment” 4)

Aside from the after-effects of erysipelas she suffered from in 1899 that may have affected the earlier performance, the indicated change in delivery parallels a shift in taste recognizable in Vancouver playbills that around the turn of the century see a significant increase in the production of George Bernard Shaw and Eugene O’Neill plays.

Both Johnson's reviewers and critics frequently note that her performances and voice gained as much or more authority from her Native identity as they did from her gender. In their influential 1924 attempt at a Canadian literary history, J.D. Logan and Donald G. French praise Pauline Johnson's poetry for "the supreme spiritual and aesthetic qualities of thought, its simplicity of structure, its lovely colour images, its winning music, its passion, its pathos, and womanly tenderness" (140). Comparing her poetry to the literary endeavours of other New Woman writers whose literary output he dismissed as "erotic, neurotic, and tommyrotic," Charles Mair found appeal in Johnson "writing as a natural, generous, healthful woman" (480). By stressing her civilized qualities as a Victorian lady and emphasizing her emotional qualities of motherhood, Pauline Johnson's stage persona establishes what Misao Dean identifies as her own kind of power through femininity in order to "construct herself and to be constructed as authoritative" in agency and as contributor to a developing Canadian nation (10).

Critics argue that the rise of New Woman fiction also had an influence on the construction of a distinct female voice in "The Cry of an Indian Wife" and its benevolent reception. Johnson's narrator in "The Cry of an Indian Wife," a poem set against the sufferings of the Plains Cree during the Riel rebellion, describes her agony at the moment her family and nation prepare for war and death. Despite her own sufferings, she reminds her audience that

... my heart is not the only one  
 That grieves the loss of husband and of son;  
 Think of the mothers o'er the inland seas;  
 Think of the pale-faced maiden on her knees;  
 (*Feather* 18: 41-44)

The poem's narrator emphasizes maternal feelings innate to both races to provide a connection and understanding between the two nations. Maternal feelings as well as educational issues, health and work reform are topics that the genre of New Woman fiction explored (Dean 9). Johnson took part in the debates and discussions on New Woman issues that frequently appeared in newspapers. In her 1883 *Globe* article "Outdoor Pasttimes for Women," she observes:

The whole age is crying out for reform, political, moral, spiritual, and one of the first steps toward that much-needed achievement is individual reform... but we women are brought up with little idea of individual importance. Any boy that is born may be a President, or a railway king, or, at the least, carve out for himself an excellent niche somewhere in life. But the little girl baby? Well, its mother smiles and kisses it, and prays in her heart that the little maid will grow up strong and pure and womanly, and that is all.... (qtd. in Gerson *Paddling* 81)

It is in this emphasis on maternalism and on the roles and responsibilities of motherhood that the rhetoric of New Woman and imperial motherhood overlap. In their emphasis on empathy and moral superiority, British imperial ties and ideologies of motherhood ultimately help to overcome the suspicion harboured against the radicalism perceived in the New Woman movement and become enabling forces in the struggle for social reform, equality and political participation. The innate ability of the 'mother of the race' to sympathize and her female duty to morally educate the nation help to establish Johnson's authority on stage as advocate and educator. For Johnson, this moral obligation to civilise, empathise and educate becomes a bridge between racial differences that allows her to actively advocate as a part of the imperial family. In contrast to the portrayal of First Nation women as promiscuous and savage, she relies on universal maternal feelings to overcome racial differences. Working out a life and a profession in a world that was

only too likely to judge women and Natives harshly, Johnson had to be careful to refer to New Woman and First Nation issues without seeming calculating or threatening. With this emphasis on maternal roles, she constituted her own self as an authority and enabled herself to write “conforming to the ‘rules’ of femininity” (Dean 12). But the emphasis of the maternal role common to all races within the imperial family also allowed her to side-step racial boundaries. To ensure her success and manage the public’s perception of her, Johnson had to carefully navigate the waters of indigeneity and progressive first wave feminism by emphasizing what audiences perceived as her ‘natural’ femininity.

E. Pauline Johnson’s practice of sequencing her presentations so that her Indian pieces were followed by poems and skits that were alternately humorous or patriotic mitigated her challenge, allowing her audience to return home comforted rather than perturbed and ensured her success. The subject position that she constructed for herself through her stage persona and beyond allowed her a certain leeway to plead for the aims of her peoples. Johnson was the first Canadian woman of First Nation descent to search for ways to express her pride in her Mohawk heritage in ways that her audiences could understand, mitigating the boundaries of racial exclusion and racial inclusion in the imperial Canadian family. These compromises did not oppose the dominant discourse, but created a niche, a subject position from which to articulate a sense of self-constructed and self-authorized subjectivity. It is interesting to note that in her Canadian performances Pauline Johnson appealed to the ideology of a unified Canadian nation under imperial protection comprised of English-Canadians, French-Canadian and First Nations by including components of all three. According to Walter McRaye, Johnson sought to heighten the pathetic appeal to this national vision with McRaye’s speciality of

reciting William Henry Drummond's humorous *habitant* poems, her English loyalist evocations and her first nation material to create an all-Canadian program that reflected the founding peoples of the Canadian nation ("East and West" 34). The farther west she moved on her touring circuit, the more she perceived ambivalence of her self-fashioned position as imperial subject that is at once part of and standing outside of the racial norms of the imperial family is resolved through her female obligation to civilize the frontier. Sponsored by libraries, various societies and churches to bring literature, culture and entertainment to small towns, McRae anecdotally reveals that in several frontier towns that they performed in between 1902 and her final performance in Kamloops, B.C. on August 23, 1909, Johnson was the only living woman the men had seen in several years. He remarks that all the men in the audience were dressed in their best and treated Johnson like perfect gentlemen ("Pauline Johnson and Friends" 46). Additionally, in these anecdotes about their greatest success McRae also frequently emphasizes Johnson's moral qualities and charitable nature, once again giving careful attention to her gender. In his recollections "East to West," he recalls that in one Ontario town they fundraised for a wooden leg for the town constable, and in Kuskanook, BC, Johnson used her platform to fundraise for the building of a Methodist church, as "Pauline said she had never seen a place that needed a church more" ("East and West" 41).

Compared to the Canadian content and the civilatory mission the poet-recitalist delivered in the Far West, critics argue that the closer Johnson moved to the imperial centre, the more she fashioned herself as the colonial other (Morgan 322). Several reviews suggest that she deliberately chose to heighten her exotic appeal as Mohawk performer for British audiences during her two visits in 1896 and 1904. Strong-Boag and

Gerson point out that Johnson started using Tekahionwake, the name of her maternal grandfather, in her advertising during her first visit to London in 1896. Although her “Indian poems” constitute only a small number of her total works, she consciously chose to perform these in the drawing rooms of London’s aristocracy. During her first stay in London in 1896, she shared literary popularity in fashionable drawing rooms with other entertainers in rustic costume such as U.S. American Joachim Miller, the fashionable “Poet of the Sierras,” who dressed up as a stereotypical western miner, in flannel shirt and trousers tucked in boots. Miller would stroll into the drawing rooms, throw down a bear skin and, reclining, read his poems to the London aristocracy, who believed his to be a historically realistic representation of American life and manners of the gold rush craze (McRae, “East and West” 36). During her second stay in London, a production of Somerset Maugham’s *The Land of Promise* was playing at Haymarket Theatre. While the play openly criticizes the false promises made through advertising promoting immigration to Canada and portrays Canada as uncouth, it nevertheless romanticizes the frontier and pioneering life of a homesteading past. Johnson, herself complicit in heightening stereotypical expectations of the imperial centre, was appalled by the inauthentic mock-up of the homesteader cabin that constituted the set (Keller, *First Aboriginal Voice* 103).

Both visits to London, one in the spring of 1896 after her first successful tour of Southern Ontario and the northeastern United States, and a second one in 1904, were significant moments in Johnson’s career, as they led to publishing and writing opportunities that furthered Johnson’s popularity and provided her with further sources of income. During both visits, she charmed British audiences and journalists and also, as her

biographers point out, enhanced relations with influential patrons, including Prince Arthur, later Duke of Connaught, son of Queen Victoria and adopted chief of the Six Nations, and influential publisher John Lane, who agreed to publish her first collection *The White Wampum*. Gerson rightly points out in “Postcolonialism meets Book History,” that despite her billing as a novelty on the British stage, she was already known in Britain before her first visit (426). Indeed, literary critic Theodore Watts-Dunton had reviewed W.D. Lighthall’s *Songs of the Great Dominion* in the September issue of the influential *The Athenaeum* and had singled out Johnson as “the most interesting poetess now living” (412). Pondering the “adequacy of English poetry—British, American, and colonial—to the destiny of the English-speaking race” (411), he expresses his displeasure that Lighthall only included two poems

[...] by the cultivated daughter of an Indian chief...[who] though she bears the English name of Pauline Johnson, is of a famous Indian family, the Mohawks of Brantford—that splendid race to whose unswerving loyalty during two centuries not only Canada, but the entire British nation owes a debt that can never be repaid. (412)

It is noteworthy that Watts-Dunton responds benevolently to Johnson’s poetry and can include the civilized and cultured Johnson in the imaginary family of future imperial culture-makers based on her sensibility in discussing the sublime beauty of the Canadian landscape and her family’s loyalty to the Empire. In contrast, Johnson’s British publisher John Lane preferred to emphasize Johnson’s ‘Indian qualities’ over her civilized and cultivated drawing room persona in order to promote her shows. He asked her to appear in her Indian maiden costume during interviews, and he introduced various props of “noble savagery” into her set on stage as well as adding to the decorations in her

apartment where she received interviewers. One reporter describes the “reminders of her Indian home and associations” that he found in her London studio at 25 Portland Road:

On the mantelpiece rested the most hideous of masks, the bearded goggle-eyed mask of the mystical Medicine Man; on a screen were hung wampums, which, it may be, have checked many a butchery in the past; while a fringed tunic of buckskin, ermine tails, and bracelets and necklaces of bear claws and panther teeth, all told of one who was proud of her Indian lineage and associations. (P.A.H. qtd. in Gerson, “Postcolonialism Meets” 428)

Extending the assemblage of her costume to the set design to market the exotic savagery of her Indian traits rather than relying on the balance between Indian and Canadian content characteristic of Johnson’s North American performances fits the imperial tradition of displaying alterity from the fringes of the Empire since Elizabethan times.<sup>32</sup>

Some English reviewers linked the Mohawk ancestry of the “cultivated daughter of an Indian chief, who is, on account of her descent, the most interesting English poetess now living” to the history of imperial progress. But such acknowledgement is the exception. Johnson’s appeal to imperial benevolence, evident in her interview in *London Sketch*, is unique among the characterizations of her in the British periodical press. In this interview, despite relying on a stereotypical rhetoric of romanticized frontier and noble savage otherness, she very directly states the plight of indigenous peoples:

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<sup>32</sup> In her essay “A Wigwam to Westminster: Performing Mohawk Identity in Imperial Britain, 1890s – 1990s,” Morgan points out that during both visits to Britain Johnson repeatedly used her performance in Indian costume to make political points and educate the British people about the political issues arising from imperial paternalism and colonial domination. Upon returning to Canada, Johnson used her articles in several British newspapers to enlighten the British public on the sophistication of Mohawk culture and Six Nations political structure. Morgan draws attention to the comparative strategies used in articles like “The Lodge of the Law Makers: Contrast Between the Parliaments of the White Man and the Red Man” in which Johnson compared the sophistication of lawmakers and politicians in both societies and critiques the rigidity of British traditions with regard to succession and women’s political status. However, I think it is important to note that, while her performance allowed for a subversive fluidity between personae, her articles are marred by a language that consciously mimics the exoticism of a fake Indian dialect.

These are my people, the six nations who form the Iroquois. All Indians are not, of course, so progressive. Some are as far behind the Iroquois as the Turks are behind the English people; but the quality is there. If only a chance for advancement be given, and the taint of the whisky-bringing white outlaw be kept away. Put a pure-blooded Indian in a drawing-room, and he will shine with the best of you. (Johnson qtd. in Keller, *Pauline* 112)

Despite her appeals to imperial benevolence emphasizing the potential that all First Nations have to be included in the imperial family, most reviews during the London seasons of 1896 and 1904 rely heavily on the exotic thrill of savagery to describe Johnson to the British public. The limited roles that the proximity to the imperial centre allowed for Johnson are even more evident in the melodramatic language used in the British reviews of her performances than in earlier Canadian reviews. British reviews characterized her with mitigating adjectives like “cultured” and “charming.” While for the *Glasgow Herald*, “her Indian poems fairly breathe the spirit of the Red Man and his home in the great forests and on the illimitable prairie” (qtd. in “E. Pauline Johnson Walter McRaye Promotional Bill”), several reviewers used sensational openings like “Do not be alarmed, gentle reader” (P.A.H. qtd. in Gerson, “Postcolonialism Meets Book History” 428) and “To think of a red Indian is to shudder” (“Miss E. Pauline Johnson” qtd. in Gerson, “Postcolonialism Meets Book History” 428). The *Pall Mall Gazette* even alluded to a successful invasion of barbarism calling her the “Indian Boadicea demanding the allegiance of her subjects.” The 1906 *Times* reviewer assured his readers that he recognized in her performance “the thoughts, and traditional habits of a great, moribund nation” (McRaye, *Pauline Johnson and Friends* 102), reinforcing the exoticism of the vanishing race.

In “‘Publica(c)tion’: E. Pauline Johnson’s Publishing Venues and their Contemporary Significance,” Sabine Milz emphasizes that Johnson’s performances served Johnson as more than just a vehicle of self-expression (par. 2). In a publishing environment in which authors had to pay in advance for the publication of their work (thus bearing the financial risk), in which, to quote from a letter by Johnson (dated 15 January 1915), “books of short stories are looked down upon by the trade [as] Canadians do not seem to buy books of short stories to any great extent,” and even frequent contributions to popular Canadian and American magazines could not guarantee to pay enough to make an independent living (Karr 16), Milz asserts that “by bringing together “performative and print media, oral and written communication, ... Aboriginal storytelling, popular European performance entertainment, and the printed word” Johnson was able to profitably publish and popularize her writing, “whose print publication may have been critically but not economically rewarding” (par. 3). In this sense, Johnson was innovative, “an Aboriginal-English hybrid and a woman born in an age of modernity, and so her oral and written publishing venues were also hybrid and modern” (par. 5).

In my examination of the dramatic performances that portray female First Nation characters such as the dramatic readings of Pauline Johnson and Constance Lindsay Skinner’s British Columbian frontier drama *The Birthright*, there is a striking parallel in the rhetoric used by both authors to evoke a romantic notion of an imagined and imaginary frontier setting, which allows them to imagine characters and stage personas that take a political stance towards contemporary racial and sexual politics. Especially the later poems Johnson writes and chooses to perform, like “The Trail to Lillooet,” “The Train Dogs” and “Prairie Greyhounds,” reflect a fascination and identification with the

Canadian frontier long past but still allow for a space of possibility, hybridity and contestation of gender restrictions and racial politics of inclusion, to rephrase Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa (14). Pinning down their exact intentions remains difficult though, as both Johnson's and Skinner's career and art are inevitably complicated by "the reportage and vested interest of those who wrote about [them], by [their] own various self-representations on stage and in [their other] writings" (Gerson and Strong-Boag, *Paddling* 218). Nonetheless, there are similarities in the way both woman artists wrote for an audience desiring to see an image of Indians on stage, not only out of economic necessity, but also because it allowed them to evoke the idea of the frontier as a transgressive space in order to discuss political matters beyond the limitations set for late-Victorian and Edwardian women in participating in public discourses.

## Chapter 2: Performing the Empire and Its Civil Education: Dramaturgical Practice, Maternal Feminism and Imperialism's Role in Shaping Canadian Culture and Social Change

Among the most overtly imperialist forms of female theatrics are the highly popular flag drills and educational masques in which Anglo-imperial subjecthood was rehearsed and performed before the Second World War. One of the most popular writers of flag drills for girls was Edith Sarah Grove Lelean. Born in 1870 in Gloucestershire, England, Lelean was a passionate educator of girls in Ontario. Unable to find suitable plays and dialogues for school entertainments, the fervent imperialist authored a five-volume series of patriotic drills and marches for Canadian schools. Despite great personal losses in the trenches of the First World War, she continued writing popular patriotic scenes. Her published works for young people comprises at least eight plays, four from 1916 alone, and three volumes of verse. Of Lelean's eighteen published works, nine are patriotic pieces with titles like *Canada Calls*, *Rule Britannia* and *Soldiers of the Soil & the Farmerettes*. All of them display the relationship between Canada as imperial daughter and Great Britain as imperial mother as a relationship between women. In highly choreographed fashion, her 1917 *Britannia* illustrates all Canadian provinces and a selection of colonies of the Empire (Newfoundland, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, India and Ceylon) clad in their respective flags celebrating the glory of the imperial centre on stage through short dramatic monologues. But not only does Canada praise Britannia, in turn she in full jingoism thanks Canada for her support in the First World War:

Britannia.—'Tis a beautiful gift! The gold is gleaming and precious, and Britannia thanks you. Canada, you have done

well, your gifts are rich and choice and Britannia's heart is overflowing in gratitude to all who call themselves Canadians. 'Tis not alone for these material gifts that Britannia thanks you, Canada, but also for the part you have played in upholding the cause of right and justice in keeping the old Flag flying. (17)

The political, economic and social developments of the early twentieth century had a direct impact on cultural production by women in all areas of performance and, in turn, those areas became important media shaping how women perceived themselves as educators and preservers of culture and civilization. In this chapter, I will draw attention to the pageantry used to stage the 1927 British School Girl Tour organized by the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire (IODE) to promote Empire unity and a racialized white Anglo-Canadian nationalism modelled after British values and will compare the themes and format of this pageantry to imperial theatricality in the plays of Mazo de la Roche, often identified as “chief mourner for the dying English influence in Canada” (Hambleton, *Mazo de la Roche of Jalna* 217). The IODE's tour pageantry and de la Roche's plays will be read in the context of contemporary educational and social policy as well as social events of a theatrical nature in order to consider the role of performance in the creation of identity and the lasting influence of British imperial ties on Canadian female self-perception before the Second World War.

Mazo de la Roche (1879-1961) is not necessarily known for her plays. Indeed, the focus of critical attention has been on her *Jalna* series, in particular her use of popular romance plots, and discussion emphasises the author's career as an exemplary fall from favour demonstrating the change in readers' taste from Victorian to modern fiction.<sup>33</sup> De

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<sup>33</sup> See, for example, the critical essays by Ruth Panofsky and the works of de la Roche's biographers Ronald Hambleton (1966), Daniel Bratton (1996) and Joan Givner (1989).

la Roche rose to literary stardom overnight with the award of the *Atlantic Monthly* prize in 1927 for the first of her sixteen *Jalna* books, novels in the Great House tradition delineating the rise and fall of a Canadian genteel family in southern Ontario. The author's subsequent slow decline from favour with critics and, though much later, with her readers may indeed exemplify a shift in taste from a post-Victorian interest in melodramatic plotlines and an elegiac preoccupation with the past to modernist sensibilities. Both de la Roche's novels and her audience retained an enduring commitment to what critics have deemed "Jalnaland" with its "Upper Canadian social vision whose contours resemble that of the Loyalist visions" (Duffy 77). However, the unexamined play scripts of the "chief mourner for the dying English influence in Canada" (Hambleton 217) show an interesting shift from a sentimentalized social vision for Canada embedded in a nineteenth-century understanding of imperial motherhood to a racialized vision of Canada as a developing nation state that synthesizes British values and a unique Canadian identity to inform a new generation of Canadian men and women prepared to weather the turbulent 1930s and 40s. De la Roche's representation of female roles and responsibilities, her interpellation of the imperial subject and her use of homosocial triangulation reflect a 1920s shift in the balance of Canadian and imperial values and avoid simple ideological alignment. Germane to my study and often overlooked in recent criticism, de la Roche's plays were successful in their day; she was awarded literary prizes by both the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and the Montreal chapter of the Canadian Authors Association and was the only Canadian playwright to have one of her plays produced both on Broadway and in London's West End. I will read her dramatic works against the theatricality of the 1928 British Schoolgirl

Tour in order to juxtapose the IODE's aspirational ideas of modernized imperial motherhood with the more complex version of Canadian womanhood Mazo de la Roche presents in her later plays. In this part of the chapter about shifting imperial ideologies and their reflection in dramatic practices, I concentrate on three of her play scripts: the 1925 one-act play "Low Life," a four-act adaptation of her 1929 novel *Whiteoaks of Jalna* first performed in on April 13, 1936 at the Little Theatre in the Adelphi in London, England and her undated manuscript "Snow in Saskatchewan."<sup>34</sup>

### **Mazo de la Roche's "Low Life" and the Myth of British Superiority**

In her notoriously unreliable autobiography,<sup>35</sup> de la Roche mentions a developing interest in playwriting in the mid-1920s (*RTC* 183). Of her first three comedic one-act works, one was awarded two literary prizes, one was honourably mentioned, and all three early plays were published by MacMillan in 1929, two years after the success of her first installment of the *Jalna* series. "Low Life," premiered by the Trinity Players at Trinity Memorial in Montreal on May 14, 1925, is set on the Eastern seaboard and presents a conflict between a working-class couple and a British 'remittance man' fallen on hard times. The Bennis, a couple in economic distress, have taken in a no-good British lodger

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<sup>34</sup> Archival records list thirteen existing play scripts at the Mazo de la Roche fonds, Queen's University Archives. According to the *Online Encyclopaedia of World Biography* and Ronald Hambleton's 1966 biography *Mazo de la Roche of Jalna*, five of her play scripts were produced. I have yet to verify that number. The plays listed as performed include the one-act plays "Low Life," first produced at Trinity Memorial Hall, Montreal on May 4, 1925, directed by W.A. Tremayne; "Come True," first produced at Hart House Theatre, University of Toronto on May 16, 1927; "The Return of the Emigrant," also produced at Hart House Theatre under the direction of Hugh S. Eayrs on March 12, 1928; and the two full-length adaptations of novels: *Whiteoaks*, first produced at the Little Theatre, St. John Street, The Adelphi, London on April 13, 1936 under the direction of Nancy Price, and *The Mistress of Jalna*, first produced at the New Theatre, Bromley, Kent on November 12, 1951, directed by Stafford Byrne.

<sup>35</sup> All three biographers point out that Mazo de la Roche falsified information including her age and ancestry shortly after the success of the first novel in the *Jalna* cycle and, for the rest of her life, remained notoriously vague about any given date.

with “patrician manners” (de la Roche “Low Life” 39) in order to make ends meet.

Predictably, their lodger Linton, a charming Dickensian moocher, is unable to make rent.

In a comedy of manners de la Roche pits the working-class couple -- the shrewd but pragmatic Mrs. Benn and her limping, unemployed husband -- against the charms and deceptions of decayed gentility:

MRS. BENN.—I was a soft. The sime as Joe, ‘ere. But I am not a softy any longer. Why, look ‘ere. I want to tell you something I did. Yesterd’y, when I was cleanin’ in a cellar I took a bit of charcoal and I figured out on the wall ‘ow many meals I’d give you. Eight months—thirty d’ys a month—two ‘undred and forty d’ys. Three meals a d’y equals seven ‘undred and twenty meals. Seven ‘undred and twenty times ‘ave you drawn your chair up to my board. Think of it! Seven ‘undred and twenty times you’ve ‘ad the run of your teeth at my tible!

LINTON.—You’re forgetting the time I was in hospital three weeks, Mrs. Benn, and how weak I was afterwards. I only ate enough to keep a child for another month. (36)

The conflict erupts when Mr. Benn grants gentleman Linton food and shelter over the course of an especially cold afternoon after his wife has kicked the lodger out earlier that morning. Mrs. Benn comes home from work early only to find him back in her apartment, drinking her tea and eating the precious orange she had saved for her daughter.

The representation of local-colour working-class characters with Nova Scotia accents by an Ontario writer may not come as a surprise. Critics have pointed out that the dominant form of literary imagination in Canada during the twenties “continued to be the rural romance, escapist literature which ignored the contemporary social situation” (Bobak 85). The period from 1927 to 1960 witnessed a widespread interest in rural Canadianness, and furthermore, as cultural historians have observed, a strong interest in

what Ian MacKay terms “the Folk” of Nova Scotia fostered by outside interest in the perceived quaintness of Maritime culture as well as by Nova Scotians’ conscious creation of a distinct regional identity as a reaction to Confederation (9). De la Roche, in “Low Life,” consciously juxtaposes the comic foils that the Benns represent against the sly gentleman who with his civilized airs nonetheless embodies qualities that the playwright deems valuable for rural Canada. Thus, she downplays the realism of economic hardship working-class Canadians felt in the mid-twenties in favour of a comedy of manners to promote an old-fashioned, British class consciousness. And even though historian Jo-Ann Fellows argues that “the ‘British Connection’ in Canadian nationalism did not survive the First World War, except in a fantasy world that occasionally found expression in patriotic speeches, bad poetry, or [...] in the *Jalna* novels” (283), Mazo de la Roche’s play and her other works of the time period exemplify what Dennis Duffy calls “the colonial mentality in its unswerving allegiance to British institutions and mores, and conveys the Loyalist myth of a Canada redeemed by British allegiance—and the myth of a humane and harmless gentry” (285). This myth of British superiority was informed by the assumption that Englishmen were superior in class and status to almost all members of Canadian society. However, as other historians have pointed out, the remittance man, who had after some social indiscretion been sent to the colonies and lived there flamboyantly, often beyond his means, met with growing Canadian resentment over the course of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century. Indeed, he frequently became a popular target of caricature and cutting satire (Dunae 123-24).

In a surprising twist of events, the couple decides to let their former lodger stay on if he teaches their daughter the manners and airs of refinement needed for her to overcome the limitations of a working-class life.

BENN.—Teacher said—“You ‘ave reason to be proud of your daughter, Mr. Benn. She has the manners of a patrician. I can’t teach ‘er nothink.”

MRS. BENN (*astounded*).—She said that about our Gladys?

BENN.—About our Gladys.

Linton (*mildly*).—I did what I could.

BENN.—And you should have ‘eard ‘im, Lizzie, when I was tying to Gladyses ‘air ribbon. ‘E’d just stepped in for ‘is overcoat. “now,” ‘e says, “mind your manners, you young limb. None o’ your coarse Canadian w’ys of speakin’. S’y---“Yes, teacher,” prettily, not “yeh” or “huh-huh”. And “teacher,” mind, with the last syllable nicely clipped, not “teacher, “or you’ll never grow up to marry a gentleman. . . . Lizzi, we’ve got to think of Gladys’ future, ‘ave’n’t we? A refined influence at work, says teacher.

[...]

MRS. BENN.—Sit in, men.

*(They’ll come forward with alacrity but Linton does not sit down till he has assisted Mrs. Benn to her seat with the utmost gallantry. She blossoms into smiles.) (39-40)*

De la Roche describes the inspiration for the dramatic scene in her autobiography: “Its story was first poured out to me by a charwoman who came in regularly to work for me. She had a worthless husband and I sympathized with her” (*RTC* 183).

Myth, according to critics of imperialism, favours rightful place and trust in British allegiance. In almost a comic foil, de la Roche exposes this myth in the play but nonetheless re-emphasizes the British cultural value system that every Canadian should

aspire to. “Low Life,” according to de la Roche, played successfully at Toronto’s Hart House and, in 1925, won two literary prizes: an award for best play by the Canadian Author Association and one, interesting to note, in the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire Playwright Competition. Unfortunately, submitting the play to two literary competitions and winning both caused a minor scandal and led the Canadian Author Association to ask de la Roche to return the prize money (183).

### **Performing the Model Citizen—The IODE School Girl Tour**

With its content and promotion of refined British manners, it is therefore not surprising that a play such as de la Roche’s “Low Life” found sympathy and success in a playwriting competition held by the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire as it promoted imperial values through scholarships, bursaries, book prizes, and awards, and pursued educational projects in communities across Canada. Furthermore, sympathy for the lower classes is a key concept at the heart of both the Loyalist myth and imperial motherhood. IODE founder Clark Murray declared in 1900: “Do not forget that the destiny of our Empire lies in the hands of our women and our children, more than in politics and in parliament” (qtd. in Pickles, *Female Imperialism* 16). The IODE, founded at the turn of the century, had made it its mission through its own particular brand of female imperialism to promote an Anglo-Canadian nationalism modelled after British values. “Canada was to become a nation through conformity to a grand narrative, the contents of which were to be based upon British democracy and constitutional monarchy, the Christian myths and saintly symbols of the British Isles, and economic and cultural ‘progress’ through new innovations and technologies” (Pickles, *Female Imperialism* 3).

The IODE promoted these values through voluntary work, education, and cultural philanthropy, as these activities were deemed suitably 'female.' The Order attracted mostly conservative women of middle and upper-middle class upbringing who saw it as their mission as imperial mothers to advance imperial culture and values (54).

Increasingly dissatisfied with the influx of non-British immigrants and fearing a rising interest in American values in the 1920s, the IODE realigned its efforts to promote a stronger Canadianization by focusing on its public education programs. This "Canadianization [from within] was based upon," as IODE historian Katie Pickles explains "mimicking Britain as much as possible" (54).

Education was viewed as a key to ensure national stability and economic growth. Various Anglo-Canadian middle-class organizations actively promoted educational projects that drew on the spirit of the Social Gospel movement to ensure that Canada would be populated by a culturally homogenous people of high character. For example, in the aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the Canadian Manufacturers Association and the Canadian Business Association organized The National Conference on Character Education in Relation to Canadian Citizenship, which sought to evoke an imaginary nation rooted in what historian Tom Mitchell identifies as middle-class "Anglo-conformity" (8). Reacting to similar concerns and in order to promote their own brand of imperialism and Canadian nationalism, the IODE organized in 1928 the highly theatrical English Schoolgirl Tour<sup>36</sup> in collaboration with the Canadian government, the

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<sup>36</sup> According to a *Globe* article dated August 24, 1928, a tour with similar political intentions simultaneously took place for twenty-five British schoolboys (20). However, as the dialogical performance of nation and gender differs for men and women, I will be limiting this analysis to the construction and performance of what IODE historian Katie Pickles identifies as a "modernized form of Imperial Motherhood" ("Exhibiting Empire" 82).

British government, and The Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW). A selected group of twenty-five seventeen- and eighteen-year-old women from elite British public schools representing every major region in Britain, accompanied by their parents, were sent to tour through twenty-six Canadian cities to promote empire unity both in Canada and, upon return, in Great Britain. One of the tour's explicit aims was to sell to the young women "of marriageable age" the beauty of the Canadian landscape and the abundance of natural resources to emphasize, in an inverted twist on the imperial trope of the connection between women and land, the potential of Canada as the maturing son of the Empire. IODE historian Katie Pickles argues that the schoolgirl tour provides a vivid snapshot of the IODE's ideal Canada ("Exhibiting Empire" 80) and forms "a narrative of superior British-based culture, economy and politics in a modern resource -rich, technologically advanced, democratic Canadian nation" (*Female Imperialism* 75).

In keeping with both the discussion and practice of immigration policies in Canada and Great Britain in the post-war 1920s, the participants were encouraged to actively promote an attractive image of Canada on returning to the British Isles. In turn, they were on display themselves, projecting an image of a new generation of Imperial femininity to which Canadians could aspire. This may interrogate the argument put forward by historians that the Schoolgirl Tour only served to emphasize similarities between mother country and dominion (Pickles, *Female Imperialism* 76). Rather, I would like to suggest, through the enactment of a desired Canadian identity for potential British emigrants and female Canadian citizens of the dominion alike, the Schoolgirl Tour served as a pageant promoting a modernized imperial motherhood and scripted a performance for the young

women that naturalized imperial femininity by bringing together the best of both worlds—British imperial civilization and Canadian natural resources. The elaborate dramaturgy and theatricality of the encounters that the IODE arranged suggest what theatre scholars have called an “explanatory power of performance” (Reinelt 70). It renders the young women as icons. They are transformed into Miss Canada, the symbolic connection between nation, ideology and the land, the theatrical embodiment of the future of Empire. “To the IODE, [these British] schoolgirls epitomized the ideal Canadian, and they were exhibited to Canadians as model citizens ... as ‘daughters’ of their ‘mother country’ and future mothers themselves” (Pickles, “Exhibiting Canada” 81).

Starting and ending in Quebec, The Schoolgirl Tour made twenty-nine stops all over Canada--from Halifax to Victoria. During these stops, the young British women were welcomed by city councils and local IODE chapters; shown historic sites, museums, and tourist attractions; and received lectures on Canadian history and culture. Interesting to note is the fact that the tour also showcased industrial sites of a developing resource economy like lumber mills and mines--rather unusual places to visit for Edwardian women. The young women were asked to take turns writing and delivering polite thank-you speeches to town officials and hosts. Miss Thompson, the IODE tour director, placed special emphasis on the young women’s fitness and exposure to nature (84). Not only did the tour feature regularly scheduled swims and hikes besides tea and dinner parties, but also included a full week at several camps in Northern Ontario’s Algonquin Park, where the women lived in log cabins, had sing-alongs around campfires, swam, hiked and learned how to canoe. All of their experiences were later broadcast in radio interviews.

The women were asked to keep diaries that were to be published in *Echoes*, the IODE's national publication (89).

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the myth of Canada as a Northern nation is intrinsically linked to Loyalist culture (Berger, *The True North* 8) and nation-building ideologies in the period between 1890 and the Second World War. To the popular Canadian imagination, Algonquin Park, famously iconicized by the Group of Seven painters, represents cultural nationalism's preoccupation with a Northern environment of strength in which British stock thrived. Indeed, Canada was hegemonically portrayed, and conceived itself, within this myth through popular culture of the 1920s (Grace 9). To showcase young British women thriving and frolicking in this environment highlights their suitability as settlers and civilizers of a future Canada. As Pickles points out, "The desirability of the girls was embedded in naturalized notions of race, health and sexuality [in the] connection between the perceived health of the girls, the health of the British race and the health of Canada as a place" (Pickles, "Exhibiting Canada" 82). Their modern modes of transportation that included trains and motorcars, as well as their fashionable clothes and flapper haircuts, created a spectacle for the Canadian public that emphasized "the modernisation of imperialism and nationalism themselves" (82). In its article on the schoolgirls' visit to the National Exhibition in Toronto, the *Globe and Mail* called the Schoolgirl Tour "a new influence in Empire education to teach the true meaning of Empire citizenship" ("Young Ambassadors" 20). Despite the slim media coverage of the tour in Canada and Britain, its theatricality highlights the connection of race, nationalism, imperialism and gender that informed the IODE's vision of a future Canada for female

Anglo-Canadian imperialists and illustrates the performative public relation practises the IODE utilized in order to achieve this vision.

Maybe in this sense, it comes as no surprise that the IODE chose to award Mazo de la Roche's "Low Life" its prize for the best one-act play of 1925, nor that the IODE promoted it in their publication *Echoes* (de la Roche, *Ringing* 183ff). The ending of the play aligns itself with the order's ideas of imperial motherhood. Linda Kealey defines this form of maternal feminism as the "conviction that woman's special role as mother gives her the duty and the right to participate in public sphere" in order to work towards social reform (7). Ramsay Cook calls these reform movements starting in late-Victorian Canada "the regenerators" to highlight their attempt to influence Canada's moral renewal and to bring the nation into line with the ideals of an enlightened British empire (3).

Engagement in public discourses of reform in order to create healthy, productive citizens for a maturing Canadian nation is at the heart of the imperial motherhood and reform movement, according to Carol Lee Bacchi, and constitutes a conservative response to a perceived social integration caused by rapid social transformations accompanying industrialization and urbanization. "Temperance, the Canadianizing of the foreigner, the battle against prostitution, the campaign for compulsory education, the desire to rescue delinquents—all reveal a desire to restore a degree of control over society" for a greater good (9).

In the conclusion to "Low Life," de la Roche aligns herself with the reform movement at the heart of upper-class imperial Canadian motherhood by promoting an adapted Britishness as cultural strategy and a form of moral integrity. Allegorically read, her short one-act plays present Canadians (especially the uneducated ones) as 'children' who, in a

narrative of zoomorphic cultural maturation through copying the ‘mother country’, can become a nation whose identity is situated in both Canadian patriotism and imperial values. In turn, she suggests, this guarantees Canadians a better future. Her plots do not simply favour British stock over Canadian-born characters but rather advocate for new imperial Canadians who are of Canadian origin with integrated British values. The ending of “Low Life” echoes the values of the members of Imperial Order Daughters of Empire who did not perceive themselves as advocates of an attachment to the mother country, but as promoters of a special brand of female imperialism through “a co-dependence of national and imperial identities, and the need of Canadian nationalism to grow out of an imperial attachment” (Pickles, *Female Imperialism* 16). Despite popular culture’s leaning towards Americanization (Karr 4) and a shift in the cultural centre and publishing market for Canadian artists from London to New York during the late reign of Queen Victoria (Gerson 115), an attitude prevailed among the Canadian cultural elite that serious culture (with its nation-building aspirations) had to reflect British values (Bissett 23).

The type of cultural syncretism de la Roche promotes in most of her plays is best reflected in the emigration policy of its time. Statistics suggest that between 1904 and 1914, British immigrants still constituted more than 50 per cent of arrivals in Canada (Harper 164). Between 1916 and 1927, more than half a million British subjects immigrated to Canada, of whom only about twenty percent were of middle- or upper-class origin. This migration was actively encouraged on both sides of the Atlantic. However, during the Great War and in the early 1920s, British immigration numbers dwindled. Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton’s 1890s settlement policy of attracting

“climatic suitable” immigrants from Northern and Eastern European countries, the “stalwart peasant in sheepskin coat, ... with a stout wife and a half-dozen children,” affected not only immigration to Canada in the 1910s -- with non-British immigrants outnumbering British immigrants four to one (Mackey 33) -- but with over a million non-English-speaking immigrants residing in Canada by 1919, triggered questions of Canadian citizenship “along the country’s fault lines of ethnicity, language, class and region” (Mitchell 6). Despite the often foregrounded narrative of The Great War evoking a sense of national identity among Canada’s English-speaking middle class, immigration’s challenge to cultural homogeneity was perceived as potentially dangerous, as it threatened the myth of the development and maintenance of an English-Canadian national population and national identity of British origin. The 1919 Canadian Immigration Act sought to reduce ethnic diversity by emphasising racial, cultural and ideological affiliation over an immigrant’s possible contribution to settlement and economy (Government of Canada, “Forging Our Legacy”). On the other side of the Atlantic, the 1922 British Empire Settlement Act was an attempt by the British government to battle unemployment and guarantee stability throughout the empire by subsidizing transatlantic passages and farm training for willing emigrants. Estimates suggest that one hundred thirty thousand immigrants to Canada were assisted under the Act. The economic upturn in 1923 encouraged Ottawa to further develop colonization schemes for the under-populated Prairie Provinces. This led to increased effort to attract male Britons willing to farm. Despite government efforts on both sides of the Atlantic, the majority of British emigrants assisted to come to Canada after the First World War

were women. Critics have linked the common mythology of a surplus<sup>37</sup> of females in Britain between 1850 and the Second World War to policies designed to populate the Empire. For example, citing a surplus of more than a million British women of marriageable age, Britain's Secretary for the State of the Dominion Leo Amery argued in 1919 that British women were needed for the economic and cultural development of the colonies, where there was still an overabundance of men (Kennedy 407).

Missionary societies and similar organisations that promoted and supported British immigrants were a popular volunteering opportunity for Canadian middle- and upper-class women. Numerous volunteer organizations like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and other Canadian women's associations such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the Toronto Junior League and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union engaged in what Katie Pickles identifies as "a considerable amount of maternal work" to welcome, assist and assimilate newly arrived immigrants (*Female Imperialism* 54). Typically, the IODE organized welcoming committees at all major port cities and train stations, providing restrooms, canteens, nurseries and pamphlets, and through local chapters held social events and education programs for immigrants they deemed easy to 'Canadianize.' As IODE immigration spokesperson Laura Thompson wrote in 1926:

Should we now not recognize that Canada's continuance as part of the British Empire may be imperiled by a failure to build up a population resolved to remain loyal to that

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<sup>37</sup> Monk argues, "The idea of 'redundant women' was not a result solely of First World War battlefield losses" (25). She argues that this idea had been popping up in Britain since the 1850s and had less to do with Britain's changing social dynamics and more with a fear that too many working-class women with not enough employment would eventually lead society into inevitable moral decay. At the same time, Alessio points out, while in Britain between 1891 and 1911 there was a perceived excess of women over men, during that same period a significant surplus of men was recorded in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and white South Africa, which in turn resulted in The Empire Settlement Act of 1922 (Alessio 243f.). "Citing figures according to which women exceeded men in Britain by more than a million, Secretary of State for the Dominions Leo Amery argued that women from the 'centre of empire' were needed on the 'peripheries'" (Pickle, *Female Imperialism* 54). Pickles explains that this view persisted throughout the 1920s and 30s (58).

Empire? Should we not allow ourselves to be timorous as to the possibility of Canada, this great country—being able to provide a livelihood for those British who are already in our midst? (qtd. in Pickles, *Female Imperialism* 62)

Notwithstanding the general encouragement of British immigration to Canada on both sides of the Atlantic, the attitude towards British immigrants to Canada varied according to perceived class differences between the newcomers and their Canadian counterparts and whether they lived in rural outposts or urban centres (64). Rural communities mocked the genteel British immigrant of middle- and upper- class upbringing. Conversely, in urban centres, the attitude towards new British immigrants was welcoming, as the newcomers were perceived as bringing British upper-middle-class and upper-class civility to Canada. Nonetheless, in addition to this migratory elite, IODE women and other cultural societies continued to express a preference for young, unspoiled female domestic help from the British Isles. British servants were, even in the 1920s, still a sign of sophistication.

But wishful thinking also clashed with the reality of immigration. Parallel to the expressed desirability of British stock, throughout the nineteen twenties, the Canadian cultural elite also frequently voiced its concern over British attempts to offload undesirable subjects to the colonies. IODE National Education Secretary Constance Boulton's address on immigration to the Toronto chapter of the order illustrates the imperial maternalists' concern over the variability in the quality of British immigrants. Her speech encouraged the chapter to strengthen the chapter's effort to support immigrants of desirable qualities:

I am convinced the foreign immigrant is as varied in quality and type as the British immigrant. We have magnificent British immigrants, and absolutely worthless British

immigrants, and among those foreigners we call dirty, filthy and ignorant (I hear it on every hand), are you not sure among those immigrants there are magnificent types of men? The lower classes of foreigners have I venture to say a far greater appreciation of music and art. (qtd. in Pickle, *Female Imperialism* 56)

While urban centres saw levels of shared cultural understanding as qualities that were essential for a successful assimilation into the Canadian fabric, liberal arts education did not reliably predict success in settling the new country and integrating into society. As Jean Barman explains in her article on popular attitudes towards British immigrants to British Columbia before the Second World War, the concern about the level of civility as marker of suitability was not necessarily shared in rural outposts. Barman argues that the attitudes towards British immigrants underwent drastic changes in the early twentieth century. British immigrants were often perceived as arrogant, shunning the local cultural elite as below their rank, and were looked down upon by their host communities as unsuited for the physical demands of frontier life (23). As British Columbia's *Colonist* argued in a popular article, no reason existed why "a man born in the 'right little, tight little island' is on a somewhat different plane from those of us who first saw the light in what we have no objection to calling the Colonies" (qtd. in Barman, "Ethnicity in Pursuit of Status" 34). Vancouver's popular *Westminster Hall Magazine* concluded the same year that "it sometimes seems that those who have the least occasion to be exclusive are the most apt to 'put on airs'" (9). Despite a general enthusiasm for British immigration as a means to guarantee the strengthening of British stock, the 1920s saw a growing concern that "Canada was viewed in Britain as a 'dumping ground' for the 'unfit'" (Schultz 170).

### **British Immigration and the Unsuccessful English 'Farmer-Gentleman' on Stage**

This popular discussion about the necessity for British immigration to raise levels of cultural civility in the outposts of the Empire on the one hand, and the concerns about the suitability of incoming settlers for the building of the Canadian nation on the other hand, provides another point of convergence between the IODE's cultural and political activism and Mazo de la Roche's plays. Although Mazo de la Roche claims in her autobiography that her preferred vehicle of expression remained the novel and that the materiality of theatre productions held no appeal for her, records exist of nine more play scripts besides her published one-act plays of 1927 and her full-length dramas *Whiteoaks* (1940) and *Mistress of Jalna* (1954). The unpublished three-act play "Snow in Saskatchewan" is set against the settlement of the prairies and dramatizes the love life of an educated but unsuccessful English 'farmer-gentleman.' The expansionist politics and propaganda of the Second British Empire rendered western Canada's newest provinces as the Empire's final frontier. To attract settlers, "The Last Best West" (Seton 525) was often portrayed as "the promise of Eden" (Owram 4). Critics have pointed out that the period's imperial discourse was informed by concerns about racial and social purity and imperial renewal (Devereux, "New Woman" 176). Immigration to western Canada is a theme treated frequently in the realist novel of the 1920s and 30s, most prominently in F.P. Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1927). While Grove uses realism as a technique to naturalize the ethnic immigrant as a new generation of successful Canadian nationalists (Kamboureli 29), de la Roche in "Snow in Saskatchewan" questions imperial expansion and the success of British settlements in western Canada through her application of melodramatic strategies. Protagonist Tom Rawlence's tragic ending, his moral short-sightedness and the

character's juxtaposition with more apt, successful farmers question the suitability of the sought-after middle- and upper-class Briton favoured by politicians and cultural organizations such as the IODE. In turn, through an emphasis on a new generation of Canadians that is symbolically married to the land in the play's conclusion, de la Roche employs its melodramatic tropes to make subtle reference to a waning imperial significance in favour of a Canadian cultural and ethnic syncretism.<sup>38</sup> In his history of *Propaganda and Empire*, John Mackenzie identifies melodrama as the cultural vehicle of choice to represent the early successes of British imperialism and also to show the later waning influence of British imperialism among the imperial cultural elite. Melodrama, for Mackenzie, moved over the course of the nineteenth century from the working-class music hall to the echelons of bourgeois culture. For the imperial subject, melodrama with its emphasis on moral integrity provided the ideal platform to justify cultural and military expansion and violent assimilation of inferior otherness by providing its audience a dualistic moral framework of Manichean opposites (53). "Snow in Saskatchewan," by foregrounding individual action and embodying the moral corruptibility of the old world in an individual character, utilizes a similar strategy, and thus testifies to the need for change in the cultural fabric of Canada's settlement project. Ultimately though, it never explicitly exposes the gaps in bourgeois attitude.

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<sup>38</sup> Glenn Wilmott in *Unreal Country: Modernity in the Canadian Novel in English* (2003) argues modernism in Canadian literature pairs techniques of realist representation in fiction with a romantic nationalism. He identifies a recurring idealized embodiment of British values in realist texts in the Canadian characters of Ralph Connor and other authors. Several literary historians of Canada have pointed to the persistence and significance of romance in the national literature in Canada well past the period when it had given way to realism and then modernism in America and Europe. See, for example, E.L. Bobak's article "'Seeking Direct, Honest Realism': The Canadian Novel of the 1920's" (1981) or E.D. Blodgett's *Five-Part Invention: A History of Literary History in Canada* (2003).

During the first two acts of the play, Tom Rawlence, his German wife Anna, their two children, their Swedish farmhand Gunnar, their British neighbours and an old rancher of Scottish origin are trapped in the Rawlences' farmhouse during a three-day spring blizzard. During the course of the snowstorm, various love triangles, for example, between Lexie Rawlence, Tom's daughter and the Finnish farmhand or Tom Rawlence and the neighbour's wife Lola Pass are revealed. The dialogue between the characters frequently returns to a discussion of the hardship of farming the prairies and to the character traits that make a successful settler.

Tom Rawlence is certainly lacking the necessary qualities to be a successful farmer. High-strung, meek and hot-headed, he is more interested in his children's intellectual development than his farming. His intellectual preoccupation, however, stifles his ability to engage in the physical labour necessary to succeed in such a harsh environment. The first act opens to Tom's unsuccessful attempt to educate his two children in Latin and French. Both his wife Anna and Tom believe that what may be called a 'petit bourgeois' education will allow their children to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for ranching on the frontier (1.1.6). In a comedic interplay, Anna bemoans her lack of education and Tom mocks her mercilessly by pointing out that her "better qualities" include "an iron digestion and a loyal heart" (1.1.7). This ironic emphasis on better qualities, both feminine and masculine, is indicative of the melodramatic plotline of right action and right feeling and foreshadows both the moral conflict on which the play hinges as well as its tragic ending. Tom's suitability as settler is questioned by his desire to give his children a proper British education:

Tom:     But the Boy has brains. I wish I could send him  
           home to a good school.

McPhee: Ay, and unfit him for life here! Your English  
Public School Boy—I know him. Don't I see him  
out here by the score? With no more initiative  
than a rabbit. (1.1.24)

The entrance of farmhand Gunnar and his accusation that playing the gentleman equals sitting “by the stove in the warmth, and nothing do [sic]” (idem) juxtaposes the stereotypical conflict between hard-working, successful and stubborn non-British immigrants and failing British gentleman farmers, a Canadian master narrative that can be traced back to authors like Susanna Moodie and Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Having arrived in Canada from Sweden three years earlier without a word of English, Gunnar, as characterized through the words of another character, “is a young man who will get on” (1.1.23).

Three other characters reinforce this paradigm of suitability for a new Canadian nation. Shrewd, elderly Scottish rancher Angus McPhee has made a living of the prairies for twenty-eight years. While he admits that he left Canada once for the old country in a bout of homesickness, the prairie and the pioneering life have captured his heart. Even more so, the prairie landscape has become a common trope, the object of his desire, a physical manifestation his body longs for at night (2.1.23). He stresses that

[...] there's some made for the life and some aren't. [...] They are made for it, absolutely. They have the pioneer spirit. They never look back on their defeat, Always forward. Hope grows in them like the Spring flower on the prairie.... (2.1.23)

The Rawlences' neighbours Lola and Bill Pass fall into the unsuitable category of British settlers that Jean Barman identifies as “migratory elite” (Barman 23). Recent British settlers from an urban and relatively well-to-do background, they are characterized by foolish decisions like, for example, taking their motorcar out “for a spin” in the middle of

a blizzard. Moreover, Bill Pass is rendered as a spoiled and deceptive schoolboy with temper tantrums over trifles such as a lack of jam for his blancmange. He is also characterized as mischievous for not returning borrowed items (1.1.17). His wife Lola is revealed as a gold-digging temptress who only shows her romantic interest in Tom Rawlence after his unforeseen inheritance has been announced through a cable at the end of the first scene, all in tune with melodramatic conventions. And while his family in comic interludes practices curtsies, correct social addresses of bishops and lords, and perceived upper-class English manners with the expected malapropisms, Tom Rawlence plans his future with Lola Pass.

Tom Rawlence is not just a typical melodramatic stock character. His love pursuit of Lola Pass renders him morally questionable. However, his redeeming quality may lie in his concern for the best outcome for all characters involved. If the paradox of melodrama is that, even though its focus lies on the foregrounded ethical conflict in the interior life of its characters, its characters are not constructed with psychological depth and rather than being introspective, convey meaning through action, movement and gesture (Brooks 46), then Tom Rawlence's actions serve to resolve the larger conflict that arises through the aforementioned unsuitability of the British gentility for prairie settlement. His tragic suicide at the end of the play, recognizing his moral betrayal, creates the necessary pathos crucial for successful melodrama. Believing his wife to be in love with his farmhand Gunnar, he decides to leave his farm behind to the more suitable couple and take his children back to England. The revelation that his daughter is in love with Gunnar and her accusation that "you wanted to get rid Anna ... you're ashamed of her" drive him to suicide (3.23). Indeed, his last dramatic utterance, "All the right words come to me now,"

points to an unspoken truth that is not revealed within the lines of the play. Furthermore, in the last scene of the play, de la Roche questions the new generation's ability to return to a social position their father left behind in Britain long ago. If the children's difficulty in learning more academic subjects and refined manners at the beginning of the play, along with their contrasting pragmatic side, indicate their suitability to remain on the prairies, de la Roche emphasizes this through her employment of the motif of the prairie flower once again in Lexie Rawlence's final song: "I am a little prairie flower,/ growing wilder by the hour" (2.17).

In a final melodramatic gesture, the new generation of Canadians, Lexie Rawlence and farmhand Gunnar, embrace each other at the end of the play.

Lexie: [...] Nothing can hurt us now. Nothing can separate us. I am a woman, Gunnar. ... You are a man. ... I feel as though we were the first man and woman in this white world. Look at me, Gunnar. Don't turn your face away. (He looks into her face, then slowly gathers her into his arms ... as Pass and McPhee follow, bearing Tom's body) (3.37-38)

In other words, the play fits our modern understanding of Victorian melodrama in its emphasis on old-fashioned moral imperatives and the responsibility of the imperial subject to recognize and embody the best of British imperial subjecthood. What is of interest here is how the melodramatic characters are used to figure and simultaneously occlude the potential failure of a British Imperial settlement. While de la Roche foregrounds Tom Rawlence's moral impotence and, if only reluctantly, questions the class structures and suitability of British settlers, she boldly proposes a cultural syncretism embodied in the young couple. In the epicene representation of the nation, Lexie Rawlence is identified with the Canadian soil that can be tilled and tamed if

married off to a hardworking immigrant with the right qualities. De la Roche's allusion to the Fall of Man reifies a metanarrative of innocence lost and the potential of redemption in the evolutionary narrative of Canadian maturation. The almost pastoral ending of the play, precisely by its appealing familiarity, allows the audience to easily identify with the young lovers and, at the same time, accept the critical view on immigration policies as part of a momentary dilemma in the liberal state-making enterprise. The use of pathos, as critics of melodrama have pointed out, is crucial to understanding its dramatic intent.

"Pathos involves [the audience] in assessing suffering in terms of its privileged knowledge of its nature and causes" (Neale 8). Its narrative logic, according to Neale, is the need to produce a discrepancy between the knowledge and self-understanding of its characters and that of the audience. If melodrama points to and mourns but never names the values it sees lost, then in "Snow in Saskatchewan" de la Roche mourns the old-fashioned imperial ideals of civility and humanism that have to be left behind. She heralds a shift in values from a romanticized imperialism to a marriage of new and old ideals for a new Canadian nationalism.

### **Queering Imperial Values: Mazo de la Roche's *Whiteoaks: The Play***

De la Roche's positive view on the possibility of merging imperial values and Canadian nationalism in a new generation of citizens is complicated in her stage adaptation of her second novel in the Jalna cycle, *Whiteoaks of Jalna*. The dramatic adaptation *Whiteoaks: The Play*, a domestic comedy in three acts, premiered in Great Britain in 1936 and in the United States and Canada in 1938. It may present the only play by a female Canadian playwright before the latter part of the twentieth century to have been successfully produced in London's East End, The Theatre Royal in Bath, and New

York's Broadway. Furthermore, her biographers argue that "more than any other single event, except the original publication of *Jalna*, the phenomenally successful run of *Whiteoaks: The Play* established Mazo de la Roche's reputation, from which all her books benefitted" (Hambleton 153). The initially unpopular play gained overnight success in Great Britain right before it was about to close, and despite only moderate reviews in the United States, Canadian audiences went as far as to celebrate the play as a "red-letter event in the annals of Canadian drama" (*Globe & Mail* Feb 26, 1938 16). Furthermore, according to *Montreal Daily Star* theatre critic S. Morgan Powell, it signalled "a return to the golden age" of Canadian theatre (6). Not only does its stage history and critical reception in Canada, the U.S. and Great Britain elucidate changing attitudes towards imperial legacies, but also the changes de la Roche made to the ending of the play as compared to the novel indicate a changing attitude towards the foundational imperial and maternal values her earlier plays promoted.

By 1933, the fifty-four-year old Mazo de la Roche had published four novels in the *Jalna* family saga and was at the peak of her literary popularity (Panofsky 61). Ruth Panofsky notes a shift in reviewers' attitudes towards de la Roche's literary skills as early as 1931 but emphasizes that readers' interest in her work did not diminish till the early 1960s (63). The popularity of her novels attracted editors and writers for other media. As early as 1927, Mazo de la Roche had offers from literary agents eager to buy the dramatization rights to the *Jalna* novels (Hambleton 138). De la Roche refused all manuscripts of dramatic adaptations in order, as she claimed, to protect the integrity of her characters. For example, she rejected William Lennox's stage adaption of *Jalna*, writing to his agent Alfred McIntyre that she could not approve his dramatization as she

feared that “Grandmother Whiteoak and even her sons might easily be made into farcical or grotesque characters which [she] could not tolerate” (139). In his biography of de la Roche, Ronald Hambleton reports that not until she had watched John Gielgud performing his *Richard of Bordeaux* in March 1933, did she reveal to her friends and confidants, including Katherine Hale and St. John Ervine, her plans to dramatize *Whiteoaks of Jalna*. He cites her letter to Katherine Hale<sup>39</sup> on April 24, 1933, in which Mazo de la Roche enthusiastically announces: “I did so want to talk to you—tell you of my latest work, dramatization of *Whiteoaks*. St. John Ervine and Raymond Massey are enthusiastic about it. I wish R.M. [Raymond Massey] could have produced. It is so difficult to find a producer these days. At least that is what I hear. Please don’t speak of the play over there” (qtd. in Hambleton 139-40).

Raymond Massey urged her to adapt the play herself and introduced her in 1934 to Nancy Price, the then manager of The People’s National Theatre Productions, who immediately recognized an opportunity to capitalize on the popular writer’s fame. However, despite Nancy Price’s encouragement, de la Roche’s initial enthusiasm about the project quickly soured because of a lack of theatre professionals interested in producing the script. She writes in *Ringing The Changes* that

Again and again I wondered if ever it would be produced and reached the point where I did not much care. About my novels my feelings were very different. There my public was steady and warm-hearted. They understood me and I understood them, that is to say, I offered them lucidity and living characters, and, in return, they gave me belief in those characters which was equal to my own. (298)

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<sup>39</sup> Katherine Hale, pen name of Amelia Beer, the daughter of prominent Ontario steel magnate James Warnock and step-sister to Raymond and Vincent Massey, was a young literary editor for the Toronto *Globe & Mail*. De la Roche and Hale met professionally in 1911 and struck a lifelong friendship. See, for example, Hambleton pp.24ff and Bratton p.70.

Despite initial rejections from producers, in January 1936 Price encouraged her to rewrite her first adaptation, as producers had found the initial dramatization unsuitable for the taste of modern theatre audiences. Ronald Hambleton cites an interview with Nancy Price in 1963, in which she revealed to him that Mazo de la Roche's first dramatization of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* had resembled a pageant with five acts and twelve changes of scene.<sup>40</sup> Price found the pageant, a format that had lost its popularity in Canada before the First World War, unsuitable to the taste of contemporary audiences accustomed to realism on stage, and insisted on a collaborative rewrite into a modernized three-act structure (Hambleton 143).<sup>41</sup> Despite Price's efforts, as a letter to Arnold Palmer at Christmas 1935 suggests, de la Roche remained unconvinced of her own dramatic abilities: "That

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<sup>40</sup> Her biographers point out that de la Roche cherished homemade pageants in her childhood as her favourite form of entertainment for her and her companion Caroline Clement (Givner 19).

<sup>41</sup> British versions of the published play mention both Nancy Price and Mazo de la Roche as authors. Nancy Price insisted in response to a written query by Ronald Hambleton that the adaptation is solely hers. However, this and the notion of co-authorship have been contested by Caroline Clement who insists that the play script was written mostly by Mazo de la Roche in consultation with Nancy Price. Hambleton concludes that though de la Roche likely leaned heavily upon Nancy Price's experience, the creative input of both authors cannot be sufficiently disentangled. He suggests some indication can be found in a letter from de la Roche to Nancy Price on September 18, 1935, in which de la Roche informs Price about the progress she has made with the play:

I hope I have not been too long in my work with the play, but I imagine you have plenty to do this week casting it. I found it a greater undertaking than I expected, and I have worried a great deal over the fourth act. It had been tinkered at so much—made up of so many small scenes—that it was scarcely coherent, and I think you will agree with me that the final curtain was pretty bad ... One thing that must be remembered is that the Grandmother did not leave *Jalna* to Finch but only her *private* fortune. The house was not hers to leave. It belonged to Renny, a fact which is made evident earlier in the play by references to the uncles and grandmother making it their home—sponging on him. ... I have written a new ending for this act which I hope you will like. I have also done a new ending for Act 3. I quite agree with you that this curtain was very weak and that the scene between Finch and Pheasant was too long. You will find this shorter. (qtd. in Hambleton 144, italics given).

Hambleton's research indicates that, though Mazo de la Roche did the rewriting, she did so to Nancy Price's prescription. Furthermore, Heather Kirk points out that Caroline Clement was a significant contributor to the creation of the *Jalna* series. Ronald Hambleton draws attention to the presence of both women's handwriting on the original manuscript of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* (Hambleton, *Secret* 27). He quotes a de la Roche letter, in which the author credits Caroline Clement as follows: "And besides all her tender qualities she is the backbone of my work, as it were. She has a far better critical mind than I" (115).

play of mine! It is still coming on—as it has been for two years. Now I have a quite impersonal feeling about it, as though someone else has written it—someone of whose dramatic ability my opinion is rather—not exactly, but dubious” (qtd. in Hambleton 145). In the end, the final version of the play must have satisfied both Price and de la Roche, as Nancy Price, who also played the lead role of Adeline Whiteoak, set out to mount its production at the Little Theatre in the Adelphi, the theatre she managed in London’s East End. About the collaboration with Price, de la Roche mentions that she valued Price as an “unusual” theatre director, one who “valued the opinion, the taste of the author” (*RTC* 302). Rising star Stephen Haggard was cast in the second lead role as Finch Whiteoak. Prior to the play’s opening night, *The Times* published a positive recommendation in the theatre announcements on Thursday, April 9th, 1936 (12).

The three-act dramatic adaptation of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* centres on the yet-to-be made will of the 102-year-old grandmother of the clan, grim and dominating Adeline Whiteoak. Even in her advanced age, she displays more vitality and strength of mind than her elderly sons, daughters and even grandchildren who take care of her. Characterized as unconventional but loyal to imperial values, or, as S. Morgan Powell identifies her in his review of the play “a type entirely Victorian, wholly autocratic, splendidly indomitable” (6), she rules the household, quick in retort, enjoying to the full her sense of humour and taking a keen delight in midnight talks with her eighteen-year-old grandson Finch Whiteoak. The play’s first two acts develop the relationship between the matriarch, repeatedly railing against the hypocrisy and humbug of her family members, and Finch, the gifted musician, who stands out in the family of upper middle-class farmers and horse breeders as a sensitive, imaginative youth, belittled and misjudged by every other family

member save his keen-sighted grandmother. He is juxtaposed with Renny Whiteoak, oldest grandson, masculine ideal, inheritor of the family farm under financial duress, and embodiment of ruffian Loyalist mythology. With all members of the large family seeking to acquire Adeline Whiteoaks' inheritance, the final act reveals Finch as the beneficiary of his grandmother's will and depicts the sharply contrasted reactions of his relatives to that blow.

In *Ringing the Changes*, Mazo de la Roche claims that despite excellent reviews the London version of the play was forced to close early, until through "unexplainable circumstances" its last two performances at the Little Theatre at the Adelphi were sold out (305). Incidentally, a few days before the scheduled final curtain, poet and theatre critic St. John Ervine's rave review in *The Times* linked the writer's abilities to the craft of Chekhov and the actors' qualities to John Gielgud's. Certainly, the play's initial review in *The Times* was not as positive as de la Roche claims. Its anonymous reviewer endorsed the quality of the acting on all parts but commented that the play is "a trifle weak in dramatic impetus and too often dependent on its interest in minor details of domestic felicity and infelicity" ("Whiteoaks" 8). Charles Taylor, in a more endorsing review of London plays in *The New York Times*, called it "workman-like." In his view, "'Whiteoaks' is an honest, 'straight play', never dull, never incompetent, with an adequate plot and lively characterization, but the whole of it is not greater than the sum of its parts" (X2). Certainly, Vincent Massey, at that point residing in London as Canadian High Commissioner for the United Kingdom, was, according to his biographer Claude Bissell, "not prepared to hail it as Canadian triumph" (39). Massey's mission to promote Canadian culture in Britain was certainly needed. As a reviewer of *Whiteoaks: The Play*

in *Punch* on April 29, 1936 candidly noted, “seeing how very large the Dominions are, it is perhaps somewhat remarkable, that they do not manage to take up more space on the English stage” (498).

De la Roche also neglects to mention in her account of the play’s success that it only became popular after her personal friend St John Ervine commiserated with her about the play’s reception and wrote his favourable review (Panofsky, “Reviewers” 63). According to de la Roche, his influential opinion and an endorsement by George Bernard Shaw guaranteed *Whiteoaks: The Play* an extended run for an additional two years. She writes in *Ringin in the Changes*: “The great Bernard Shaw had praised Mazo’s play! Price transferred *Whiteoaks* to a larger theatre called The Playhouse<sup>42</sup> ... London theatre goers flocked to the play for the next three years” (58).

Additionally, in 1937 and 1938 the play toured throughout England under the sponsorship of Charles Killick, manager of The Playhouse. Vincent Massey congratulated Nancy Price after the 500th performance with: “It is very pleasant indeed, to think that the RATHER TENDER Plant whose future gave us some concern a year ago has struck such firm roots” (39, emphasis given). Killick, in collaboration with London’s other theatre mogul Victor Payne Jennings and New York’s Shubert Brothers, arranged for *Whiteoaks: The Play* to tour Canada in the spring of 1938 before opening on Broadway later that fall. The play opened at Montreal’s His Majesty’s Theatre on February 22, at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre a week later and toured Hamilton, London, and Brantford, Ontario. The North American production cast renowned

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<sup>42</sup> *The London Stage 1930-1939* lists The Playhouse Theatre, Northumberland Avenue, Charing Cross, London as venue for the extended run of *Whiteoaks*. (Wearing 513)

American actress Ethel Barrymore as Adeline Whiteoak but kept the rest of the British cast.

Playing to almost capacity in all Canadian cities, the play was called the sensation of the season by reviewers (Mason 16) and heralded as an example of “the finest tradition of the pre-war theatre” (Morgan Powell 6). Contemporary *Toronto Star* theatre critic Gina Mallet suggests that a critic's perceptions must be “filtered through a philosophy, a way of looking at the world” (qtd in Wagner, “Theatre Criticism”). In this sense, opinions commonly found in the gushing Canadian reviews of Mazo de la Roche’s play are exemplary for their attitude towards Britain’s relationship to Canada and its lingering imperial influence on Canadian nationalism. In his review, *Montreal Daily Star* critic S. Morgan Powell does not bemoan the “little dramatic action given,” but reads the play as a “satirical comedy of manners and personalities.” He argues that its power lies in its portrayal of the individuality of its characters with “their unconscious revelation of likes and dislikes, emotions shallow and deep, qualities of the heart and mind, and all the little foibles humanity manifest itself in every age and every clime” (6). Not limited by its Canadian content, for him, the North American premiere’s emphasis on characterization and inner motivation over action and plot development in the tradition of nineteenth-century theatre “measure[s] up to the highest standards of acting of the theatre before it fell upon evil days” and signalled an artistic maturity in its return to a golden age of theatre (idem). The theatre critic for the *Toronto Daily Star* did not share nostalgia for the past and admitted that “A tinge of regret mingles with the admiration some of [de la Roche’s] fellow-Canadians feel for her work in that the people she presents so realistically are *not* Canadians” (*The Observer* 4). The reviewer worried that the

“extraordinarily tribal character of the Whiteoaks” with their “rowdiness and the extraordinary amount of liquor consumed” might be mistaken for a representation of ordinary Canadian people (4). However, he still noted that, despite his confirmed prejudices about themes and content of the play, the play’s last act “swept [him] quite off [his] critical feet by its lifelikeness and fervor.” In a comparison with popular British dramatist and prose writer J.B. Priestley, he concluded that “Miss de la Roche excel[s] in the art of drama as well as in that of the novel.” Only the *Globe & Mail* reviewer reported that some audience members felt that the dramatist’s use of dialogue “reduce[d] the play to futile tameness” (19). Despite de la Roche’s hesitation towards casting Ethel Barrymore as Adeline Whiteoak, all reviews celebrated her character portrayal as “taking rank with the really great stage portraits of the century in the English-speaking theatre” (Powell 6). Furthermore, while the touring production was in Toronto, the social pages of both the *Globe & Mail* and the *Toronto Star* followed the celebrated cast’s every move and reported daily on the social functions that included teas and banquets with various social organizations and a visit to the original ‘Jalna’ (see, for example, *Toronto Daily Star*, Wed Mar 2, 1938 14).

J.J. Shubert had already acquired the American production rights for *Whiteoaks: The Play* as early as the summer of 1936 and announced its Broadway production in the *New York Times* “News of the Stage” section on June 6 that year. However, *Whiteoaks: The Play* did not premiere at the Hudson Theatre on Broadway until March 23, 1938. It featured once more Ethel Barrymore as Adeline Whiteoak “wearing a lace cap as if it were a matriarchal crown and brandishing her walking stick in sceptered majesty (Brown 167). Certainly, de la Roche preferred Price’s rendition of the Whiteoak matriarch over

Barrymore's, as she felt that "no other actress [but Nancy Price] could give such authenticity, such magnetism, such humour to the part of Adeline Whiteoak. ... Never for a moment did Miss Barrymore make me believe in her" (*RTC* 306). Yet, according to de la Roche, the play had a fair run in New York. Its U.S. American reviewers were less favourable. Theatre critic John Mason Brown in the *New York Post* on March 22, 1938 mused that "New York will not be able to take Whiteoaks to its heart as London has done for the simple reason that there is no play to take" (12). British reviews were more favourable. However, they missed more local colour (and with the imperial subtext). The *Daily Telegraph* found de la Roche "a good novelist but immature dramatist" in her tendency to make "the play [...] really too lifelike" and complained that it "does not even explain that the Whiteoaks live in Canada" (9).

Contemporary critics argue that the novels of the *Jalna* series articulate what William New identifies as a very "late bloom of Loyalist-imperial sentiment" (129) and represent an essentially idealized Canadian version of English bourgeois country life with Loyalist Scottish and Irish roots. Douglas Daymond points to the series' melodramatic tendencies in the repetition of patterns and motifs that include "an emphasis on longing for freedom and experience ... [and] inexplicable shifts in character attitude combined with the most remarkable coincidences to produce plots which occasionally make inordinate demands on the reader's willingness to suspend belief" (49). In both the stage version of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* and the novel, the inheritance of Adeline Whiteoak, in the play a comedic anchor, is in the Great House tradition and is linked with the survival of the horse breeding business, and the upkeep of Empire Loyalist traditions. The Whiteoaks' support of British-Canadian imperial values is evoked through frequent references to the family's

entanglement in the empire's past. Ruth Panofsky argues that the conservatism of knowing one's place is what attracted audiences to "the ideologies of [the particular] imaginary past" that *Jalna* represents (69). The Loyalist experience that de la Roche's writing epitomizes is, as critics argue, "at the centre of Canadian [national] identity. It provides a link between the two most important extra-national influences in Canadian history—Great Britain and the United States—even if this linkage consists of being ground between them" (Fellows, "The Loyalist Myth" 97). Dennis Duffy confirms that "the [novel] series epitomizes the colonial mentality in its unswerving allegiance to British institutions and mores, and conveys the Loyalist myth of a Canada redeemed by British allegiance—and the myth of a humane and harmless gentry [...] Yet *Jalna*, the house, remains a great good place [...] Whether or not *Jalna's* Ontario ever existed is of less interest than the tightness with which de la Roche entwined strong colonial and familial values" (285). Given the waning significance of the Loyalist myth to Canadian self-identification in the late 1930s, it is open to speculation whether the play's Canadian success was based on the author's popularity, the success the play had in London as the imperial centre, its nostalgic Canadian content, or a mixture of all three factors.

The ending of the play differs somewhat significantly from the novel in its portrayal of Finch's sexuality and thus may be read as an ideological shift in the rendition of the symbolic national family the Whiteoaks represent. In both the novel and the stage adaptation, artistic Finch Whiteoak, the eighteen-year old grandson, is an aspiring musician and outsider to a family in which, as theatre scholar Nicholas de Jongh puts it, men are depicted "mainly astride horses or [doing] manly things with sporting dogs" (47). Finch is not only rendered effeminate and a pariah in the family for his interest in the arts, but

his homosexual leanings are revealed in both novel and play. In a device that de Jongh calls worthy of a Sardou or Scribe (47), Finch accidentally drops a letter from his friend, aesthete Arthur Leigh, addressing him as his ‘Darling Finch.’ Neither text ever reveals details about the “sudden, passionate attachment” between the two teenage boys (*Whiteoak Chronicles* 442) that the rest of the family finds “neurotic,” but Finch’s unmarried, middle-aged half-brother Piers advises him that it is better for an eighteen-year old man to frequent brothels than to have a homosexual relationship as he burns the revealing letter in the fireplace. In the novel version, Finch attempts two kinds of flight from the persecution of his family. He at first runs away to New York in order to start his artistic endeavors. Failing at this, he is allowed to return and is reconciled with his forgiving relatives. After the content of Adeline Whiteoak’s will is revealed and the family turns on him for a second time, he attempts suicide. Sexually, he redeems himself in the eyes of the reader by first losing his virginity to an older Gypsy woman and, towards the end of the novel, falling in love with young Sarah Archer. In its dramatic rendition, his sexual non-conformity remains foregrounded. The final scene of the play depicts Renny Whiteoak, the new patriarch of the clan, reassuring Finch that, despite his sexual and artistic transgressions, he is still a member of the family:

Renny.—(*putting his hand on Finch’s shoulder*) ... It’s just as Piers says—a lot can happen in two years. You’ll grow up. You’ll show the family what you are made of.

Finch.—They hate me.

Renny.—No, they don’t.

Finch.—They say I killed Gran.

[...]

Renny.—And she loved you. Buck up! Don't disappoint her. ... And for that thing (*with a gesture towards the piano*)—well, play on it as much as you like. ... [Gran] seem to be with us.

Finch.—God—what courage—

Renny.—Don't you realise, Finch, that you've got [that courage] too? Clever old Gran discovered it and has given you your chance. Now—make the most of it. Don't let her down! (*He goes slowly off.*) (122-24)

Setting all speculation about the author's own sexuality aside,<sup>43</sup> frequent depiction of sensational sexual desire is a recurring motif in all of the *Jalna* novels (Daymond 49).

According to Faye Hammill, and the novels as well, I may add, the play never depicts the implied sexual acts. In its insinuations of illicit and licit sex de la Roche remains in the tradition of popular romances and displaces the human body from the scene in order to metonymically substitute for it inanimate objects. Furthermore, Hammill argues that de la

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<sup>43</sup> Speculations about Mazo de la Roche's sexuality, and her relationship to her cousin and lifelong companion Caroline Clement, have overshadowed the academic assessment of de la Roche's written work. Faye Hammill cites George Hendrick's 1970 study of her works as an early example of this type of criticism that accuses de la Roche of shamelessly selling out to the salacious desires of her audience and blaming her tendency to create larger-than-life characters on the fictional worlds she and Caroline Clement invented as children. He finds evidence in de la Roche's own autobiography: "From her early childhood, Miss de la Roche dwelt in a Playland which supplied her with overwrought fictional material and kept her an emotional adolescent all her life. ... Almost instinctively, it appears, she gave her audience what it wanted (Hendrick 7). As Hammill points out, "Hendrick is here making assumptions based on his knowledge that his subject never married and chose instead to live with her cousin Caroline Clement, with whom she created a fantasy world (akin to the Brontës' Gondal), which they referred to as "the Play" and sustained throughout their adult lives. Hendrick's reference to emotional adolescence ostensibly points to this behaviour, but it is also a tacit comment on de la Roche's failure to enter the adult order of heterosexuality and maternity" (5). While the description of Playland in *Ringing the Changes* reveals an affinity for staging pageants and its vivid description has been used by Mazo de la Roche to self-justifyingly explain her interest and talent in story-telling, little else can be deduced. Joan Givner's 1989 biography *Mazo de la Roche: The Hidden Life* uncovers several new documents that help assess the relationship between de la Roche and Clement. She indicates the possibility of an erotically charged relationship between the two women and finds parallels between de la Roche's life and her character Finch Whiteoak. However, this form of autobiographical reading is flawed with assumptions and neglects factual evidence as Heather Kirk in her rather blunt and accusatory article "Caroline Clement: The Hidden of Mazo de la Roche's Collaborator" points out. Kirk's article, while providing historically accurate, significant new biographical data, unfortunately simplifies and misrepresents Givner's argument. See also de la Roche's biographer Daniel Bratton's rebuttal in response to both Kirk and Givner on <http://www.mazo.ca/questions>.

Roche “contains her characters’ sexuality by requiring immediate renunciation and repentance from them, thus providing titillation without disrupting traditional moral frameworks” (para. 26). Despite a discernible tradition in Canadian fiction of eroticized same-sex relationships, including among others John Richardson’s *Wacousta* (1832), Louis Hémon’s *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), and Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* (1927)<sup>44</sup>, the depiction of same-sex desire in fiction and on the stage would have been more shocking to 1920s and 30s Canadian sensibilities than the heterosexual, though extramarital, desire depicted in the novel. On the stage, as de Jongh explains, the effect of this type of revelation and Finch’s ashamed silence in response to the allegations, would “in a conventional play of the period serve to ruin the youth’s chances of being the beneficiary of his grandmother’s will” (47). As the American reviewer of the play in *Variety* points out, the character of Finch is on stage “an almost pathological case” (56).

It is not easy to discern how the unresolved moral blemish of Finch Whiteoak in the ‘happy ending’ of de la Roche’s dramatic version of *Whiteoaks of Jalna* affects a reading of the play with regard to her affinities to the imperial centre and her shifting vision of a Canadian nationalism married to modernized imperial values. To complicate the matter, one must also consider the author’s changing relationship with Canada as homeland, her relationship with her Canadian readers as well as her interest in projecting a favourable, self-constructed pro-Canadian artistic image to the Canadian public while being an expatriate. De la Roche by 1938 had lived in England for several years but made considerable effort to keep up appearances as a loyal Canadian subject. In 1937, de la

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<sup>44</sup> For an in-depth discussion of homosexual and homotextual desire, see, for example Terry Goldie’s *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction* (2003).

Roche had bought a huge Elizabethan mansion near Windsor, and, as her biographer Joan Givner comments, “She apparently saw the purchase as something of a defection from her native land, for she warned her Toronto publisher not to let the news get out” (179). Her reviewers in the *Toronto Daily Star*, the *Montreal Daily Star* and Toronto’s *Globe & Mail* all mention that she cabled her regrets about not attending the opening nights of *Whiteoaks: The Play* in both cities. If Finch is morally blemished, he remains, despite accusations of treason by various relatives, a member of the family. In its somewhat conventional depiction of homosexual deviance through self-loathing and artistic sensibility, Finch even admits to his grandmother early in the play that he is no good in an easily decoded sexual confession (48) which is certainly not missed by matriarch Adeline Whiteoak: “You are a queer boy, but I like you, yes I like you very much” (49). If this seems to make Finch morally acceptable, in a surprising comment in the final scene his older brother recognizes him as “the strangest, the sanest” of them all (123).

Criticism has frequently identified Mazo de la Roche’s depiction of the *Jalna* clan as a romantic allegory for the nation, promoting stability and old-world values to its readers during historically turbulent times. With regard to her conservative vision of sexual and national politics, Ruth Panofsky explains the function of Mazo de la Roche’s Whiteoak clan as follows:

The family unit and the estate assumed primary importance over the needs of the individual members of the Whiteoak household, whose loyalty to *Jalna* nonetheless endured throughout the series. An established hierarchy within the family ensured that each person knew his or her place—despite fleeting transgressions—and that the more vulnerable members were looked after and protected by their stronger counterparts. Adeline and Renny Whiteoak regularly behaved as mater- and paterfamilias, guarding the

welfare of their charges and overseeing the moral climate, such as it was, of *Jalna*. (68)

Both Ruth Panofsky and Dennis Duffy agree that the publication and commercial success of the novels and play throughout the Depression and the Second World War indicate that the family provided a role model of society in a turbulent period of the twentieth century. Douglas Daymond argues in his reassessment of the *Whiteoak Chronicles* that Mazo de la Roche's fictional microcosm suggests "that civilization need not be founded in repression, that individual freedom and spontaneity are not necessarily destructive of order and tradition ... *Jalna*, [in that sense,] is the imaginative expression of an ideal" (61). "Everything is subservient to the maintenance of strong family ties" (Fellows 94). Moreover, Finch's inheritance guarantees the clan its economic survival. *Jalna* is founded on "the family's ... corporate fidelity to the house and its tradition ... amid a world that has lost sight of the old rules" (Duffy, "Heart" 67). Its inclusivity represents the dream of maintaining tradition in the face of modernity, war, and change, and of achieving prosperity as a reward for hard work and loyalty. In the symbolic equation of the core family as nation then, the house, and the family that inhabits it, still represents British traditions which are maintained in the face of urban development, a growing economic uncertainty and an increasingly democratic political system.

Queer theory scholar Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her groundbreaking study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, delineates a continuum between homosexual desire and homosocial desire as "the potentially erotic" (2). She argues that this continuum is foundational for patriarchy. In the "structural context of triangular, heterosexual desire" the active male homosocial desire is projected onto women as exchange object by triangulating male bonding asymmetrically through the passive

positioning of women as displaced objects of a patrimonial relationship. “In any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (25). With this in mind, the novel *Whiteoaks of Jalna* frequently utilizes this structural paradigm in the recurring motif of sexual transgression and redemption: Renny desires his brother’s wife, and Finch loses his virginity to the mother of a girl his best friend impregnated in wedlock. As Tobi Kozakewich argues, “culpability for the principal sexual conflict [in the *Jalna Chronicles*] is always subtly to the ... outsiders in the love complex” (89). In his view, the Whiteoaks are in the conclusions to all novels sequestered from their adulterous affairs because those most to blame for improprieties are “atypical Whiteoaks” (90). Certainly, at the end of *Whiteoaks of Jalna*, in a twist on oedipal desire, incest and succession, Finch is taken back into the fold and, even more than that, replaces his grandmother in her position as matriarch of the clan. In contrast, the dramatized version eliminates the redemptive heterosexual narrative and leaves the audience only with the homosocial bonding between the two brothers underneath the picture of Adeline Whiteoak. Symbolically, Mazo de la Roche bonds the hypermasculine loyalist tradition embodied through Renny with the artistic outsider Finch who like his grandmother defies conventionalism.<sup>45</sup> This alliance -- despite its unconventional use of a “tragic, almost pathological” condition (“Plays on Broadway: Whiteoaks” 16) -- between the hypermasculine loyalist patriarch and the deviant outsider, whom a critic in *The*

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<sup>45</sup> Nicholas de Jongh, in his overview of homosexual characters on the American stage, identifies de la Roche’s Broadway production of *Whiteoaks: A Play* as an Ibsenite liberation play by focusing on an easily identifiable gay character in a commercially viable play. However, *Whiteoaks: A Play*’s reliance on a comedic structure with a conclusion that promotes a new generation and its reification of Loyalist traditions suggests a very different intention than Ibsen’s adaptations of tragic forms with its lack of catharsis.

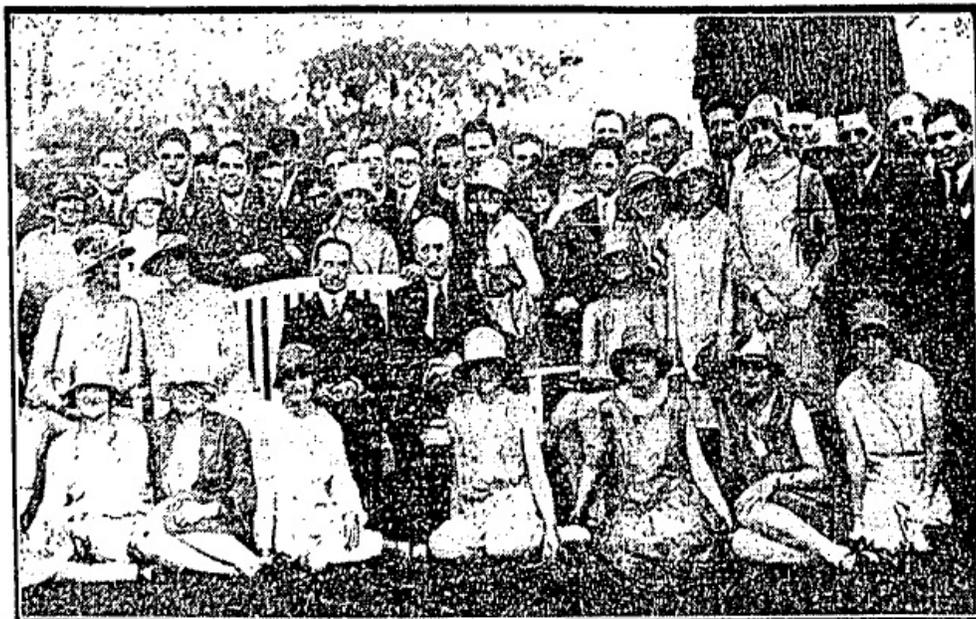
*Times* characterized as “a musical alien ... clumsy, shy, tautly strung” (16), ultimately does not threaten the imagined British allegiance or any of the traditions associated with that connection. Rather, the alliance reinforces the imperial link through its emphasis on historical legacies, its evocation of imperialism as civilizatory project, and its implication of the importance of individual freedom and the instinctive life as the cornerstones of former British imperial grandeur during a war that threatened Britain and the rest of the world.

Despite the ‘happy end’ provided in the dramatic adaption, *Whiteoaks: The Play*’s *Toronto Daily Star* reviewer not only expressed his hesitation about the timeliness of a family on stage that in his view behaved with a rowdiness associated with nineteenth-century Loyalist tribal character, but also expressed his opinion about the unsuitability of their attitudes in a time in which “Canada is becoming self-conscious [about] the Canadian type, and that Canadian ways of life and institutions differ ... from those of either Great Britain or the United States.” Despite “knowing full well that no doubt every abnormality can be found in Canada” and worrying about the implications of Miss de la Roche’s popularity outside of Canada, the reviewer nonetheless admits to having fallen for the dramatic interaction in the last act. He acknowledges that “[o]ne sympathises with the sensitive artistic boy who suddenly and without any intimation or premonition finds himself plunged into a cauldron seething with bitterness and wrath” out of which he “emerges with some magnanimity and dignity.” Towards the end of the review -- aptly titled “A Powerful Sermon by Mazo de la Roche” -- the reviewer’s language suggests that, in his view, the play implies a version of Canadian nationalism based upon muscular Christianity and zoomorphic social Darwinism: “that imperfect civilizations through

which mankind has slowly climbed upwards ... have always brought degradation with it”

(4). Furthermore, only the exposure of human nature’s negative aspects can help overcome them. In this sense, the play relies less on nostalgia for a time past, but instead successfully evokes the Second British Empire’s educational project that underlies all of maternal, imperial feminism: sympathy for the suffering other in order to save and assimilate it into the family of civilizations.

## To Visit Exhibition City



These "Young Ambassadors of Empire" Are to Spend Some Time of Their Stay in Canada at the Canadian National Exhibition. These Visitors From Great Britain Were Recently Received at Rideau Hall by the Governor-General and Lady Willingdon, This Photograph Being Taken at That Time.

Fig. 3. Canadian Schoolgirl Tour, *The Globe*, 4 August 1928, p. 18.

HIS MAJESTY'S 5 DAYS ONLY TUES. FEB. 22  
 EYES (8.30) MATINEES: WED. THURS. SAT (2.30)  
 NORTH-AMERICAN PREMIERE  
 PRIOR TO NEW-YORK

VICTOR PAYNE-JENNINGS  
 has the honour to present  
**Ethel BARRYMORE**  
 IN MAZO DE LA ROCHE'S FAMOUS PLAY

**'WHITEOAKS'**

Based on THE BEST SELLING NOVEL 'WHITEOAKS OF JALNA' with  
**STEPHEN HAGGARD** IN HIS ORIGINAL LONDON ROLE

LONDON'S GREATEST STAGE HIT  
 850 PERFORMANCES

Eves.: 50c to \$2.50. All Mats.: 50c, \$1.00, \$1.50.  
 Plus Tax. SEATS NOW SELLING.

Fig. 4. *Whiteoaks: The Play*, Advertisement, *Montreal Daily Star*, 17 February 1938, p. 14.

### **Chapter 3: The Theatre of Social Reform: Dramaturgical Practice, Gender Transgression and Strategic Audience Design for Social Change**

In her study of constitutive rhetoric and audience design in Canadian suffragist discourse, Katja Thieme notes an absence of theatricality in the protest of Canadian suffragists between the 1880s and the 1910s. While she is quick to point out that suffragist engagement in Canada differed significantly from chapter to chapter and between organizations in how they expressed their activism and how they related their work to other social reform movements such as temperance, labour, or charity causes, she nonetheless bemoans "the relative absence of spectacular performances--of vocal and public advertisement, demonstrations and protest--and also the lack of documentation of the public displays that took place" in comparison with the often spectacular suffrage protests in Britain and the United States frequently covered by Canadian newspapers ("Constitutive Rhetoric" 39).

Enfranchisement is only one of the causes pursued by social or progressive reformers who frequently used theatre, costume and spectacle as means to garner public attention. Female social reformers with causes as diverse as temperance, access to education, female equality, poverty relief and moral reforms all utilized forms of para-theatre, or more specifically ambivalent theatre in Filewod's sense of the term (*Committing Theatre* 8), in order to participate in the public arena. What Filewod identifies as ambivalent theatre, forms of theatre that played with the boundaries of what is traditionally perceived as theatre and theatricality, allowed for political protest and social intervention during an era of anti-theatrical prejudice, specifically with regard to women on stage. Ambivalent theatre enabled women to playfully enter the public sphere, to transgress late-Victorian

gender limitations that confined them to the private sphere. Drawing on examples from temperance, suffrage and co-education advocacy, this chapter will look at how female reformists used ambivalent theatre as a means to address and find support from multiple audiences by allowing for multiple subject positions within the social fabric of their performances and consequently provided their audiences with new role models of progressive civil engagement. At the same time, their performances relied on containment strategies such as typical theatrical props, costumes and well-established templates such as parody, melodrama or comedic closure to mitigate the challenges these radical subject positions posed.

I would like to contest this notion of a lack of theatricality in the social reform discourses of Canadian female reformers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century by broadening the notion of public sphere beyond parades and demonstrations to include weekly magazines, temperance evening entertainments, and revivalist meetings. The forms of theatre used to advance women's roles into the public sphere during the social reform movement are self-consciously chosen types of para-theatre: theatre that works at a certain distance from and, simultaneously, creates a certain spectatorial distance with respect to the social practices that it produces in order to exploit a newly created transgressive space (*Committing Theatre* 55). These creative forms of theatre are staged in a wide variety of uncommon venues: in church halls, on the streets, but also in the literary magazines of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. As Filewod remarks, "At dinners, recitals, parodies, and concerts, the performance of the public self ... legitimized the entertainments as something other than [morally questionable] theatre,

but at the same time the popular stage ... gave [the social reformers] performance templates" (50).

Although one cannot discuss the use of theatre for the advancement of political and social causes by Canadian women without discussing mock parliaments as an important theatrical genre, or without acknowledging in particular the near-mythological status of Nellie McClung's 1914 *Women's Parliament* within that genre, I would like to shift the discussion away from this particular example of theatrical activism to a broader consideration of audience design, performative elements and rhetorical strategies in the work of several groups of social reformers by contrasting three unlikely images of gender reversal for the social good: Sarah Anne Curzon's 1882 closet drama *The Sweet Girl Graduate*; the popular suffragist mock parliaments as exemplified by several versions of *The Women's Parliament*; and the public performances of temperance societies in general, but specifically the theatricality of the Salvation Army. All of these are evidence of organizations that relied on theatre, theatricality and a public display of engaged female citizenship in order to find support for their causes, to fundraise and to gain the public's attention. Furthermore, these uses of theatre provided women activists with a platform and a public forum for civic engagement that helped them to overcome their late-Victorian ideological limitation to the private sphere. Their dramatic practices provided female social and moral reformers with transgressive role models of female citizenship by publicly staging new forms of female civic engagement. Although Sarah Anne Curzon's play and its parodic representation of the distinctiveness of gender and sex have been extensively discussed by Celeste Derksen and Kym Bird, I would like to contrast it with William Tobin's playlet "Culture" in order to draw attention to how the

radical nature of Curzon's play lies not only in its staging of sexual difference but in ideas about the intersectionality of gender and citizenship it proposes.

### **Canada as a "Nation Without Suffering"**

Historians have identified the progressive reform movement as the defining feature of Canada's social and intellectual history of its period, as a generation of visionaries strove to bring Canada in line with an ideal of what reformer and writer Agnes Maule Machar described as "a nation without suffering" ("Our Lady of the Slums" 234). The late nineteenth century saw a significant growth in reform organizations, largely in response to the dislocation and social transformations of industrialization and urbanization. At the same time, reformers acted in response to a perceived need to create healthy, productive citizens for the newly created nation. This sense of a social gospel for a budding nation has been described by historians as "reform spirit" (Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred* 3) and "social passion" (Allen 3). Ramsay Cook has famously called the social reformers of late-Victorian Canada "the regenerators" to emphasize the religious underpinnings and the far-reaching nature of the reforms they sought to implement (3). The social reformers positioned themselves against what they defined as outmoded modalities of societal structures, "identified variously with orthodox Christianity, laissez-faire capitalism, traditional gender mores, and older, feudal order." In Janice Fiamengo's words, the social reformers "saw themselves as connected with the emergence of a new social order, one of greater compassion, equality, and humanity" (*Even in This Canada* 24).

Most of this work was done in various forms of amateur organizations engaged in public education, activism and pamphlet writing in order to "reshape the ethical subjectivity of Canadians [...], [to] foster social and moral reforms and, as a largely

informal coalition for the moral regeneration of the state, civil society, the family and the individual, to 'raise the [overall] moral tone'" (Valverde 18). Samuel Clark et al., for example, have identified three inter-related though distinct social reform movements: the Social Gospel, the suffrage movement, and the temperance movement (41-42). Critics have pointed out this generalization overlooks the existence of other equally significant organizations such as the Sabbatarians, foreign mission societies, home mission organizations, lodges, educational societies and civic reform leagues among others (Fiamengo, *Even in This Canada* 28). A clear distinction between social purity movements and social gospel movements is hard to maintain and, given the fact that membership in these organizations was often overlapping, it is important to keep in mind that several of the popular organizations--the National Council of Women of Canada, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Young Women's Christian Association, for example--engaged in a wide variety of social reform causes simultaneously. This is to critics the most defining characteristic of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century social reform movement (Valverde 18).

Although viewed by its contemporaries as progressive, most historians paint the Canadian social reform movement as conservative in its response to the perceived social issues it sought to address. Carol Lee Bacchi, for example, characterizes the social reform movement as an anxious response to perceived social disintegration. To her, "Temperance, the Canadianizing of the foreigner, the battle against prostitution, the campaign for compulsory education, the desire to rescue delinquents—all reveal a common desire to restore a degree of control over society and chiefly over its deviants" (*Liberation Deferred* 9). If most critics have characterized the Canadian social reform

movement as inherently conservative in nature compared to similar movements in the Commonwealth and the United States, Dorland and Charland have argued that the Canadian social reform and especially the women's movement were in fact far more progressive than critics make them out to be. To Dorland and Charland, the "radicalism and impiety" that characterized the struggle for social reform in other countries are not important components of the Canadian movement. Its novelty lies in the fact that it called for women's rights and public recognition in a civil culture that did not conceive of women as political subjects. They point out that in the Canadian context social reform advanced mainly through deferral and social satire as new and more legitimate forms of protest (222). No matter which side of the argument one favours, both sides of the issue point to three important insights for the consideration of theatre and theatricality in the Canadian women's social reform movement, especially given the fact that the majority of its critics find its methods of protesting not "radical, impious or spectacular" enough. First, as most organizations were involved in more than one cause and had to find support not only among their own peers but also within a variety of groups with different political leanings and opinions, the reformers had to strategically address a multiplicity of audiences and causes simultaneously using a variety of performative strategies. Additionally, the ephemeral nature of these theatrical protestations, often with minimal public record, needs to be kept in mind as they require careful reconstruction through a variety of sources. And last, as Thieme's research suggests, a careful consideration of audience, spectator and argumentative vehicle is required (41). The aim of this chapter is thus two-fold: to highlight the strategic deployment of different forms of theatre as well as to carefully consider the skilful address of multiple audiences within these public

performances that sought to advance social causes and provide for the reformers a form of what feminist historiography has identified as "gender bridging" (Parr 355), the ability to overcome "the division between the home and the legislature, the voluntary and the professional, practice and policy" through theatre that set out to build political, economic, and moral "bridges between the public and the private." (356)

Fiamengo describes the social reformers as "shar[ing] a consciousness concerning the need for changes identified by them as progressive," but adds that nonetheless the reformers were an exceedingly diverse group," a broadly based coalition made of church people, temperance activists, educators, social scientists, women's groups, civic leaders, politicians, and philanthropists" (*Even In This Canada* 24). What distinguished these reform organizations from each other was not necessarily their causes, their theatrical practices, the audiences they addressed, the rhetoric they employed or the agency they sought; it was their affiliation with class. As Valverde notes, many of the reform organizations targeted the middle class and sought to engage middle-class supporters (18). She draws our attention to the fact that although an organization like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was more feminist and progressive than other women's reform organizations of its time and played a central role in advancing women's political agency, "it confined its work to and mainly attracted women of the same ethnicity, religion and class" and did little charity work outside of its class affiliation. The WCTU, the historical, literary and moral reform societies and similar organizations were set up by "Anglo-Saxon Protestant (and largely middle-class) women to uphold their own interest and seek relevant changes in Canadian society" (65). In contrast, the Knights of Labour and Salvation Army attracted mostly working-class women. Valverde argues that

the success and popularity of the Salvation Army lies in the fact that it provided working-class women with a forum for agency and civic engagement. To her, the pattern of affiliation based on class arose partly out of "a genuine need for middle-class women to get together with women like themselves [in their own organizations] and agitate for their own needs and beliefs," thus excluding others (65).

Sarah Anne Curzon's 1882 blank verse closet drama *The Sweet Girl Graduate* and the suffragist mock parliaments of late-Victorian and Edwardian Canada provide good examples of attempts to advance causes for women across all classes, but as the specific theatrical forms and their constitutive audiences indicate, both are very much rooted in the Anglo-Canadian, Protestant, middle-class activism of organizations like the WCTU or the Toronto Historical Society and appeal in audience design and rhetoric to their particular audience. In contrast, Salvation Army street spectacles, Revivalist gatherings and public wedding parades consciously seek out and address working-class issues through their methods of "soup, soap, spectacle and salvation" (Walker 7). If their theatrical methods differed, they are similar to their middle-class counterparts, as all of them relied on a rhetoric of equality and on transgressive performances of gender, consciously playing with a reversal of stereotypical gender roles. Middle- and working-class organizations both deliberately drew on an intersection of gender and nation in rhetoric and performance in order to advance their chosen causes: access to higher education, suffrage and temperance, respectively. In the spirit of the social reform movement of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, they addressed social causes, sometimes beyond their own class affiliation, for the general advancement of Canadian society. Their visions of female civic agency did not differ significantly when

compared with each other. By staging how men behaved, acted out by women, their performances sought to eradicate gender differences between the sexes. At the same time, they strove to highlight their respective audiences' maternal responsibilities as Canadian women, mothers and citizens across societal boundaries.

Canadian social historian Mariana Valverde cautions critics not to fall into an overly generalized association of rhetorical strategies and performative interventions with class. To her, the class basis of the different organizations of the social reform movement was not a simplistic matter of middle-class reformers imposing their values on working-class communities and these communities in turn developing oppositional aesthetic practices. She argues that all of aforementioned groups engaged in social reform were "as much concerned in creating group cohesion for themselves" as concerned with exerting influence outside the group; each group strove as much "to make itself as to make others" (29). Neither can the various facets of the social reform movement and its activities be limited to, nor were they directed exclusively towards, one particular class of Canadian women: "What has [often] been described as imposing values on another class is simultaneously a process of creating and re-affirming one's own class" (30). But the mere fact that these processes of creating, performing and re-affirming identity and agency take place as much among the bourgeoisie as they do in the working class, and often, as Valverde remarks, "through the same practices" (69), merits an analysis of how gender and nation intersected, were constituent of, and were performed in the dramatic practices of these female social reformers.

The first part of this chapter traces how satirical one-act comedies and closet dramas including Sarah Anne Curzon's *The Sweet Girl Graduate* argue for access to higher

education for women in order to improve Canada's moral standing, using the rhetoric of both liberal and domestic feminism. Arguing that women should become educated in order to become educators meant that the authors of these texts believed themselves “to be liberating women from oppressive conditions and moving all people to a better nation” through women’s ability to serve as moral educators, using feminine empathy and reason (Devereux, *Growing A Race* 11). While the middle part of this chapter discusses the frequent use of mock parliaments by women activists, in particular the WCTU, in order to achieve enfranchisement and support among both liberal and maternal feminists, the latter part of the chapter contrasts these dramatic practices with the popularity of the Salvation Army spectacles in their attempt to rescue Canadians from drunkenness, sin and misery. Contrary to common misperceptions about the rigidity of working-class gender ideology, their performances consciously adapted dress and played with gender norms in order to create a platform for female Salvationists to become moral regenerators and educators in ways that required them to perform deliberately “in a manner that ran counter to the conventional female roles of docility, passivity, and domesticity” (Marks 172).

All three examples of theatrical and para-theatrical practice discussed in this chapter establish a liminal space (whether in the form of closet drama, a theatre performance as part of larger evening entertainment, or through the use of spectacle, as in the case of the Salvation Army) in which gender transgression and subversion become possible in order to advance women’s roles as social reformers in the public sphere. It is important to note here that both Sarah Anne Curzon’s *The Sweet Girl Graduate* and mock parliaments rely on parody as literary and rhetorical strategy in order to, rephrasing Diderot, provide their

audiences with “a fine amusement, capable of [simultaneously] amusing and instructing the most sensible and polished minds” (“Parody”). However, parody is not operating in the Army’s para-theatrical performances. It is rather that there is comparable complexity to be found between all three in their sustaining and subverting of received ideas.

### **Role-Reversal and Parody in Sarah Anne Curzon’s *The Sweet Girl Graduate***

In its review of Dr. William Tobin’s double bill of the locally popular drawing room comedy “Jane at the Academy” with the equally “sparkling little curtain raiser ‘Culture!’” by the same author, the Halifax *Acadian Recorder* reported on February 26, 1902 a “more than unusual interest” in the play (Electronic Performance Calendar). The performance by W.S. Harkin’s Theatre Company at the Academy of Music featured soon-to-be famous American actress and theatre manager Jessie Bonstelle as Bella Harris, the female lead, playing a Canadian-born wife to an English Dominion service man. In the one-act sketch written in 1899, husband Henry Harris complains to his mother-in law about his wife’s lack of culture and sophistication. He wishes her to be worldlier instead of occupying her time with what he deems trivial female activities: shopping and idle chatter over tea. However, his wife has secretly been attending art school and Dalhousie University. In a final comedic interrogation, Bella exposes her husband’s lack of knowledge in subjects he claims to master including art history, chemistry and history. Overwhelmed with the “flood of erudition she lets loose” on him, he longs to return to the days of her ignorance and simplicity (Tobin 2). In order to wean her from her new studies, he increases his public displays of affection and takes her on a second honeymoon to see King Edward VII’s coronation.

In many ways Tobin's drawing room comedietta follows a common comedy-of-manners pattern mocking the husband's pretence before reconciling the happy couple. There are, however, two interesting things to note in Tobin's presentation of characters, issues and his comment on the status of educated women at the turn of the century, as noted by the reviewer. The later part of the nineteenth century had witnessed a significant change in attitude towards education for women.<sup>46</sup> Despite a lingering debate on the purpose of female education, the suitability of co-education for women and the content of gender-specific curricula, twenty years after the first woman had been admitted into a co-educational university program, female post-secondary education did not spark enough controversy in 1902 to guarantee public interest. Yet, the performance review in the *Acadian Recorder* calls Dr. W. Tobin's *Culture! A Drawing Room Comedietta* "one of the most talked of events of the week," as it had generated "general interest [not only] from the fact that the playwright is a prominent citizen" but mainly because of protagonist Bella Harris's pointed, satirical remarks "in vivid, realistic style" that openly criticized Halifax politics and civic affairs (Electronic Performance Calendar). Tobin's play openly satirized the perceived lack of culture and education among Halifax's male community leaders and, moreover, portrayed a modern woman stepping out of the limitations of the private realm by directly commenting on public affairs. The comedic portrayal of an educated New Woman in the playlet was perceived as less radical than the criticism about local politics her character put forward. Although easily contained in the comedic reconciliation of husband and wife, the misogynistic play nevertheless touched

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<sup>46</sup> The Maritimes were particularly progressive in this regard. Dalhousie College admitted women as early as 1882, although only to handful of programs (Prentice 17). See also *The New York Times* 1889 article about "Female Education in Canada."

upon an uneasy connection between citizenship, gender and education that illustrates changing perceptions of women's roles at the turn of the century as moral educators of the public and their 'right' place in society. Education, in the lingering shadow of late-Victorian gender ideology, may benefit Bella privately, but does not give her access to, or even the right to comment on, civic affairs. Tobin's *comediatta*, in this sense, exposes the ongoing disconnect between education as cultural refinement and education for civic and professional purposes.

The development of a humanistic education is, according to Bruce Curtis, intrinsically linked to the formation of the Canadian state (51). In his essay on the educational reform movement in pre-Confederation Canada, he argues that humanistic pedagogy became the expressed goal of reformers like Reverend Egerton Ryerson as early as 1837 in order to foster loyal citizenry. In the Canadian liberal state experiment of colonial dependency, 'humanization' was a pedagogical device which involved the development of capacities of feeling and moral behaviour. While these capacities were ethically and aesthetically pleasing to school reformers, they were also an instrument for the development of new modes of self-regulation. The 'moral' attitude which this pedagogy taught was a way of relating to others and an ethically-founded acceptance of and affection for existing political form (57). The successful development of the faculties of reason and sentiment through exposure to art, science, literature and music would "create habits of mind and body conducive to productive labour, Christian religion and political order" (54) and would strengthen patriotic ties to the Empire and within the Canadian dominion.

While the rhetoric in this concept of education and its purpose relies on (masculine) gendered tropes of moral responsibility towards the progress of civilization (Henderson

6), the struggle for professional education for women arose in the mid-1880s as part of the discourses of new imperial expansionism, the social reform movement and New Womanhood (Roberts 27). Based on a fear of social and moral degeneration, proponents of women's education argued that by virtue of their womanly qualities, mothers had the duty and right to participate in the public sphere with "a moral scrubbing brush in her right hand and moral uplift in her left eye ... To make this old Earth into a spotless Town" (Dougall 57). Indeed, the "cult of domesticity," as Anne McClintock argues, easily lent itself to an extension into the public sphere and informed the debate's rhetoric all over the Dominion (9).

Sarah Anne Curzon's 1882 editorial drama, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* presents probably the most interesting use of a template dramatic form that combines political comment, burlesque satire and theatricality to lobby for equal access to education by appealing to a divided group of proponents and at the same time seeking to persuade opponents. Written for the first edition of John Wilson Bengough's satirical magazine *Grip-sack* in the form of a closet drama in response to one of Goldwin Smith's articles in *The Week* about woman's place in the state (Wagner 139), *The Sweet Girl Graduate* mocks the idea that women are not intelligent enough to study at the university level. In the play, young Kate Bloggs,<sup>47</sup> after being denied admittance to the University of Toronto, poses as a man to gain access and graduates with top honors, only to reveal her true sex at the end of the play. In a final "persuasive" speech she encourages others to support women's causes through petitions and political engagement. Using parody throughout the play but

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<sup>47</sup> Bloggs, according to the play's critics, is the nineteenth-century British version of the last name Doe and signals an Every[wo]man. See, for example, Bird, *Redressing* 62.

breaking the parodic mode in the final speech, the play presents a persuasive, imaginatively enacted contribution to the Ontario debate about co-education in the 1880s by dramatizing the arguments of proponents and opponents alike in a play script that discusses women's higher education as a civic duty.

Dyer writes that parody works by creating "difference at the heart of similarity" as it exposes the conventionality of arguments, their language and form by incorporating them into its own peculiar structure and reformulating and re-accentuating them (Dyer 34). Parody remains intentionally ambiguous because it "lets nothing rest secure, including what it seems to endorse" (Hannoosh 7). In this sense, Curzon's strategy of using parodic forms but also breaking them strategically is interesting to note. In order to understand the complexity of Curzon's satirical response in dramatic form, I will provide an introduction to Curzon's background as reformer as well as a short overview of the diversity of positions held by both proponents and opponents of women's access to higher education in late-nineteenth-century Ontario.

If we understand *The Sweet Girl Graduate* as a satirical contribution that participates within the framework of a larger public debate and believe Wagner's assertion that it constitutes a response to one of Goldwin Smith's biting polemics in *The Week*, it is important to consider how the play addresses, appropriates and utilizes argumentative strategies by opponents and supporters alike, by providing a truly humanistic education through appeals to the readers' rational and emotional faculties. The play follows the format and plot structure of a popular drawing room comedy or comedy of manners in order to both educate and entertain its readers. Curzon seeks to convince the educated middle-class audience of magazines like *The Week* and *Grip-sack* by providing

intellectual banter through parody and a plethora of highly educated and amusing intertextual references. Publishing her argument in the form of closet drama allows for a strategic removal of an identifiable author position within the text and lets the reader contemplate the various political standpoints within the larger debate as they are revealed by characters on the imaginary stage.<sup>48</sup> Curzon consciously foregrounds protagonist Kate Bloggs' ability to reason better than any of her male counterparts as well as her ability to persuade more successfully than any other female characters, thus consciously disengaging rational and emotional faculties from attribution to a given sex. Yet, if Curzon presents the progressive nature of her argument in Kate's act of successful cross-dressing as a "space of possibility" disengaged from gender and sex (Bird, "Leaping" 182), critics have pointed out that at the end of her play Curzon returns to a stereotypical parodic closure in an attempt to convince her readers of the harmlessness of the described scenario (Derksen, "Out of the Closet Part 2").

Curzon's biography is that of a representative first-generation feminist and activist. Born in 1833 near Birmingham, England, she immigrated with her husband to Canada in 1868. A journalist and active member of the Toronto Women's Literary Society, Canada's foremost suffrage organization, Lundy's Lane Historical Society, the York Pioneer and Historical Society, and a president of the Women's Canadian Historical Society, her writing and activism are often identified with the liberal feminism camp of

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<sup>48</sup> I agree with Alan Filewod's assertion that the term closet drama is limited in its attempt to pay justice to the theatrical possibilities of this popular nineteenth-century form. He points out while most plays at the time were published after their successful introduction to the stage, closet dramas differ in intent and audience. He proposes the term journalistic drama and argues that the dramatic form comes with two advantages over other forms of print journalism: journalistic drama stands out against tightly set newspaper columns and lends itself to "reducing political arguments to partisan stereotypes" by presenting them in a dialogical debate. Moreover, in terms of reception experience, this form of drama privileges the reader (*Committing Theatre* 32).

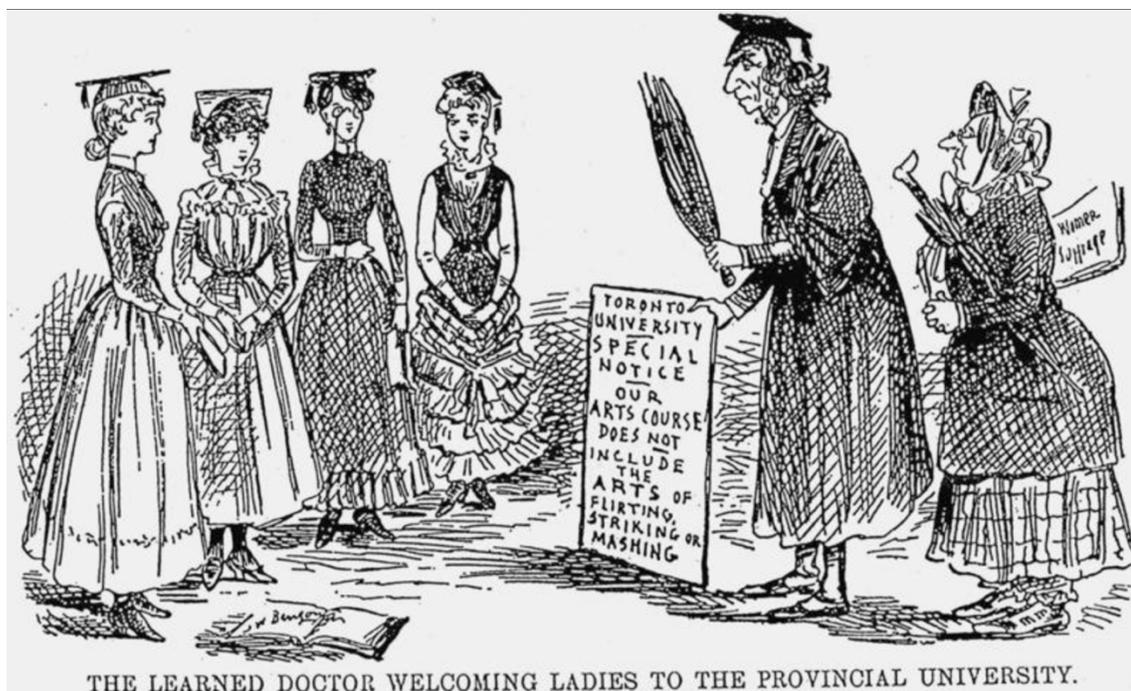
first-generation female activists. The Toronto Women's Literary Society, comprised of a remarkably homogenous group of white, educated middle- and upper-class Anglo-Canadian women,<sup>49</sup> was particularly active in the 1880s in campaigning for enfranchisement, moral reform and co-educational and professional possibilities for women through petitions, journalism and lobbying. Sarah Anne Curzon describes her form of activism in her own words in a much-cited address to the Wentworth Historical Society: "I was one of a sex that has never been recognized as in its right place when found upon a platform, even the very modest platform of the essayist" (qtd. in Wagner 141). And even though her politics and pamphleteering are identified with the liberal feminism of her time, her writing and her plays often strategically employ the rhetoric of both maternal feminism and liberal feminism alike in order to emphasize common causes among a diverse group of social reformers of either persuasion.

The Ontario debate about post-secondary co-education in which *The Sweet Girl Graduate* takes part focuses, as Kym Bird asserts, "less on educational questions than it did on more general matters relating to a "woman's [physical] nature." Opponents often linked the co-educational setting to the unfounded fear of providing grounds for sexual distraction. They feared "grave evils would result from allowing young men and women to attend the same college" (Prentice et al. 159), lampooned in John Bengough's caricature "The Learned Doctor Welcoming Ladies to the Provincial Universities":<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Bacchi reports that out of 156 female leaders, "33 held an MA or better, 17 a BA, 13 had attended normal school, 12 graduated from Ladies' Colleges and Collegiate institutes, and 5 educated privately" ("First Wave" 578).

<sup>50</sup> Barbara M. Freeman points out that John Bengough was in support of co-education. She writes about this caricature: "A notice on the lectern, forbidding 'flirting' and 'mashing,' was a reference to fears that they would become morally loose. They might also join their male classmates in striking and boycotting classes, a form of rebellion then common on campuses. There was also the subversive implication that a university education would turn these young women into crone-like suffragists themselves. While this cartoon can be



**Fig. 5.** Bengough, John Wilson. “The Learned Doctor Welcoming Ladies to the Provincial University.” *Grip-sack* vol. 11, 1884, p.21.

The second most popular argument opponents put forward claimed that women were not “physically constituted to handle the rigour of academic life” (Bird, “Leaping’ 170).<sup>51</sup> The two most common arguments that advocates of higher education for women faced fall thus into two categories—one that argues for the ontological differences between sexes and one that concerns the performance of gender in the interaction between the sexes. Moreover, critics of higher education for women argued that women were unable to absorb higher education, and that negative results derived from educating women.

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read as critique of exaggerated masculine fears of female intellectual aspirations, it also made fun of the women who had them” (*Beyond Bylines: Media Workers and Women’s Rights* 45).

<sup>51</sup> The Ontario debate happens comparatively late if viewed in a broader context. According to *The Maritime Educational Review*, in other parts of the Dominion and the U.S. “the question of higher education of women [was] no longer a disputed one, and the last half of the century ha[d] witnessed a great awakening both on the part of women themselves ... as regards the capabilities and needs of women in the matter of education” (Bird, *Redressing* 48).

They maintained that education would turn “female gentleness, self-denial and obedience into ‘strong-minded women’ and ‘men in petticoats’” (Selles-Roney 251).

More moderate critics alleged that women in co-educational settings would distract, tempt and mislead their fellow male students or be in danger of being misled by alcohol, tobacco and impropriety. As an article in the *Moncton Times* in 1883 puts it: “if the women of all civilized countries are purer and more virtuous than men, it is because all the laws of nature intended them to be so and because by reason of such natural forces, they have not been brought within the range of contaminating influences by which men are usually surrounded” (Prentice 19). Thus, promoters of single-sex education based on an ontological difference between men and woman reflected in a demand for separate spheres endorsed the idea of a separate curriculum tailored to refine the female virtues and woman’s capacity for sympathy through the study of literature, art history, music, elocution, household management and the moral teachings of Christianity.

Among the supporters of single-sex education were many of the first-generation maternal feminists. Growing out of the reform movement and extending the notion of separate spheres, maternal feminists also believed that women were fundamentally different from men. Women’s ‘maternal virtues’ such as moral purity, compassion, self-control and nurturance entitled them to specific rights based on their duty to family and state and thus women required their own liberal arts education.

Liberal feminists like Sarah Anne Curzon argued that women were equal with men and thus entitled to the same rights based on a common humanity and should thus receive equal opportunities through co-education. Curzon summarises this approach to her activism herself in an often-cited paper read to the Wentworth Historical Society in 1891:

“For twenty years I have been upholding the doctrine of the equal rights of woman as a human being” (106).

*The Sweet Girl Graduate* relies on the popular format of a drawing room comedietta, a type of part well-made play, part society drama, part comedy of manners and popularized by Scribe and Sardou in early nineteenth-century France, often focusing on upper class sexual indiscretion (Bird, *Redressing* 61). Receiving a rejection letter denying her access to university classes as a woman, Curzon’s protagonist Kate Bloggs disguises herself as a man to attain academic honour, to “prove that Canadian girls are equal in mental power with Canadian boys” (131). Although her body, soul and moral (or as Bird asserts, feminine) nature revolt against the indiscretions expected from her new gender (“Leaping” 174), she nonetheless goes ahead and “to the tyrant [of gender normativity] plays the slave” (Curzon, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* 130). In her monologue at the end of the second scene she convinces herself despite her better nature that immoral behaviour may be part of the act of passing as a man. Certainly, her opinion of most her fellow male students is low, as Kate recalls in horror “Those dreadful orgies that the *Globe* describes,/ Of men half-tight with lager and old rye,/ Who waylay freshmen and immerse them in/ The flowing wave of Taddle,” only to remember shortly after: “*Why, I shall be a freshman!*” (130, emphasis given). Her hope that “Surely there are among a studious band/ some who love temperance and godly life” is short-lived as she concedes that “At Rome [she’ll] have to be a Roman” and not betray her sex and play along. The literary allusion to Dickens’s *Uriah Heep* signifies both her commitment to assimilate into the masculine world and the self-loathing she expects from her experience. As critics have pointed out, her soul revolts as “Masculinity [in the play], represented as unrestrained

libidinal appetite and vice, is alienated against a nineteenth-century Christian ideology of moral and social reform most often associated with women” (Bird, “Leaping” 176). In order to appear convincingly masculine, eloquent Kate “train[s her] voice to mouth out short, thick words,/As Bosh! Trash! Fudge! Rot!” and “cultivate[s] an Abernethian, self-assertive style ... That men may think there is a great deal more in/My solid head than e'er comes out” (Curzon, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* 126).

Despite all hesitation, her act of cross-dressing is so convincing in appearance and manner that she fools even close family members. But not only does her alias wear men’s clothes; Tom Christopher also immerses himself fully into the lifestyle of a young scholar with its expected drinking, smoking and flirting with young ladies. His transformation from a freshman to a successful gold-medal-winning third-year student remains outside the text but appears seamless. Furthermore, even her desire is regulated by her masculine persona, as revealed in the third act in a letter to her friend, Miss Orphea Blaggs, here quoted at length:

Do you know, dear, when I look back upon the pleasures of the past two years—how soon we forget the pain!—I am not to incline to regret the steps rendered necessary by my devotion to my sex, for use has made me quite at home in the—ah—divided skirt. How many lovely girls have I danced with through the rosy hours who will never more smile on me as they were wont to smile! How many flowers of rhetoric have been wasted on me by the irony of fate! How many billets-doux, so perfumed and pretty, lie in my desk addressed to my nether garment! And how many mammas have encouraged Mr. Christopher, will forever taboo Miss Bloggs! And then the parties and the picnics! Ah, my dear Orphea, what do I not sacrifice on the altar of my sex.<sup>52</sup> (132)

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<sup>52</sup> If one considers the common argument opponents of education for women like Goldwin Smith put forward who oppose education for women in fear of a reversal of the natural order as prescribed by the Bible, Curzon’s

The disengagement of gender and sex embodied in the disguised Mr. Christopher exposes the relationship between both sexes as socially constructed rather than natural and thus, “within the discourse of equality ... presents a place of liberation, a ‘space of possibility’ for women beyond gender” (Bird, *Redressing* 169). Kym Bird in her careful reading of gender politics in Sarah Anne Curzon’s plays argues that through the play’s presentation of progressive politics in the form of parody, “by deconstructing the masculine and feminine, by revealing them to be parts one performs and guises that one takes on, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* calls into question the very liberal feminist project which the play tends to engage” (169). What creates the sense of ambiguity is neither the act of cross-dressing for success in an all-male environment itself, a motif that despite its inbuilt ambiguity was culturally established and morally acceptable (see, for example, Davis 113), nor the displacement of the male gaze through the letters that account for a woman’s view while at the same time never subjecting Mr. Christopher to the reader’s/viewer’s scrutiny. In the end the ambiguity -- the playful shifting strategies of Kate Bloggs’ speeches, acts, and letters that mock both the arguments and counterarguments common to the discussion -- creates the almost elusive nature of the play’s politicking. For example, Kate’s initial outrage over her rejection is framed in a heroic monologue that utilizes iambic pentameter and mockingly dismisses man’s academic ambitions to climb Parnassus and be “vested in all the pride of place and power” as, in her words, mere trifles in comparison with women’s recent mountaineering achievements and the development of bloomers.<sup>53</sup> In humanistic fashion, Kate pointedly

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frequent use of religious allusions creates a subtle mocking of this type of refusal by rendering Mr. Christopher even in her chosen alias as a Christ-like martyr for her sex.

<sup>53</sup> The allusion “not that our alpen-stocks are weak” speaks both to the physical and social achievements of Victorian women as well as the physical constraints and societal restrictions that had to be overcome. Over

remarks in bombast that it is not the physical differences that bar women from entering academia, but merely that “we wear/the Petticoat.” The emphasis on the relationship between dress, perception, power and influence in society is striking. However, just a few lines later, she employs emotional and sexual guile in a form of feminine persuasion to overcome her father’s objections. This conscious juxtaposition of exaggerated masculine and feminine gender performances is strategically employed through each of the first three acts and illustrates Curzon’s parodic intent.

Moreover, Kate’s letter to her cousin Orphea in Act 3 that lists her academic and romantic achievements as male student ends with an exaggerated overemphasis of feminine qualities and concerns:

From the flowers and water to the dress and hair, Kate is represented not as herself but as an exaggeration of upper-class, stereotypical ... hyperbolic rehearsal of femininity ... that [portrays itself as] narcissistic, delicate, aesthetic [and] which situates women as object for the sexual titillation of men. (Bird, *Redressing* 174).

In contrast to Tom Christopher’s intellectual achievement, this “fabrication of the feminine for effect” highlights the artifice of both genders (Bird, *Redressing* 175).

Applying Judith Butler’s notion of drag as a performance that “mocks both the expressive

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the course of the nineteenth century, mountaineering became a popular pursuit of male European explorers, naturalists and scientists. The Alps had captured the British imagination throughout the romantic and Victorian age. Lucy Walker, a passionate British female pioneer, climbed 95 major peaks in her career and was the first woman to reach the summit of the Matterhorn on July 21, 1871—an event highly publicized all through the British Empire. Curzon’s reference to a piece of clothing that signifies this achievement is especially meaningful. As historian Rebecca A. Brown explains, “Mountaineering was fraught with ‘unladylike aspects’: it introduced possibilities of inappropriate contact with the opposite sex and many believed its extreme physicality would injure women’s fragile bodies and minds” (6). In addition to the restrictive social expectations women also had to contend with often dangerous clothing that impeded their physical movements, including voluminous skirts, corsets and poorly designed lady’s boots. Often, women wore bloomers or climbing breeches beneath their skirts or held them up with elaborate systems of rings, ties and hooks. Marjorie Hurd, in her article “Fashion at the Peaks, 1876-1935” reports that some women climbers took off their skirts and hid them underneath rocks nearby, climbing in men’s pants or bloomers (373).

model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity” (Butler 137), Bird argues that the feminine and masculine gender performances Kate Bloggs assumes can never be read as true or natural:

Drag in the play does not only apply to the student, a woman who adopts the gender of a man; it also refers to the feminine woman and the heroic man who perform a kind of drag for they represent gendered acts which do not refer to a prior identity, they thus prevent or deny a reading that would posit them as true or natural ... Kate’s romances can be read as a parody of heterosexuality, her masculinity is critiqued by its feminine orientation, and femininity, too, is revealed to be a grand performance. (“Leaping” 177)

If her outside appearance disrupts the assumed link between sex and gender and renders her actions, both the cross-dressing referred to as female wickedness in a Macbethian intertextual reference to “a deed without a name” (Curzon, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* 131) and her cavorting student life, as dangerous vices, her essential feminine self remains uncorrupted. Femininity is re-asserted in the play as an essential, uncorrupted feminine self at the core as much as it is a grand performance on the outside. Furthermore, Kate’s references to the cross-dressing acts of Joan of Arc and Lady Godiva elevate her disguise to a form of Christian female martyrdom, emphasizing the Victorian virtue of female self-sacrifice.

Not only the treatment of the ontological self in Curzon’s humorous interrogation of gender, sex and female cross-dressing is important to investigate. Similarly, the traditions of parodic para-theatre and comedy of manners she draws on, and the way she interpellates her various audiences and engages them in humorous intellectual bantering are important for the understanding of her closet drama. Additionally, it is difficult to discern the scope of her intervention without analyzing how the rhetoric of the drama addresses the diverse audience of supporters and critics in its use of comic incongruity and parodic double-structured discourse. While ridiculing the arguments of the promoters

of single sex education and opponents of higher education for women alike and exposing, as Kym Bird puts it, the difference “between an ontological full liberal humanist identity supported by the play’s politics, and a parodic treatment of gender which contests this ontology” (“Leaping” 169), the play avoids narrative closure through its use of a double-structured discourse capable of unsettling commonly held assumptions and challenging governing opinion less through direct ridiculing and exaggeration than through reflexivity. As Dyer writes, parody works by creating “difference at the heart of similarity” as it exposes the conventionality of arguments, their language and form by incorporating them into its own peculiar structure and reformulating and re-accentuating them (Dyer 34). Additionally, Kate’s final speech in which she reveals herself as woman and encourages her audience to sign petitions supporting higher education for women cannot be read as part of the parody. If the parodic treatment of cross-dressing exposes the difference between sex and gender, the final scene of the drama complicates both political and ideological alignment.

Readers of Sarah Anne Curzon’s *The Sweet Girl Graduate* frequently note a difficulty in distinguishing between the play’s illustration of various women’s roles and Curzon’s politics in the drama (Derksen, “Out of the Closet Part 2”). One might argue, however, that this ambiguity is intentional and crucial for the success of the play. Critics have pointed out that the inclusion of the rhetoric of both maternal and liberal feminism in reform discourses was common and often intentionally ambiguous. Reformers, as Katja Thieme postulates in her study on Canadian Suffragist rhetoric and audience design, were very aware of the different groups that constituted their audience. Publishing their writing almost exclusively in regular newspapers and magazines, they couched their arguments

for equality, higher education, and vocational innovation in rhetoric that interpellated supporters, bystanders and critics alike (“Constitutive Rhetoric” 39). Thus, Kate Bloggs’ interaction with the other characters in the play is revealing, as their character types represent the various participants in the debate about post-secondary education for women and their specific arguments. As Derksen suggests, “Curzon constructs character ‘types’ that are ‘rhetorical’ rather than ‘realistic’ (“Out of the Closet Part 2”). In response to each of those characters, protagonist Kate strategically changes the tone, form and content of her retort to counter their contentions. In comic foil, Mr. Bloggs, Kate’s father for example, represents the common ‘male’ cultural arguments that she “knows enough to wed.” He counsels her with religious undertones that she should not strive beyond her domestic sphere and finishes his advice with the common Victorian railing against the potential sinful influence of women in co-educational settings. Kate’s response is mockingly short, using her charms and a naive pretense, a strategy that according to Catherine Cleverdon was deemed successful and acceptable by most reformers if strategically employed (4):

If I obtain  
The honours hung so tantalizingly  
Before us by the University,  
Will you defray the cost, as hitherto  
You’ve done, like my own kind papa? *She kisses him.*  
(Curzon, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* 144)

Mrs. Bloggs’ objections receive significantly more attention, which may be indicative of a more interested but generally politically inactive target audience that Sarah Anne Curzon mocks in their uninformed, maternal ways, but whose support can be gained by emphasizing the similarities between maternal and liberal feminism. Using humorous malapropisms and dialect, Mrs Bloggs promotes the Victorian notion of separate spheres

and does not see the need for women's education: "Have I not always said that women do not need so much education as men, and ought to keep themselves to themselves, and not put themselves forward like impudent minxes" (124)? She fears that the reputation Kate will gain by studying the same books with her fellow male students might prevent her from finding a good match in marriage. Instead, she advises Kate to seek refinement by attending a women's college. This attitude towards higher education was commonly promoted by maternal-imperial advocates for women, most prominently by Lady Aberdeen and the National Council of Women of Canada. Derksen identifies the humorous rebuttal with which Kate responds as "'party-line' pronouncement" ("Out of the Closet Part 2"). Dispelling all allegations of impropriety in co-educational settings, she retorts:

Now, mamma, you know we have gone all over this before, and shall never agree, because I think that the better educated a woman is, the better she can fulfil her home duties, especially in the care and management of the health of her family, and the proper training of her sons and daughters as good citizens. (Curzon, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* 124)

The play toys with the logical inconsistencies and double standards in all the positions Curzon presents in *The Sweet Girl Graduate*: Kate Bloggs's mother fears the moral and sexual improprieties that may ensue if young men and women congregate, but does not fear them in socially promoted picnics, garden parties and concerts, and Kate's father falls for the same manipulative femininity he suspects in co-education. Kate's counter-arguments successfully expose her parents' inconsistencies: "... you, and the other ladies, will allow your daughters to go about to picnics, parties ... with any man that happens to ask them ... and yet you see nothing but impropriety in my desire to attend college" (125).

Yet, Kate's own reasons remain similarly inconsistent as they change according to her audience.

Curzon delineates a fourth political position in the character of Kate's confidant and cousin Orpheia, a position Thieme in her study on constitutive rhetoric in Canadian suffragette discourse identifies as the "gentle lady" or privileged female bystander ("Constitutive Rhetoric" 39). Diverging from the hardy Canadian ideal of the vigorous 'mother of the race,' such a woman is often characterized by reformers as in this 1910 letter in the Toronto *Globe* as belonging to the "well-fed, well-clothed, well-protected class who do not care to be aroused" (12). As Derksen affirms, although Orpheia admires "her cousin's 'outrageous' spirit, [she] functions as a prototype of conventional, middle-class femininity" ("Out of the Closet Part 2"). As much as the differences between Kate's feisty character and Orpheia's passive femininity are juxtaposed, her inclusion as both the collaborator and eager receiver of Kate's letter detailing her adventures emphasizes the essential feminine qualities in both characters. Furthermore, as Thieme argues, distinguishing types of female identities and placing them within the social and moral fabric highlights their inherently moral qualities and orients them toward a desired, potential future action (46).

If critics find the arguments the characters put forward logically inconsistent and Kate Bloggs' responses contradictory and shifting in accordance with her audience, they nevertheless point out that this strategic use of constitutive rhetoric is common to the public discourses of nineteenth-century social reformers (Thieme, "Constitutive Rhetoric" 42). Especially, a common language of innate moral behaviour of the female civil subject and her motherly duties, common to all of Kate's arguments and reminiscent

of maternal feminism, is striking and may just be the most effective rhetorical strategy to garner support across various groups of reformers. In an audience that Boyer identifies as a “cohesive, organic community bound together by an enveloping web of shared moral and social values,” the careful inclusion of commonalities within the differing ideological positions helped to contrast the exaggerated characters in the parody with the actual positions of the reformers and consequently strengthened the appeal to reason in Kate Bloggs’ final speech, thus providing a reconciliatory closure to the play (Boyer 6). For example, as historians note, the notions of ‘woman’ and ‘mother’ were contested terms and slippages between meanings could be strategically used to persuade a larger group as long as the distinctive qualities of motherhood were emphasized (Thieme, “Constitutive Rhetoric” 42). Critics of suffrage and educational reform alike have pointed out that this strategy proved to be most effective. As the head of an American Ladies College put it, the language choice of reformers combined “an allegiance to certain well-defined ideas about what is proper for women with subversive attention to women’s intellectual development” (qtd. in Scott 39). Imperial motherhood and liberal feminism alike believed woman’s distinctive qualities were refined through education to prepare her to influence society “in the Church, in the school, in all moral and social reforms” (39). Appealing to a language of common ground allowed Curzon to occupy shifting rhetorical positions in a discussion where liberal feminists were commonly identified with lobbying for co-education and those who championed imperial motherhood tended to advocate single sex education. But in addition to using a rhetoric that addresses and amuses maternal feminists, liberal feminists, critics of co- and single-sex education for women and

bystanders of no fixed opinion, this play's appeal and its playful persuasion depend upon its various audiences recognizing their own reflections in its parodic mirror.

If we look at parody as “an historical and a cultural as well as a formal event” (Bradbury 64) that examines and exposes outmoded cultural beliefs and systems, “parody is an appealing discourse for a culture in a state of transition” (Kiremidjian 242).

Parody's basic definition as a comical rewriting of another work prevents it from proposing itself as definitive. Implicating itself in its challenge to the parodied work, it suggests its own potential as a target or model text. From a theoretical perspective, it suffers from no self-delusion, but rather flaunts the fact that it is as vulnerable and tenuous as the parodied work. (Hannoosh 18)

Parody remains intentionally ambiguous because it “lets nothing rest secure, including what it seems to endorse” (Hannoosh 7). *The Sweet Girl Graduate* relies on two distinct but interwoven theatrical forms: parodic para-theatre and drawing room comedy. The parodic para-theatre in *The Sweet Girl Graduate* mocks--at the same time as it reinforces--the didactic intentions of the drawing room comedy. Gender is exposed as performance as much as the essential feminine self remains morally intact and uncorrupted.

In his study of nineteenth-century Canadian parody and satire, Klay Dyer exposes the false belief that early Canadian political satire is “rather crude” (Kuester 149). He argues that early Canadian political parody, while often grouped in with burlesque comedy, must be assessed as a separate genre. Furthermore, he proposes that if examined within its context the popularity, relevance and sophistication of parody are crucial to understanding the development of a distinct Canadian national culture. Leonard Doucette suggests that a journalistic form of parodic para-theatre was very popular in Quebec throughout the nineteenth century (4), especially in the discussion of Confederation

politics, and became common in Anglo-Canadian political commentary shortly thereafter. Curzon's use of the closet drama for polemical purposes fits the rhizomorphic forms of theatre of the Canadian nineteenth-century reform movement (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 53). In a country with a relatively high level of illiteracy,<sup>54</sup> Canada's politically influential, educated upper and middle class enjoyed a sophisticated magazine culture with weekly and monthly periodicals in addition to the daily newspapers. The political commentary in Canada's early magazines is characterized by its reliance on highly dramatized rhetorical strategies and a highly educated use of cultural and literary allusions. Curzon's choices of performative text, parodic vehicle and rhetorical bombast are thus a successful response within a larger cultural fashion, in a manner similar to Goldwin Smith's articles in *The Week* dismissing suffrage and women's rights (Wagner 141).

Smith's writing is similar to the writings of other nineteenth-century cultural commentators, as it is marked by the highly dramatized rhetorical strategies he employed. For example, in Smith's 1890 article "Woman's Place in the State," the author, similarly to Curzon, distances himself rhetorically from the argument by reporting on arguments presented by all sides in the debate on suffrage in England and the United States through the use of dramatic characters before leading the reader to the conclusion that there are no reasonable grounds for any female claim to the vote. In order not to be accused of being

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<sup>54</sup> Paul Rutherford in *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late-Nineteenth Century Canada* notes that basic literacy rates only improved from mid-century onward. Analysing data gathered from census and church records, he deduces that around mid-century "a quarter to a third of all adults in the mainland colonies could not read" (25). By the end of the nineteenth century through centralization and reorganization of the school system as well as the promotion of co- and adult education, the illiteracy rate dropped to between nine and ten percent. This reduction, as Carol Gerson notes in *A Purer Taste*, was achieved especially through the influence of popular movements such as the National Council of Women's fostering of reading circles and other education societies (6). Gerson concludes that "[b]y the end of the nineteenth century most adult Canadians could read [and] many valued the notion of literary activity" (7).

“actuated by selfishness of [his own] sex in arguing against the female claim” (516), he composes a debate through the authority of other characters by engaging them in philosophical exchanges. Indeed, his question-and-response pattern between American suffragettes and the U.S. American Senate committee echoes journalistic para-theatre.

Say the committee: “Jefferson trembled when he remembered that God is just. Now woman, our equal, asks relief from greater wrongs. We shall refuse them at our peril. God is still just. Jefferson’s forebodings were but a glimpse in the terrible retribution which descends upon the people. (519)

Expectantly, Smith concludes his exploration by reinstating the status-quo through the strategic use of a continuum fallacy followed by rhetorical questions: “In a reign of license, what would be, what has been, the condition of woman” (529)? His form of innuendoes and appeals to common reason in order to preserve the status quo are also apparent in his articles that supposedly triggered Curzon’s satirical rebuttal.

By the same token, Sarah Anne Curzon’s title *The Sweet Girl Graduate* ironically subverts a condescending cultural notion. Derksen traces the genealogy of the derisive term “sweet girl graduates” in Canada to an anonymously published satirical verse poem published in *Queen’s College Journal* in 1876.<sup>55</sup> She points out that the term was frequently employed by critics of co-education for women in both Canada and the British Isles. If the literary allusions to Dickens and Shakespeare, cultural references to Greek mythology, Christian history, and conscious mimicry of Renaissance farce and French comedy add to the intellectual amusement, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* seeks to dazzle in a battle of wits and consciously humours the cliché of the sweet girl graduate through the

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<sup>55</sup> The phrase “sweet girl graduate” can be found in Tennyson’s 1847 “The Princess”; this might be its first appearance.

display of Kate's intellect and achievement. Curzon nevertheless shifts the tone in the final scene of the play to an appeal to pathos. While the form of Kate's final speech, delivered once again dressed in "full dinner toilet of Reseda silk, and carrying a dandelion and lily bouquet," returns to blank verse, the female speaker asks for forgiveness and sympathy for her passion to learn both from her largely male audience within the play and from her readers:

... and so I, ...may now  
 Look you all in the face without a blush, save that  
 Which naturally comes at having thus  
 To avow my hardihood, is praise, I trow,  
 You will not think unworthy; and to me  
 It forms a soft remembrance that will ever dwell  
 Within my grateful heart.  
 Can you forgive me? (153)

The return to the proper sphere of emotion may satisfy what the *Queen's College Journal* author has deemed a male desire for women to "remain[n] Mistresses of the hearts" (qtd. in Cook & Mitchinson 123) but also serves Curzon's argument that the development of the higher faculties of learning does not encourage "men in petticoats" (123). This discursive strategy is what Dean identifies as practising femininity: a return to a female persona that foregrounds her feminine qualities. Commonly found in New Woman novels, critics of women's literature of the 1880s and 90s have attributed this to an ambivalence found in feminist thought of the period.<sup>56</sup> However, Dean argues that the overemphasis of feminine qualities does not so much represent a contradiction in itself, but a conscious decision to render the contradiction in ideological perspective invisible. Overcoming the split between an autonomous, ontologically complete humanist subject

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Gerson, *Purer Taste* 146, Godard 89.

who believes in the equality of men and women based on their common humanity and the expected maternal self-sacrifice demands a reintegration into the discourse of the feminine (Dean 60, 61). If the cross-dressed Mr. Christopher reveals that masculinity and femininity are performative disguises one can take on, Kate Bloggs' final confession of her betrayal (rendered with a wink of the eye as feminine self-sacrifice in her speech) and her explanation about women's natural desire to learn reinforce the notion of an essential feminine self underneath the performance of gender. The ungendered being of a student is rendered invisible to the onlooker by drawing the reader's attention away from the theatricality of the satire in favour of a more generally acceptable status-quo of a naturalised category of identity in order to gain support for the Toronto Women's Club petition for educational reform:

--If that indeed, as I must need believe  
 From all your looks, you do not blame me much,  
 Endue me with a favour. It is this:--  
 Let every man and woman here to-night?  
 Look out for those petitions that will soon  
 Be placed in many a store by those our friends  
 Who in this city form a ladies' club,  
 And each one sign. Nay more, to show you mean  
 What I, with swelling heart have often heard  
 You strongly urge, the rights of women to  
 The College privileges, get all your friends  
 To sign. ... (136)

If the parody in the first three and a half acts persuades through wit, humour and hyperbole, Kate Bloggs's strategic return into the female fold challenges outdated perceptions without threatening the overall status quo. However, as Dyer's consideration of parody's cultural function aptly illustrates, the mirror that is parody works both through distortion and critical distance. And in the ambiguity of the last scene, the reader may retrospectively realize that Kate's sincere and essentially feminine appeal is—

similar to the persuasive strategies used on her father—a form of female persuasion. And thus, beyond limiting the play to a mere response within a larger cultural discourse in an almost Shakespearean battle of wits, the play in itself makes its most persuasive argument by presenting smart, intelligent and educated women participating in public debate as active citizens and successful reformers.

### **Role-Reversal and Parody in Mock Parliaments**

Although closet, editorial and similar satirical journalistic verse drama are a common form of cultural intervention, pageants, playlets and mock parliaments constitute an even more popular dramatic form of cultural engagement and political activism, especially in the fight for women's equality. Such satirical forms of protest often received equally biting responses, such as John Wilson Bengough's satirical poem "The Female Righter," published in *Grip-sack* in 1878. In the poem, Bengough mercilessly mocks white, female upper- and middle-class political activism by 'exposing the true motifs' behind those protests: "I am a Female Righter, and / If you will list to me, / I soon shall make you understand, / What sort of rights they be" (*Grip-sack*, 4, May 1878, 24, ll.1-4).

Predictably, his verses follow well-established lines of argument against female equality: ignorance ("... To vote on all I understand / And all that I do not." (ll. 35-36)), negligence of female duties ("I want upon the lounge to sleep, / Or read, or take my ease; / And want the right my house to keep / As dirty as I please." (ll.5-8)) and the reversal of the 'natural' order ("These are the rights of woman, and / You'd best oppose them not, / Or when we get the upper hand, / We'll teach you what is what." (ll.37-40)).

If the politically orthodox whose views are represented in Bengough's verse took considerable time to be convinced about the merits of suffrage and women's access to higher education, it is interesting to note that not only satire but theatricality in all forms were common tools in the social reformers' political toolbox all over the United States, Great Britain and Canada (Finnegan 81). Suffragists used pageantry, drama, motion pictures, parades, public speaking events, tableaux and spectacular forms of theatrical protest such as chaining oneself to public buildings or public hunger strikes<sup>57</sup> to draw attention to their claims. If hunger strikes present a rarer occasion, on a local level protest was often far from radical, but focused mostly on parades, protest, petition collections, pageants and drama. Many influential reformers such as American Glenna Smith Tinnin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman believed that with their use of costume, their visual nature, their capacity for "stirring emotions" and "making appeals," pageants and plays were the best way to promote suffrage (Tinnin qtd. in Finnegan 77). Pageantry utilized feminine skills such as acting, singing, orchestral accompaniment, costumes, and props and thus appealed to the reformers who wished to deliver wholesome and uplifting counter-entertainment to the public in order to gain supporters for their cause. From the point of view of female reformers, whose gendered identity revolved around championing the arts, these forms of protest were "an ideal mechanism to weave together all the arts she revered [as] the format required the use of music, movement, poetry, drama, and the visual arts" (Blair 119). Magazines like *The Woman's Journal* often printed pro-suffrage

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<sup>57</sup> Hunger strikes, lengthy parades in historical costumes and violent protest are all commonly associated with the protests in the United States and Great Britain (See, for example, Finnegan or Cleverdon). Within the British context, most noted events include the largest parade on 28 July 1910 with more than half a million women protesting for the vote and the infamous Black Friday parade on 18 November 1910 during which 200 women were manhandled and assaulted by the police, as well as the hunger strikes in response to Great Britain's "Cat and Mouse Act."

pageants and plays, making them easily accessible and widely performed. The North American Women Suffrage Association made scripts even more widely available by selling them through a series of mail order catalogues (Finnegan 83).

In Canada, organizations like the Political Equality Leagues, the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Associations, the WCTU<sup>58</sup> and the CWSA mounted productions of popular British and American plays not as single events but always as part of a larger evening's entertainment. Plays included the British one-act sketch *How the Vote Was Won* by Christopher St John and Cicely Hamilton and playlets like Evelyn Glover's *Miss Appleyard's Awakening* (Cleverdon 35, 59). The performances did not necessarily present the right to vote as every person's undeniable right regardless of their sex, but like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's popular 1911 *Something To Vote For*, which exposes the danger of impure milk and suggests that voting women could enforce dairy industry regulations, often relied on the common strategy that linked the ability to vote to a woman's maternal duties. In Canada, these short American and British plays were commonly embedded within a larger evening of entertainment that featured all sorts of native cultural refinement--music, recitations, lectures and other cultural offerings. These evenings served associations like the WCTU, the literary and historical societies and the enfranchise associations as a platform to garner public awareness, to gather signatures for political petition and to fundraise. Rather than staging dramatic protests in public venues

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<sup>58</sup> It is important to note that suffrage was not the WCTU's primary mandate. As Wendy Mitchinson asserts, although the WCTU's primary tools were petitions and plebiscites, the WCTU's started supporting enfranchisement as a means to gain political influence in order to achieve national temperance in the face of government intransigence (159). As Bacchi puts it, "Many women in the suffrage societies endorsed the goals of the reform movement. ... most were reformers first and suffragists second" ("Divided Allegiances" 90). The WCTU's contribution to national temperance will be discussed in greater detail in the third part of this chapter.

or taking it to the streets, the reformers sought intellectual engagement and debate as part of a larger offering of cultural refinement to an appreciative audience, a strategy that critics like Carol Lee Bacchi have described somewhat dismissively as the "generally cautious and undemonstrative" political strategies of the struggle for equality (*Liberation Deferred* 43).

Even more popular than the American and British plays were "the nineteenth century's most visible and effective form of intervention theatre: ... the mock parliament" (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 45). Prior to suffragist campaigns, mock parliaments were an established parodic structure to debate public policy and contemporary affairs in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century parlours. Mock parliaments peaked in popularity all over Canada in the late-nineteenth century. They became a popular form of satirical protest for Canadian suffragists over the course of forty years of struggle for enfranchisement, moving out of their original semi-private setting into large public venues (Bird, *Redressing* 69). Beyond the most often cited example of Nellie McClung's Mock Parliament, held at the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg on 28 January 1914, Kym Bird's extensive research and historical reconstruction identifies at least eight other mock parliaments and thirteen different performances: four in Manitoba, two in British Columbia, and seven in Ontario (69). According to her reconstruction of both the performance history of mock parliaments and their scripts, the Manitoba chapter of the WCTU staged the first female Canadian version at the Winnipeg Bijou Theatre on 9 February 1883, the first Ontario parliament was held as a collaborative effort of the WCTU and the Dominion Women's Enfranchise Association at Allan Gardens on 18 February 1886, and the first British Columbian productions were mounted in 1910 by the

Victoria Local Council in Victoria and at The University of British Columbia's Women's Club in Vancouver. The latter in turn inspired the famous Manitoba production of 1914 (McClung 402).<sup>59</sup>

What makes mock parliaments an interesting format for political intervention is that they are written as collective creations. Records suggest that generally more than fifty amateur actors were involved in each production. All mock parliaments followed strict parliamentary proceedings as a dramatic template. They mimicked parliamentary procedure in their staging, in their casting of roles and in the procedure. Through the introduction of humorous bills and formal debates, mock parliaments exposed commonly held, often hypocritical political attitudes and satirized existing political debates. Nellie McClung's recollection of the 1914 Manitoba event indicates that individual speeches, proposed bills and agenda items in each mock parliament were written by the individual participants in the process (398).<sup>60</sup> This has the advantage of making the form of the play adaptable to the political context it is set in. It allowed, for example, McClung with a group of fellow activists to petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly the afternoon before the performance and use Premier Sir Rodmond Roblyn's own words of dismissal in her "uproariously funny" imitation of him in next evening's replica, a performance widely credited for popularizing the campaign in Canada's first province to grant the vote to women (Gray 56).

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<sup>59</sup> In *The Stream Runs Fast*, McClung credits fellow writer, journalist and activist Lillian Beynon Thomas with organizing the 1914 Winnipeg evening after attending the Vancouver mock parliament (395).

<sup>60</sup> In her vivid description, McClung mentions that returning from a two-week absence leading up to the play, "every detail [of the parliament] had been worked out" except her own part, which she wrote and rehearsed the night before the performance (401). Moreover, Kym Bird describes the many small scraps of paper penned in different handwritings that comprise what remains of the 1896 script in the Toronto archives of the WCTU on which she based her reconstruction of the Allan Garden performance (*Redressing the Past* 70).

It is important to note that the structure of a suffrage mock parliament is circular and begins, ends, and frequently returns throughout the performance to the same questions of gender and suffrage (Bird, "Performing"). All versions start with a group of men petitioning the female Premier to be granted the vote, only to be dismissed. The parliament then formally proceeds through several agenda items, the introduction of new bills, questions to the house and a formal debate on the ratification of new legislation, often with a focus on exposing the hypocritical treatment of women by simply substituting men for women. The all-female parliament concludes with an attempted ratification of and failed debate of male enfranchisement. For example, beyond the expected debate about extending franchise to men, the 'parliamentary agenda' for the February 1896 Allan Gardens performance also featured the introduction of bills with titles like "An act for the protection of dead voters," satirically questioning the practice of ballot stuffing and who is allowed to vote as well as more overtly gender-specific ones that focussed on popular contemporary debates as in "An act to prevent men from wearing long stockings, knickerbockers and round-about coats when bicycling" (reproduced in Bird, *Redressing* 60).<sup>61</sup> Question period addressed the members of the government on whether it is "the intention of the Government to so amend the Public Schools Act as to enable them to take steps to dismiss all married men engaged in the profession of teaching?" and "Do the government intend introducing a measure to provide the ringing of a curfew bell at ten o'clock each evening of the week, warning all

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<sup>61</sup> Wayne Roberts in "Rocking the Cradle for the World" relates the scandal the first women bicyclists caused in Toronto in the 1890's. Bicycling was assumed to cause sexual arousal. Critics worried that the "unchaperoned riders were 'exposed ... to the most dangerous temptations'" and charged that women clad in "The essential costume for women cyclists, pant-like bloomers ... resembled prostitutes" (16).

men off the streets unless accompanied by their wives?"<sup>62</sup> Reviews suggest that the 1914 Winnipeg production featured a bill to bestow "dower rights on married men" ("Women Suffragist" *The Winnipeg Telegram* 29.01.1914) and a "measure to confer upon fathers equal guardianship rights with mothers" ("Women Score" *Winnipeg Free Press* 29.01.1914). In addition to challenging the status quo through a formal debate between female politicians led by a female speaker of the house, the bills introduced and the formal questions put forward by members mock all kinds of inconsistencies in the unequal treatment of women and men and the moral corruption of the current political climate.

As Bacchi points out, mock parliaments challenged the status quo by representing women as public figures, professionals and lawmakers when they were taught that their domestic duties were their highest calling (*Liberation Deferred* 52). They challenged the belief of those who commonly cited the Bible to argue that a woman's place was "in submission to man" by reversing these roles in parody within a context that reveres and respects the political system itself (Cleverdon 6). Kym Bird suggests that "[the] use of parody [in these mock parliaments] generated a dialectic between critique and imitation, between an admiration for and feminist revision of the parliamentary system" (64). Moreover, to Bird this type of parodic revision with its individually written speeches allowed for a diversity of voices of speakers with different political leanings to be heard. The large cast of the 1893 Manitoba production, according to Cleverdon a joint undertaking of the more liberal feminist DWEA and the domestic feminist WCTU,

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<sup>62</sup> Kym Bird asserts that the difficulty in assessing and reconstructing mock parliaments lies in the nature of their form. As a form of theatre created for often just a handful of occasions through a process of collective creation, many scripts were never published. Moreover, as many satirical speeches were written by specific participants, many of the actual speeches are often lost (*Redressing* 69).

featured a large cast of reformers from both organizations. Critics argue that the process of collective creation thus managed to dissolve the differences between the two main reformist schools of thought in one common fight for equal suffrage.<sup>63</sup> Form and process allowed for a wide representation of perspectives within the common cause, a strategy that, as critics suggest, united both liberal and domestic feminist supporters in one common cause.

Nellie McClung's speech as Manitoba Premier that ended the 1914 Manitoba mock parliament illustrates this sense of unity for one cause by sounding a hopeful note, and thus providing reconciliatory closure to its parody by addressing the male petitioners who opened the play as well as the general audience with the following:

If men were all so intelligent as these representatives of the downtrodden sex seem to be it might not do any harm to give them the vote. But all men are not so intelligent. There is no use giving men votes. They wouldn't use them. They would let them spoil and go to waste. Then again, some men would vote too much...Giving men the vote would unsettle the home.... The modesty of our men, which we reverence, forbids us giving them the vote. Men's place is on the farm...It may be that I am old-fashioned. I may be wrong. After all, men may be human. Perhaps the time may come when men may vote with the women--but in the meantime, be of good cheer. Advocate and Educate. (qtd. in HerStory Collective)

Mock parliaments were thus a "genteel form of social critique," organized and performed by groups of suffrage campaigners with often diverging opinions as to why women should have the vote, who nonetheless in their campaigns strategically collaborated to gain wider support, often timed to coincide with the presentation of suffrage petitions

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<sup>63</sup> As Kym Bird asserts, echoing Thieme and Cleverdon, "Within this parodic revision, as in the feminist movement itself, the struggle between domestic and liberal feminism dissolves in the common fight for equal suffrage" (*Redressing* 64).

(Bird, *Redressing* 74). They sought to criticize the division of gender roles that limited women to the domesticity of the home.

The social status of many of its well-known performers added to the popularity of the performances. For example, the 1893 Winnipeg WCTU production was organized under the auspices of Mrs. A. J. McClung, mother-in-law to Nellie McClung, and featured Dr. Amelia Yeomans, first woman physician in the province of Manitoba, and well-known journalist E. Cora Hind (Cleverdon 50). The role of the speaker of the house in the 1896 Toronto parliament was played Annie O. Rutherford, national president of the WCTU. Its list of noted performers also included Dr. Emily Howe Stowe, first Canadian woman physician, and several well-known school board trustees (Bird "Performing Politics"). A newspaper advertisement for the 1914 Manitoba production organized by the Winnipeg Political Equality League promises its audience in a byline the participation of "over fifty Women, Prominent in Winnipeg Public, Literary and Social Circles" and famously featured noted lecturer and author Nellie McClung as Premier, Lillian Beynon Thomas, Marion Beynon, and Francis Graham. As these names highlight, the organizers and performers of the mock parliaments were some of Canada's most distinguished reformers, journalists, and lecturers of the late-nineteenth century. But, as Bacchi points out, it is important to keep in mind that they were all middle- and upper-class educated women, education being "the single most important factor which converted women to suffragism" (*Liberation Deferred* 18), who staged these satirical interventions as a "safe, sophisticated protest of social elite to whom [the price of admittance of] twenty-five cents was a pittance and women's claim to democracy, if somewhat radical, worthy of consideration" (Bird, *Redressing* 74).

All mock parliaments felt the need to couch their satirical protest in longer evening programs of cultural uplift and socially acceptable entertainment.<sup>64</sup> Grand entertainment and spectacle both frame and couch the satirical critique as a liminal event. For example, according to the 18 February 1896 *Globe* advertisement promising an exciting evening of entertainment, the proposed mock parliament is only one of two items that address the question of women's suffrage in a full-evening program that primarily offered a panoply of fourteen outstanding local musical performers. As both the advertisements and the reviews of each evening suggest, the Women's Parliament is only one event among several others--for example, in addition to the mock parliament with a cast of fifty-two women representing members of parliament, the 1886 Toronto evening also featured twelve musical pieces by a wide selection of local talent. Bird's reconstruction of the event indicates the male petition was the second item in the program, the parliamentary debate fourth, followed by a "promenade" of nine musical pieces. And although the *Toronto Evening Star* review gushes in its review of the dress rehearsal on February 17 that "the members were out in full force and judging by the way they acquitted themselves a rich treat is in store for all who will attend the Parliament tomorrow evening" ("Mock Parliament" 17 February 1886, 3), the day of the Mock Parliament both the *Globe's* and the *Star's* entertainment columns focused exclusively on the musical entertainment of the evening, emphasizing that "with such attractive offering ... The Pavilion should be filled" ("Mock Parliament" 18 February 1886, 2). According to the

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<sup>64</sup> Often used as part of a fundraising campaign, Cleverdon notes that the proceeds of an evening that the St. John's Enfranchisement Association put on to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the formation and which featured local musicians and a performance of *Miss Appleyard's Awakening* "netted ... \$33.90, the most substantial sum recorded in their treasury" (190). It is worthwhile then to compare attendance and popularity with the Salvation Army 'Hallelujah Weddings,' discussed later in this chapter, that drew crowds of 1,000 to 1,500 hundred spectators at ten to fifteen cents' admittance.

*Winnipeg Free Press*, the 1914 evening at the Walker Theatre featured not only the mock parliament but also the Assiniboine Quartette, a production of "How the Vote Was Won" and several violin solos by H.E. Davey ("Women Score" 29 January 1894).<sup>65</sup>

Critics suggest that the format's popularity lies in the nature of its "ambivalent form of performance that both was and was not perceived as theatre and [thus] capable of shifting between public and private spaces of reception" (Filewod, *Committing* 55). On the one hand mock parliaments were thus successful, large-scale events that served as an integral component within well-organized campaign strategies. But they also refrained from directly protesting the lack of rights by cushioning their critique in mere entertainment. Bird puts it aptly, "They were a testimony not only to the political acumen and strength of women but to a movement that demonstrated women knew how to organize and represent themselves as the equals of men within a public forum. At the same time, ... [t]hey were an expression of the safe, moderate tactics of an upper- and middle-class white womanhood who wanted representation within the existing system of parliamentary democracy" (*Redressing* 63).

### **Uniformed Women in Men's Public Spaces—Transgression and Containment in Salvation Army Spectacles**

If the politically orthodox who saw themselves represented in Bengough's satirical poem about "The Female Righter" took considerable time to be convinced about the

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<sup>65</sup> Bird points out that both the satirical nature of the mock parliaments and the frankness with which they are advertised increase within the twenty-eight years between the first Canadian suffragist mock parliament, the 1886 Allan Gardens performance and the famous 1914 Winnipeg event, indicating to her a greater acceptance of it as feature entertainment. While both performances are advertised in the entertainment section of various local newspapers, the 1896 advertisement for the Allan Gardens event puts greater emphasis on the exquisite musical entertainment, while the 1914 production that famously featured Nellie McClung as Premier advertises the production of the Winnipeg Equality League with an emphasis on the social standing of the women involved ("Women Score" 29.01.1914).

merits of enfranchisement and women's access to higher education, the most prominent social issue of its day unified both Bengough's readers and women activists in various social organizations: temperance. The first Canadian temperance societies had appeared as early as the 1830s, but support for the movement peaked between 1880 and the First World War. The most important temperance societies for women were the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (originally an American movement whose Canadian offshoot was founded by Dr. Letitia Yeomans in Picton, Ontario in 1874 as a mostly Anglo-Canadian middle-class organization) and the more working-class focused, British-originated, Protestant revivalist Salvation Army. Both movements addressed the issue of temperance through the use of rhizomorphic forms of theatre and although their use of theatre and theatricality differed in intent, audience and form, it allowed women to actively engage themselves with public matters.

Alcohol was viewed as a major threat to national progress as it was commonly assumed to be the underlying cause of all social issues such as the increase in urban poverty, unemployment, the breakdown of families, disease, prostitution and general immorality. John Bengough's "Miss Canada, Barmaid," published in the July 1887 edition of *Grip-sack*, depicts the iconic virginal and stern-looking embodiment of the nation controlling the beer taps beside a devilish bartender in a pub aptly named "Canada, the Devil & Co; Liquor Traffic Partners." Despite her ascribed maidenly virtues, she is in cahoots with the devil to provide the working classes--men, women and children--with an endless supply of liquor from bottles labeled "Despair Rum," "Anti-virtue Brandy," and "Broken Home Gin." As the keg behind Miss Canada explains, "Alcohol [is] warranted to counteract all the effects of church, home and school and to ensure vice and poverty." Indeed, the pub

licence speaks to its political effect: the pub is "Licensed to make bad citizens and increase human misery. The profits of the work to be shared with the Canadian government." The assumed feminine virtues of care and purity that Miss Canada commonly embodies are questioned through the caricature as almost an act of teenage transgression. The caricature's caption asks the reader, "When will the country be 'ripe' to get out of this partnership?"

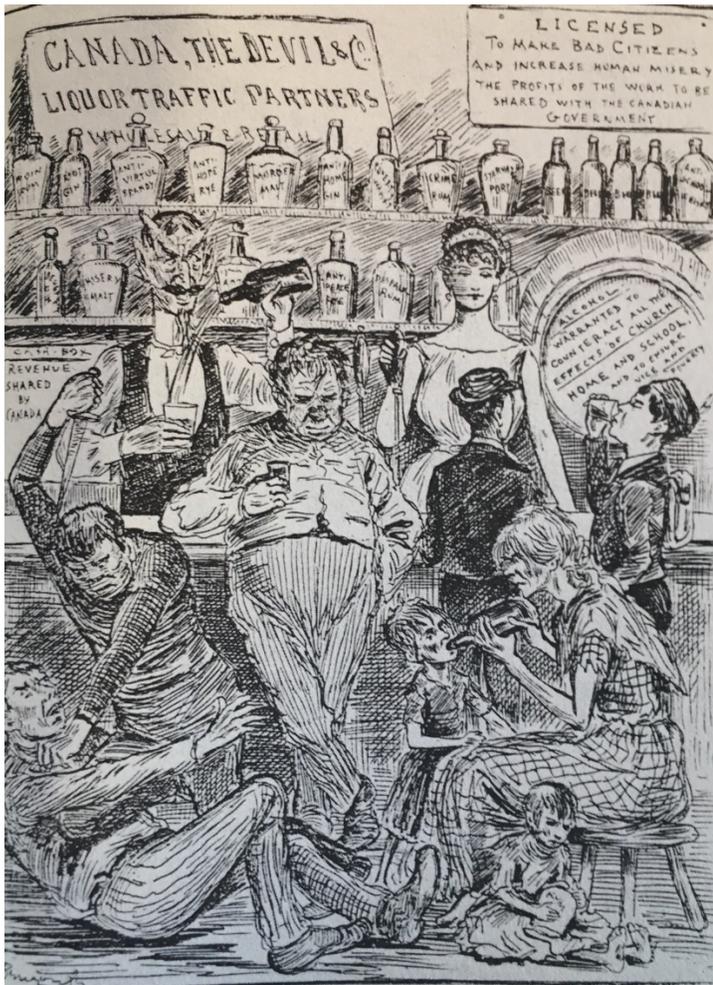


Fig. 6. Bengough, John Wilson. "Miss Canada, Barmaid." *Grip-sack*. 9 July 1887. *Sketches from a Young Country: The Images of Grip Magazine*, edited by Carman Cumming, University of Toronto Press, 1997, p. 220.

If the temperance movement's original focus was to educate the individual to abstain, guided by "the belief that self-discipline was essential to economic success and that alcohol was an obstacle to self-discipline" (Decarie "Something Old, Something New" 34), many organizations realized quickly that public interest in social reform did not run in tune with the economic interests of both provincial and federal governments. As Prohibition historian Graeme Decarie explains,

[j]urisdiction over the trade was shared by governments, since the provinces could prohibit retail sale, whereas the federal government could prohibit the manufacture of alcohol and retail, wholesale and interprovincial trade. ... [N]either level was enthusiastic about prohibition, since it would cause losses of tax revenue and party support. Both often put forward compromise legislation known as local option, e.g., the Canada Temperance Act of 1878, which gave local governments the right to prohibit by popular vote the retail sale of alcohol. The referendum was also frequently used as a delaying tactic or to shift responsibility for legislation from governments to voters. (Decarie)

Accordingly, social reformers had to address temperance as an individual decision as well as to treat it as a local, provincial and national political issue. In strategic alliance with other organizations, temperance societies like the WCTU focused on petition drives, education through textbooks and school curricula, and organizing plebiscites on both provincial and federal levels by engaging local chapters in political campaigning. Conversely, the Salvation Army and similar working-class organizations focused on educating and reforming the individual through social work, revivalist meetings and public pledges of temperance.

The first provincial chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union was formed in Ontario in 1874. The WCTU became a national organization in 1883. A popular organization for white middle-class Canadian women of Anglo-Saxon descent with

approximately ten thousand members by 1900, the WCTU was originally founded to carry the message of temperance to working-class and immigrant families, as its members saw a connection between drinking, crime and sexual immorality. The WCTU viewed "intemperance [as] a challenge to their middle-class way of life. It was a foreign element in an otherwise ordered society" (Mitchinson 154). However, historians allege that it quickly lost its interest in engaging with what its members saw as 'fallen individuals' and rather focused on the eradication of intemperance through governance, education in general and legislative change. Aligning itself closely with the ideas of domestic feminism, the WCTU saw alcohol as a threat to marriages and the welfare of families. Called to their moral duty as members of the imaginary Canadian national family, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and similar organizations not only lobbied for temperance, but consequently over time became also the champions of related causes such as suffrage, sexual hygiene, co-education and mothers' allowances (Mitchinson 159).

In his article on "Temperance and the Theatre in the Nineteenth Century Maritimes," Blagrove is one of the first to draw attention to the theatrical endeavours of what are often viewed as unlikely allies—the rather Puritan temperance movement and theatrical entertainment. He argues that although the alliance seems counterintuitive, especially as much of the popular entertainment happened in the back rooms of bars and in music halls (Lenton-Young 168), theatre nonetheless became one of the temperance movement's most successful strategies in the Maritimes. Modelling themselves after the British and American temperance movements, the WCTU's Canadian counterpart was quick to realize the potential for theatre to popularize its message of abstinence in a strategy that

Blaggrave identifies as "adopting the means of pleasant [read here: female] persuasion" (23, my addition). Through organizing temperance soirées in public halls featuring speeches, debates, readings, recitations, musical entertainments and well-known melodrama like Timothy Shay Arthur's 1854 *Ten Nights in a Barroom And What I Saw There* and William H. Smith's *The Drunkard; Or, The Fallen Saved*,<sup>66</sup> the societies provided proselytizing entertainment to counter the perceived moral decay caused by the amusements of music halls, taverns, and barrooms. In addition to just organizing or sponsoring events, the Maritime temperance movement also ran theatrical societies and "encouraged both playwrights and actors to ply their respective talents" (21). But rather than following Blaggrave's argument that "The temperance soirées, although they might abjure the intent, at least made use of the condition of 'a show,' and thereby planted in audiences and performers alike an appetite for more," I would like to suggest that, especially when taking the temperance activism in the western provinces into account, these "theatricalities of temperance" were a strategically used form of political activism that allowed women to enter the public arena and, in their maternal role as what Karen Blair calls "torchbearers of culture and enlightenment" (3), offer morally uplifting entertainment. Similar to the suffragists' use of theatre, this approach relies on couching the nature of its public activism in gender-appropriate offerings. Despite Filewod's acknowledgement that "the theatricalities of temperance were as diverse as the movement itself" (41), ranging from fully developed melodramas to tableaux, pageants and parades, the number of published anthologies of temperance recitations and dramatic scenes as

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<sup>66</sup> For additional information on its collaborative authorship, see the play's preface at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sentimnt/snplwhsaf1t.html>.

well as the record of several dramatic societies affiliated with the temperance organizations, such as the dramatic companies of both men's and women's organizations, suggest a more strategic employment of alternative dramatic entertainment than Blagrove seems to allow. In the Arnoldian sense of offering "the best of what is thought and known," an opening address given in a Nova Scotian temperance soiree that featured the musical Cadets of Temperance introduced its program with: "Our entertainment is not intended to affect you like a show, which excites momentary pleasure and is then forgotten" (25). The aspired long-lasting effects of its uplifting message illustrate the idea that alternative, healthy entertainment did as much good in the battle for social reform as did overtly political and social work.

All temperance organizations provided entertainment and preached abstinence to their members and, moreover, like the WCTU's white ribbon campaign, used visual markers as costumes, with the result that a certain level of theatricality was common to the public face of all reformers. But the most effective organization in preaching abstinence to the masses was the Salvation Army. Through its religious revival meetings, marching bands, parades, music, and its generally uncommon ways of engaging the masses through spiritual, physical and mental nourishment, it appealed especially to a working-class clientele, a group of Canadians that the other organizations failed to attract (Collins 14).

Founded by dissident Methodist minister William Booth and his wife Catherine as The Christian Mission in the East End of London, England, in 1865, it was re-named The Salvation Army in 1878 to reflect the increasingly military structure the movement had adopted. Built on the principle that that there was little point preaching 'salvation' to hungry people, the Salvation Army's aim was to bring salvation to the poor, destitute and

hungry by meeting both their physical and spiritual needs (“About Us”). The use of visually striking costumes, brassy music and crowd-drawing spectacle bemused the Army’s critics, who nonetheless acknowledged the effectiveness of theatrical means in order to address the crowds, as for example British journalist W.T. Stead in *The Northern Star*:

Ridicule as we may the doggerel hymns, the incoherent prayers, the wild harangues, the violent gesticulations and the rude sensationalism of a country fair introduced to public worship, the fact remains that the Salvation Army has saved members of the very lowest of the community from vice and crime. (qtd. in Ervine 463)

An anonymous author in an 1888 article for the *Toronto Saturday Night* reveals a similar attitude:

We may smile at the incongruous crowds that carry banners and shout hymns to the music of tambourines and drums, but we know ... that the Salvation Army does much good in reclaiming drunkards and providing places and methods of worship suitable for those who do not feel inclined to show their rags and uncouthness in a fashionable place. (qtd. in Collins 39)

Often eyed with curiosity, the Army’s strategy of soup, salvation and spectacle was effective in establishing it as it as an arbiter of the Canadian nation’s social consciousness.

The Canadian branch of the Salvation Army began its work in the early 1880s. It held its first open-air meeting in Toronto in January 1882. The *Victoria Daily Colonist* reports the first appearance of “Hallelujah Lassies beating their tambourines for dear life” in the western outpost of the Dominion in the summer of 1887 (“Hallelujah Lassies Beating Their Tambourines” 3). The three Salvationists tasked to establish the army in British Columbia--two women, Captain Mary Hackett and Lieutenant Graham, and one man,

Captain James Desson-- “opened fire” in Victoria with their first outdoor sermon held outside the Adelphi Saloon at the intersection of Yates and Government Streets, according to historians a favourite gathering place for rough men (Neylan 197). The Victoria chapter took over an abandoned skating rink at first and then moved into the ‘old Victoria Theatre’<sup>67</sup> for their indoor meetings, as the *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported in its review of the fortnight’s “Energetic Attack on the Powers of Darkness” in 1893 (“Blood and Fire”). The *Victoria Daily Colonist* reviewer was certainly impressed by the Army’s 1893 meeting, describing it in vivid detail: The stage was lined with soldiers in their red and blue uniforms who would frequently, at the female Staff Captain’s command, “fire a volley” of “Hallelujah!” throughout the evening’s entertainment. After several musical interludes, drills, story-telling, recitals, and a lecture, “soldiers and audience joined in a hymn to the familiar old popular melody, ‘Carry me Back to Tennessee’ ... to the music of the army’s brass band.” (4) Lacking a wide repertoire of entertainment options, the revivalist methods certainly attracted the curiosity of Victoria’s public. Within a year of their first meetings, the *Victoria Daily Colonist* writes:

Almost every night the soldiers are to be met with as they parade the principle [sic] streets with flags flying, the music of the drum and tambourine heralding their approach. The curiosity, if nothing else, generally induces a crowd composed principally of those who would never think of entering a church to stop and listen. Some of course follow

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<sup>67</sup> It is not completely clear if the review refers to the ‘old’ Victoria Theatre on the corner of View and Douglas Streets or an old Victoria theatre. The impressive Victoria Theatre had opened its doors on 16 October 1885 and seated one thousand people. As Chad Evans explains, aside from music halls and hotel backrooms, Victoria’s first theatre building, the Theatre Royal, had been torn down in 1882 (128). The economic boom associated with the promise of the railway, a middle-class culture with a civic sense of philanthropy and the proximity to a body of touring companies occasioned the erection of Victoria’s first grand theatre in 1885 with “mahogany opera chairs, the balcony rail upholstered in silk velvet plush with wool fringe; the wainscot of California redwood; the frescoed ceiling; the proscenium boxes adorned with stained glass windows and crimson silk curtains” (128). The Salvation Army’s ability to fill a theatre of this size in a city of roughly 12,000 inhabitants in 1895 several times a month would indicate a rather successful approach, combined with a lack of other suitable entertainment.

to the barracks and are induced to remain for the entire service. ("The Salvation Army" 4)

The 1893 evening's reviewer concluded, "There is nothing conventional about the Army's methods, which is no doubt the secret to their wonderful success, and their way of conducting their meetings is certainly not dull" ("Blood and Fire," 11.07.1893).

Although generally well-received in British Columbia, with only a handful of violent confrontations as compared to everywhere else in Canada, where Salvationists were often ridiculed, attacked, violently beaten and sometimes even jailed (Neylan 198), critics in the early years of the Army derided its sensationalist and carnivalesque practices. In *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*, historian Lynne Marks characterises the army's unusual techniques that led to ridicule and critique: "A willingness to challenge conventions and middle-class respectability was integral to the appeal which the Salvation Army held" (157). Beyond its strategic use of military rhetoric, trappings and structure--for example, by renaming a prayer service a "knee drill" and referring to saying "Amen" as "firing a volley"--the army drew in particular on popular culture and working-class entertainment as a means of attracting the public. "Like travelling circuses and variety shows, the Salvation Army paraded the streets ... with colourful banners and the music of brass bands and tambourines, and drums. Army hymns were set to the tune of popular songs, [and] uniforms [were] worn by soldiers and officers ..." (Marks 158). Popular events included Hallelujah picnics, parades, Salvation weddings, Free and Easy meetings, and Big Gos. The Salvation Army transformed (and satirized) quintessentially respectable church tea meetings into Grand Tea Fights (Marks 172). Although the Army shunned dances as inherently immoral, it nevertheless offered a range of respectable venues and events for

both sexes to mingle within the context of evangelical Protestantism, thus not only adapting to a working-class culture but also to working-class religiosity and respectability. Marks concludes that "The Army's success among both church members and non-members attests to the efficacy of its unconventional methods. The fact that it emphasized the appeal of popular culture suggests that many Ontario workers-- particularly the unskilled and the young, who were most attached to the Army's services-- were a long way from the more respectable culture [...]" (158). According to Marks, "The Army was willing to use any methods necessary to save souls because it believed the churches had failed in their responsibility to minister to all classes" (160). Some of the published written defences of the Army included attacks on the churches as middle-class institutions that had replaced Christ's true teachings with an emphasis on material glory and middle-class pride. As Canadian temperance organizations sought not only to educate and to lobby for prohibition, but also to provide entertainment, activity and fellowship as an alternative to saloons, bars and music halls, the Salvationists succeeded in their use of popular songs, lively music, parades, and dramatic testimonies in order, as the *War Cry* often extolled, to "secularize religion, or rather [to] religionize secular things" (*American War Cry* qtd. in Winston, "Living in the Material World" 468).

More striking among the unorthodox methods the Army employed is its deployment of female soldiers and officers<sup>68</sup> as preachers, founders of outposts and managers of local and provincial chapters. For example, the Army's Vancouver garrison was founded by four women in 1887, just a few month later than its Victoria chapter: Captain Mary

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<sup>68</sup> The administrative structure of the Salvation Army can best be described as being top-down and strongly hierarchical based upon military models. The Salvation Army distinguishes between lay people, church members (soldiers), and officers (in essence ministers, but who fulfill many other roles not usually fulfilled by clergy of other denominations) (The Salvation Army, "Organisational Structure").

Hackett (who also founded the Victoria chapter), and Lieutenants Lizzy Tierney, Hannah Lynes and Barbara Iverach, in the newspapers and in public often referred to by the common nickname for female officers, the Hallelujah Lassies. Outfitted with timbrels and Bibles, the four Vancouver officers staged their open-air meetings in Vancouver's largest park, Stanley Park, separated from downtown only by Burrard Inlet. There, "their praises and preachings could be heard clearly across the water in the city centre of Vancouver" ("Salvation Army Spectacle").

The press coverage of the Victoria and Vancouver examples illustrate that female officers presented a novelty to the Canadian public and an attraction in their own right. Historical sources suggest that in the 1880s more than half of the Salvation officers were women. In Ontario between 1882 and 1890 more than seven hundred women joined the ranks of the army as officers, the Army's religious leaders, and not just soldiers, the Army's equivalent of an involved layperson, in order to dedicate their lives and service to the salvation of others (Marks 178). Records indicate that the majority of women who joined the Salvation Army were domestic servants. Commonly seen as the lowest members in the social strata of late-Victorian society, the Army provided these working-class women with a relatively stable income and a sense of equality through "the opportunity to play active leadership roles, strengthening their sense of value and self-respect in a society that devalued them" (161).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Critics remark that this equality was not always realized in the upper echelon of the movement's hierarchy. Although the Army gave women a public role, it cannot be said that it gave them an equal role with men. While many women laboured as corps officers in cities and towns, the military hierarchy definitely favoured men. Critics point out that with the exception of Evangeline Booth, daughter of the Army's founder, all Army Generals have been men. Every Canadian Territorial Commander, again with the exception of Evangeline Booth, has been male. Nor were Army women paid as much as men. A female officer's salary was 70% - 80% that of a male officer. As Walker asserts, "The disparity between men's and women's wages belied the Army's commitment to equality [and] made the position of single women officers even more precarious than that of their male counterparts, much like the position of employed single women in any other occupation."

In an interview with historian R.G. Moyles, quoted here at length, "Hallelujah Lass" and founder of the Vancouver chapter Lieutenant Hannah Lynes reflects on their pioneering efforts and the connection between frontier entertainment, theatricality and spirituality:

During those years, 1887 and 1888, we held meetings in Hart's Opera House on Carrall Street ... And when the opera was wanted for theatricals, we went out in the street and held our meetings. Hart's Opera House was a one floor, rude building of just rough, unpainted boards. It would hold perhaps four or five hundred people, and there was a sort of gallery at the back, but the main floor was level, and the seating accommodation was benches; there were no chairs, and the floor was just rough boards. ... We had three meetings on Sunday, morning, afternoon, and night, and meetings every night in the week when we could get the building. At first Captain Hackett took the meetings, and the other three assistants helped her. We would have Hart's Opera House packed with men, no women at all, hardly. There were no women here, and there were no theatres or anything else excepting the saloon bar where the men could go, and there were a lot of young men--and old ones--here who had just arrived and were strangers and were glad to attend the public meeting, and the men would follow us into the Opera House. When we paraded the streets before entering the Opera House we were led, well, at first, we had nothing but the drum and Lieutenant Tierney carried the flag. I sang as we marched along, and Captain Hackett was out in front. (Lynes qtd. in Moyles 94)

With only two or three officers responsible for each outpost, a female officer's work before 1898 required considerable initiative and effort. In addition to their missionary work on the streets and in bars as well as the selling of the Army's international magazine, the *War Cry*, Army members were expected organize and preach a variety of services every day, organize collections and fundraising events, manage the books, plan

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Yet the salary paid to female officers was higher than most working-class employment available to women. See, for example, Taiz 92ff and Walker 468ff.

and march in street parades and find other innovative ways of convincing the public to attend their meetings. Officers were required to raise enough money to cover the cost for their work, including renting halls and theatres, on top of their own salary (Marks 184).<sup>70</sup>

The Salvation Army gave women equal responsibility with men in management of local outposts, for preaching and welfare work based on the convictions and biblical interpretation of the Army's co-founder Catherine Booth, who believed that women were equal to men and it was only inadequate education and social custom that made them men's intellectual inferiors. Women, according to Catherine Booth, were well-suited for preaching to the masses as it "exalt[ed] and refine[d] all the tenderest and most womanly instincts of her nature" ("Female Ministry" in Wayne 242). In her often cited "FEMALE MINISTRY: OR, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel,"<sup>71</sup> Booth argues that preaching does not damage women's feminine character or subvert her natural role:

Why should woman be confined exclusively to the kitchen and the distaff, any more than man to the field and workshop? . . . [I]f exemption is claimed from this kind of toil for a portion of the male sex, on the ground of their possessing ability for intellectual and moral pursuits, we must be allowed to claim the same privilege for woman; nor can we see the exception more unnatural in the one

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<sup>70</sup> Critics often downplayed the hardship and working conditions of female officers, as for example the following excerpt from the *Toronto World*, quoted by Lynne Marks in her study *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario*, reveals. To the writer of the article, the Salvation Army "offers light work, along with good clothes, good board, and a good time generally. What wonder then, that 'Captain Jacks' and 'Hallelujah Lasses' abound? They are simply trying to earn their living in this way, because situations in stores are difficult to obtain and they will not go on the farm ... The lass ... wants to escape the drudgery of the kitchen, or the factory. More than that, it may be that opportunities for entering upon such drudgery may not very easily be found to suit her. The 'hallelujah' door is open, and she goes in. Employment, wages and living make the main motive" (172). Marks points out that while articles frequently downplayed the hardship that Salvation Army members encountered, the average wage of a female officer was comparable to those in domestic employment. But she also reminds the reader that, as all wages were taken out of local collections, officers in new posts or with little support from the community earned much less (183). Furthermore, according to the Army's record, about 35% of the female officers left the Army within their first year of service and more than sixty per cent left the Army within three years (186).

<sup>71</sup> Originally published in London in 1859 under the title "Female Teaching," her speech was republished as an edited less confrontational version in 1870 under the title "Female Ministry."

case than the other, or why God in this solitary instance has endowed a being with powers which He never intended her to employ. ("Female Ministry" in Wayne 242f)

To Catherine Booth, preaching and public speaking were neither at odds with a woman's expected social role nor with the scriptures. Her attitude that women ought to preach wherever and whenever the Holy Spirit called them to do so was reflected in the structures of the Salvation Army that that permitted sanctified men and women equally to serve as preachers. Although churchgoing and piousness were strongly linked to the ideal of Victorian femininity, to the dismay of most Army critics, like their male counterparts, female Salvationists were expected to stand up in front of a crowd and give testimony to their faith by describing the sin and misery of their past lives. But critics were even more upset by the women's claim to preaching from the pulpit and on the streets and thus focused their criticism in particular on their spiritual leadership. As Lillian Taiz remarks, "[T]he Army regularly challenged prevailing images of womanliness when they interfered with a woman's responsibility to be on public streets working for God. A sanctified woman had an obligation to take to the streets in the name of Jesus, precisely because she was the same as a sanctified man" (87).

Feminist historians point out that

The role of the Salvation Army officer violated almost every facet of the dominant female ideal ... Ladies were not expected to call attention to themselves, certainly not by marching through the streets in bizarre outfits that conjured up images of actresses and circus performers—or even more sexually suspect women. Respectable women were not supposed to abandon the domestic sphere for the public platform in any form, let alone by usurping the role of religious leaders. (Marks 179)

Marks also cautions that due to a general lack of records, very little is known about the ideals and cultural values of working-class femininity that can be used to determine to what degree joining the Army violated gender conformity. To her, the appeal of becoming a female officer is clear: "Working-class women lacked any equivalent to the public forums of street corners and hotel bars where rough male culture was expressed. [Furthermore, only] a minority of working-class women became involved in cross-class temperance and literary societies ..." (170). In order to legitimize the trespass of female officers into the generally male-dominated public sphere of the pulpit, the stage and bawdy public establishments, the Salvation Army strategically emphasized a notion of self-sacrifice and submission, assumed natural feminine qualities, in the work of the female officers. "As the *War Cry* continually reminded them [and the public], by becoming Salvation Army officers, [the officers] had abandoned all self-interest and had dedicated their entire lives to Christ" (Marks 184). Army General Maude Booth's 1895 Chautauqua lecture on "The New Woman" makes it very clear that the Salvation Army's "women warriors" were everything but lady-like and their behaviour was not dictated by social convention or class expectations but by religious expectations:

Woman, I think, is a beautiful name. I cannot bear to hear an Army warrior called a "lady." It always seems to me to be so out-of-place, such a come-down from the holy, natural, unaffected name of woman, and besides that it savors always to me of the world. (qtd in Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous* 46)

A few, such as, for example, John Bengough in his satirical poem "The War Cry" in which he contrasts the almost naive goodness of two female officers with the boorishness of young Torontonians in a bar, cautiously admired the work of female Salvationists. To Bengough, the female officers were neither warriors nor ladies, but

innocent young women (most of the women that joined the Army were under twenty-five) who succeeded through their unwavering belief in the goodness of their fellow human beings:

Within the vaulted entry and across the polished tiles,  
 T'o'rds the group of flippant gossips, under fire of the  
 rakish smiles,  
 Came a pair of mild-faced maidens, clad in modest navy  
 blue,  
 With scoop-bonnets of the Army and the badge of crimson  
 hue; [...]  
 And with gentle step approaching, as the loungers stood at  
 ease,  
 spake in accents low and winning, "Will you buy a War  
 Cry, please?"  
 Offering a sample paper from the bundle that each bore,  
 "Will you please to buy a copy?--it will tell you of the  
 war." ("The War Cry")

If Bengough portrays the officers kindly (although as somewhat naïve), newspapers and critics frequently linked female officers' public work and their blue army costumes to the Victorian cultural assumption of the immorality of actresses. Robert Collins quotes an Anglican minister's 1884 pamphlet condemning the uncouth practices that competed more with the secular marketplace of entertainment rather than with the churches. Quoted here at length, it illustrates the severity of the gender transgression of which the Army's female officers were accused by their middle-class critics: "If I were to go into the lanes of the city beating a big drum, with one of my elders beating a little one, accompanied by several of the women of the congregation, playing tambourines and fiddles, what would be thought of us?" Especially the role and visibility of female officers upset the author of the pamphlet: their role was "not only inconsistent with the position in which it has pleased God to place women, but also with that modesty which is an ornament to her

sex.” Moreover, “their late hours and all-night meetings of both sexes together do not promote good order or the morals of the community” (anon, qtd. in Collins 40).

British historian Pamela J. Walker describes the case of two of Europe's most prominent Salvationists, Kate Booth and Maude Charlesworth, who were interned and later expelled from Geneva for preaching there. In her defence to the courts, Kate Booth challenges the presumption that she has transgressed the norms of womanly conduct by clearly delineating the difference between evangelist and theatrical performance to her critics:

It is contrary, you tell me, to your sense of what is right and becoming that young women should preach the Gospel. Now, if Miss Charlesworth and I had come to Geneva to act in one of your theatres, I have no doubt we should have met with sympathy and approval from your public. We could have sung and danced on your stage; we could have dressed in a manner very different from, and much less modest than, that in which you see us dressed; we could have appeared before a miscellaneous audience; ... we should have got money; ... and you would all have sat and approved. ... But when women come to try and save some of the forty or fifty thousand of your miserable, scoffing irreligious population ... then you cry out that it is unseemly and immodest. You would not bring your wives and daughters to hear us [talk] of Jesus, though you would bring them to hear us if we danced and sang upon the stage of your theatre. (Booth 1884, qtd. in Walker 145)

Historian Diane Winston explains the Army’s deployment of its female members, “allowing them to lead services, sending them to dens of vice and drink, and dispatching them across the country to start up ‘corps’ (churches)—shocked contemporaries.” In particular, “While Salvationist publications redefined what ‘modesty’ and ‘respectability’ meant in God’s service, secular writers alleged that young girls who joined the movement had neither” (472). She quotes a *New York Times* article alleging that “whoever joins the

Salvation Army from the nature of the case bids good-bye to respectability as much as if he went on the stage of a variety show” as a typical example for common theme of moral hysteria in the coverage of the Salvation Army in the US American and Canadian Press.

Even Canadian liberal feminist, social reformer and writer Agnes Maule Machar in her 1884 publication on the work of the Salvation Army questions the respectability of the revivalist organization for young women. Nevertheless, she applauds the Salvationists’ use of noise, spectacle and military structure for attracting the attention of young men whose “fondness for pleasure” may otherwise lead them astray (*Red Cross Knights* 17). She moreover agrees in paternalistic fashion common to the middle-class Anglo-Canadian advocates of the social reform movement that "The 'parades' and street marches give an outlet to physical restlessness and an external reality to the 'crusade,' while the vivacious airs and hearty singing equally gratify their love of music, and any latent tendency towards 'public speaking' finds abundant scope in the 'testimonies.' Indeed, the 'Army' meetings seem to combine the benefits of a safe 'club,' the old-fashioned singing-school, and a Kindergarten for 'children of a larger growth'" (30). However, if she expresses doubt about the suitability of the Army for women based on the nature of their work "in the dens of sin and vice," and on their risk of sexual immorality, an exaggerated fear common to the (often false) newspaper reports about mixed-sex barracks and the "unhealthy passions" aroused during services (18), her 1891 article "Our Lady of the Slums," published in *The Week*, reveals a change in Machar’s (and also in the public’s) attitude towards the work of female Salvationists. She concedes that the Salvation Army’s "peculiar features have sprung into being from the sore necessity of the evils it seeks to meet" and finds high praise for "this multitude of ministering angels ... walking, living,

amid the foulest surroundings with unsullied raiment kept pure amid the evil by the invincible panoply of faith and love" (234).

Not only voice and drum but also the militaristic costumes for female Army officers were intrinsic to the military theatrical spectacle and instrumental to women's transgression into the public sphere. But the Army women's costumes need further analysis, as their conception and use in some respects fail to support non-traditional aspects of the roles the Army women were assigned. Developed by pioneer Salvationist and wife of founder William Booth, Catherine Booth's uniform design for female officers was comprised of a long navy-blue skirt and a close-fitting high-neck front-buttoned tunic with white lace-edged collar that set the Salvationist apart from the fashionable world, but nevertheless retained the mid-century long, lean matronly silhouette that emphasizes the wearer's maternal qualities (Aschelford 82). A short blue travel cape and an old-fashioned black straw bonnet with a band of black silk and strings as trimmings and a red sash with 'Salvation Army' written on it completed the outfit. The bonnet with its wide brim and the blue cape with red lining were devised to protect the officer from spilled alcohol and thrown vegetables. Female officers often chose a tambourine with bright red and blue tassels and a plain linen-bound Bible to accompany the uniform. On the one hand, a female officer's costume presented a form of dress that "bestowed spiritual authority" (Winston, "Living in the Material World" 469), "a turning away from the markers of the emerging commodity culture" with its emphasis on female fashionability and adornment (466). Furthermore, it indicated a repudiation of conventional mores in favour of service, spirituality and community. On the other hand, the costume allowed a safe transgression for the young women into aspects of city life

normally closed to respectable late-Victorian and Edwardian women. Not only were the Salvationists through their “military blues [enabled to] engag[e] in activities, such as commanding, preaching, and administering, that exceeded the bounds of feminine behaviour ... [l]ikewise, they could ‘invade’ public spaces—saloons, dives, and brothels—considered outside the realm of feminine propriety” (467). In order to maintain respectability and a public appearance of feminine propriety, female officers were thus asked to dress and behave in a manner simultaneously feminine and activist, matronly and militaristic, approachable and charming but piously religious and secular (Taiz 96).

The somewhat unfashionable, matronly appeal of the costume is a crucial component in the gender performance of female Salvationists in order to remain within the boundaries of feminine propriety and piety. As much as the unfashionable costume made the officers stand out in public, it also mitigated the fine line between transgression and conformity. Although not a standard uniform until the mid-1880s, it was implemented as a way of policing the appearance of propriety in response to several female officers' practice of subverting the purpose of the uniform by adding lace, ribbon, jewellery or silk to the outfit. Whether those who altered their Army garb did so in an attempt to make the outfit more fashionable or, in the sense of a costume, to attract the public's attention as in the case of three Paris, Ontario, Salvationists who caused a commotion wearing long red silk dresses with 'The Salvation Army' embroidered on their bosoms and 'Hallelujah' boldly lettered on the hems of their skirts (Collins 39), the Army consciously treated the garments worn by Salvation Army lasses as a functional part of their public roles. Diane Winston draws attention to numerous *War Cry* articles denouncing fashion as antithetical to authentic Christianity. Her research also indicates an internal debate before the

introduction of the standard uniform as to what was permissible for female officers to wear. She cites several articles that link fashionable attire to the workings of the Devil and quotes a lengthy article by General Maud Booth, who shared command of the American Army with her husband Ballington from 1887 to 1896. In her editorial, Booth strategically links the wearing of a standardized uniform to the notion of female self-sacrifice in the name of God: "I know that the wearing of the uniform has always been, and will always be, to a certain extent, a cross." But, she continued, since the Army's good intentions were now widely recognized, its official attire was, at least, no longer an object of ridicule and persecution. She predicted that if all Army women wore the uniform, "what a mighty power should we, as women, become" (Booth qtd. in Winston, "Living in the Material World" 470). But wearing any variation on the uniform or adorning it in order to attract more attention was to be avoided. To her, the female officer's uniform had to conform to regulations because, as Maud Booth explained, "it is absurd on the face of it to have the brass 'S' of a Salvationist stuck on the collar of a velvet waist, or to see the Army bonnet worn above bangs" (Booth qtd. in Winston, "Living in the Material World" 471).

With the introduction of a standard uniform in the late 1880s, the Army began to consciously police an image of Salvation Army womanhood as self-sacrificing and chaste, as well as bold. As Winston notes, the Army decided that "Wearing the uniform required women to renounce the trappings society deemed essential for a sexualized female identity, in effect compelling reflection on one's relationship to God, self, and society" (Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous* 45). The acceptance of female officers and their respectability rested on their highly visible role in public religious meetings, in bars

and pubs, in parades, and preaching street evangelism. Thus, the theatricality of the female officers' uniforms was a key component to the Army's success, signalling to the eyes of the public a militaristic nature that allowed officers to move into masculine-defined public spaces and, at the same time, emphasized in its design a conforming to traditional domestic roles as caregivers and self-effacing nurturers with a commitment to holiness and service.

If acceptance of the transgressive Army officers rested on the emphasis on feminine virtues, their role as public personages remained an ongoing subject of public interest. Lynne Marks reports that in Thorold and other small and medium-sized Ontario communities, waning interest in the Army and its revival meetings was restored when a new female officer joined the local chapter. According to Marks, quoting the local *Kingston Whig*, "The arrival of a new female officer in Kingston drew larger crowds than "when the Governor General and the Princess were here"; the hall was "jammed to the doors" (169).

If the unusual degree of publicity scandalized parts of the public in the early years of the Army's operations, the demonstrated record of social benefits that accrued from its social services eventually led to its acceptance. As Collins explains in his history of Salvationism in Canada, between 1886 and 1890, the Salvation Army founded several rescue homes for prostitutes in several major Canadian cities. Additionally, the men's social work began in 1890 with a Prison Gate Home in Toronto. The same year a Children's Shelter was opened. The first Maternity home was opened in Saint John, N.B. in 1898, precursor to the Salvation Army Grace Hospitals. In 1901 The Salvation Army recommended to the federal government that a prisoner probation system be adopted,

leading to Canada's first parole program. In 1908 salvage work (now called recycling) began in Toronto, leading to the well-known Thrift Stores. In 1911 the first Juvenile Detention Centre was established in Manitoba and turned over to the Army to operate. That same year a farm colony was established in Coombs, British Columbia (Collins 67).

Much of the Salvation Army's success was based on its extensive social work. Moreover, this emphasis on the social aspects of salvation functions is yet another strategy that allows for a broadening of active roles for female officers in the public display of maternal qualities. Recruitment ads in the *War Cry* frequently called for "whole-hearted devoted women ... charged with a deep compassion for the lost" (*War Cry* qtd. in Marks 185). This emphasis on maternal qualities, social service and feminine self-sacrifice was more attuned to the contemporary feminine ideal than preaching from the pulpit.<sup>72</sup>

More striking than the Army's emphasis on a display of traditional gender roles is the Salvation Army's female officers' use of a rhetoric that relies heavily on the metaphor of one family, spiritually and, on a secular level, as one Canadian nation under God. These tropes are frequently used in both their public performances and the Army's publications. Often the two distinct meanings of family are conflated (Marks 184).

It is equally important for the understanding of the performative aspects of the Salvation Army to note that the stories of salvation that the Salvation Army used to

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<sup>72</sup> It is interesting to note though, although the social component of the work appealed to contemporary ideals, the reality of the Army's social work differed significantly from its projected image. Taiz notes that disproportionately more female Army volunteers were working for the social arm of the Salvation Army than served as preachers or spiritual guides (99). Lynne Marks suggests that although the *War Cry* often featured biographical articles with encouraging titles like "How She Became a Rescue Officer," the Army struggled to find women for this type of volunteer work. According to her research, "Half of all women who were posted to rescue work left the Army immediately after their posting. Most female officers clearly preferred an active public role as preacher to the more private self-denying and suitably feminine role of angel of mercy" (185).

promote itself, whether through public testimony on stage and in the streets or the published biographical narratives in the *War Cry*, are inherently melodramatic (although undoubtedly grounded in true experiences) as they follow the standard template of temptation, fall and redemption. They ring true to the experiences of Canada's lower classes, as Mariana Valverde points out, "even though--or perhaps because--they are full of clichés and melodramatic conventions. Domestic violence, drinking, unemployment and crime were, after all, real experiences of the poor, not just figments of social workers' imagination" (66). Albeit rooted in authentic experiences, Valverde asserts that many of the popular stories with titles "such as 'Fence Jack: Redeemed Burglar' and 'A Pickpocket in Heaven' spent much more time entertainingly recounting the misdeeds and adventures of these melodramatic characters than detailing their conversions" (152).

One of the more spectacular events that played into the audience's taste for melodrama, conversion allegories, and the rhetoric of family frequently utilized by the Salvationists was a public wedding. These memorable mass events served the Army's cautious emphasis of heteronormative gender roles partly to reinforce a more traditional image. Additionally, they served to quell rumours critics perpetuated in the media about the cohabitation of unmarried officers in mixed-sex barracks and the "unhealthy passions" of late-night revival tents.

The particular theatricality of 'Hallelujah Weddings' attracted large crowds of spectators. Collins describes the January 1884 ceremony between popular Captain Joe Ludgate and Captain Nellie Ryerson as follows:

At 3:00 p.m. the Hallelujah minister and Captain Ludgate arrived at Bridge Street Church [to] loud huzzahs from the assembled throng. Tambourines whirled and drums boomed as the band led the congregation in a Salvationist

song, "O how happy they are," to a hit tune of the day, "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching."

Then came an "experience meeting"--basically a giving of testimony, including Ludgate's own. There were tales of conversion. A "Hallelujah tailor" told how he hadn't hit the bottle for nine months, inspiring "Happy Bill" to spring up and sing, "He's given up whiskey drinking," to the jingle of tambourines.

Finally the bride in blue uniform arrived on the arm of the local bank manager, and the marriage went ahead in fairly conventional fashion. The couple launched their honeymoon by going to prayer meeting in the same church that night. (39)

According to Collins, a crowd of one thousand spectators, including the local police magistrate and the town's judge, were present for the wedding. Each spectator paid fifteen cents a head to watch the parade and the ceremony. Marks cites a 'Hallelujah Wedding' in Hamilton in the summer of 1884 that according to her historical sources attracted 1,500 people and charged the same price of admission. As the *Hamilton Spectator* reports,

The waving of banners, the banging of tambourines, and the frequent choruses of hallelujahs helped keep excitement at fever pitch throughout the ceremony. Afterwards, the couple rode in a carriage 'decked out with many coloured ribbons' as they paraded through streets thronged with curious onlookers. Apparently, women made up the majority and certainly the most interested portion of the crowd! (qtd. in Marks 169)

Moyles notes that the *War Cry* often featured descriptions of 'Hallelujah Weddings' written by single female officers that often ended in how they imagined their own wedding parade (39). If all sources acknowledge the public appeal of these memorable events, especially for single women, it is important to note how much these spectacles, by participating in an overriding heterosexual romance plot with one (virginal) bride and one

groom as its protagonists, function by staging public closure to an imaginary narrative. The so-called white wedding, as both normal, inevitable and immutable (Ingraham 235), reiterated a conservative notion of gender roles for Salvation Army officers, placed the officers within the discourses of religious and national family and contained any rumours of moral or gender transgression. It furthermore signifies moral, productive, family-centred and, most importantly, appropriately-gendered citizenship (240).

Beyond the symbolic function of the family as both public and religious spectacle, the marriage plot of the public Salvationist weddings holds significance if assessed through a narrative lens. The Army's construction of a public narrative that contains a somewhat less traditional gender image within the comedic closure of a wedding ceremony is strategic as it presents a sharp contrast to the melodramatic testimonies, stories and songs about poverty, sin and hardship shared that are performed during the ceremony by bride, groom and selected members of the wedding party. This juxtaposition of comedic and melodramatic elements helps emphasize the Army's overarching metanarrative of fall, redemption and salvation. Evangeline Booth's biographer summarizes the workings of the Army in a similar manner: "The Salvation Army has taken the good in life and made it as sensational as the evil. It has made the spiritual as sensational as the material. The melodrama had been devoted to downfall. It now included uplift" (Wilson 21).

A historical pageant staged at Toronto's Arena Garden, premier site of Toronto ice hockey before 1931, to mark the Army's forty-fifth anniversary and territorial congress in Canada on Thanksgiving weekend 1927 illuminates the Salvationists' success in writing the Army into the imaginary national narrative. Under the guidance of Lieutenant-Commissioner William Maxwell, eight hundred Salvationists performed the history of

Canada in several processions. According to the *Globe* reviewer, the pageant "portrayed with realistic vividness 'Canada's Pioneers of the Past, Present and Future,'" combining historical representation with the brass band, song and sermon spectacle of revival meetings ("Canada's Pioneer Days Recalled" 17). Under the rays of multiple multi-coloured search-lights the audience witnessed first the arrival of Jacques Cartier during what the reviewer claims to be a Caribou powwow. In accordance with the narrative of progress, the first scene ended with a prayer by Cartier and a reading of the Gospel. After an interlude of popular Salvationist songs, the Indians introduced Jacques Cartier to Miss Canada who, adorned with a long white rope and a single crown of maple leaves, was enthroned in the middle of wigwams while the band played, and the people sang "Oh Canada." This was followed by a procession of Champlain, Kirke, Dollard, Frontenac, Montcalm, Wolfe, U.E. Loyalists, Brant, Simcoe, Brock and Tecumseh in front of Miss Canada's throne. However, to the reviewer "the most inspiring spectacle of all" was the scene depicting Confederation:

Nine groups of young women ... in beautiful garments and bearing torches, each group representing one of the Provinces, marched in while the band rendered stirring music. They then surrounded Miss Canada and assisted her to the light the Beacon of Confederation. The introduction of Miss Salvation Army into Canada 1882 showed a representative group surrounding Miss Salvation Army, among whom were seen two of the pioneers in the Dominion. Miss Canada and Miss Salvation Army then joined hands and the pageant passed out in review. (17)

The symbolic configuration of Miss Canada and Miss Salvation Army that concluded the pageant illustrates how the Army within a short period of forty-five years was able to write itself into Canada's pioneering narrative and inscribe itself into the social fabric as a

pan-Canadian movement, relying in its public self-presentation on both the theatrics of spectacle and transgressive femininity.

The theatricalities of social reform in Canada, although maybe not as well covered by newspapers and periodicals as in Great Britain or the United States, nor as spectacular, are thus arguably indicative of what critics have identified as the rather conservative 'progressive' leanings of the Canadian social reform movement. Nevertheless, the social reformers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century embraced a wide variety of theatrical practises in a diverse range of social spaces: the playhouse and the music hall stage, church auditoriums, pubs, hockey rinks, schoolrooms, streets, private parlours, monthly and weekly magazines. In their performance they refashioned women's roles in order to provide a bridging function and extend the role of women into the public spaces of higher education and public civil discourse for the sake of Canada's moral and social purity. In order to remain on the side of respectability, the language, form, format and location of the performances were adapted to strategically address specific audiences and to fit within moral boundaries. As Alan Filewod muses, in many cases "the resulting explosion of theatrical practises defies categorization, but one thing that stands out as a common principle is the reliance ... on theatrical pleasure" to advocate for social change (*Committing Theatre* 41).

Just as the conditions under which these theatrical practices were conceived encompass very different social realities, so too the para-theatrical works of suffragists, educational reformers, temperance advocates and the Salvation Army rely on a variety of strategies that extend a progressive civic role for women into the public sphere for the sake of moral reform. Their implicit common claim, whether in Salvation Army revivals or in

closet dramas and mock parliaments, is based on belief in an equality of men and women as engaged citizens for social reform to help Canada “to make women's rights, social reform, and Christian morality its priorities” (Bird, *Redressing* 91). The forms of theatre used to advance women’s roles into the public sphere during the social reform movement are self-consciously chosen types of para-theatre: theatre that works at a certain distance from and, simultaneously, creates a certain spectatorial distance with respect to the social practices that it produces in order to exploit a newly created transgressive space. The three different but similar strategies of gender reversal for the social good in Sarah Anne Curzon's 1882 closet drama *The Sweet Girl Graduate*; the popular suffragist mock parliaments as exemplified by several versions of *The Women’s Parliament*; and the public performances of temperance societies in general, but specifically the theatricality of the Salvation Army, were strategically used forms of political activism that allowed women to enter the public arena and, in their maternal role as what Karen Blair calls “torchbearers of culture and enlightenment” (3), offer morally uplifting entertainment that advanced women’s roles as social reformers for the greater public good of morally and socially advancing the Canadian nation.

## Chapter 4 – Staging History: Writing Female Characters into National Historical Narratives

In his essay “The Growth of National Feeling,” published in the second installment of the *Canadian Historical Review* in 1920, W.S. Wallace reminded his fellow historians of Canada, whose academic discipline had been professionalized relatively recently,<sup>73</sup> that a national identity is based “not on the factors of language and religion, but on those of a common fatherland, a common history, a common allegiance, common political ideals, and common hopes for the future” (165). Before the turn of the century, most historical research had been done in amateur organizations. Despite forty years of amateur historical societies’ fervent work to research and write the history of Canada within the Empire as a narrative of progress, to Wallace and his fellow professional historians the forging of identity remained an incomplete project and thus warranted their professional engagement. A common national history proved progress. If Canada were to overcome the English-French tensions, if Canada were to gain an independent place amongst countries of the world, and if, as Wilfred Laurier had promised, the twentieth century were to belong to Canada, then society’s leaders and intellectual elite felt they had to foster a national spirit and a sense of historical progress worthy of a great nation.

In many ways, Wallace’s concept of a national spirit fostered by a sense of a nation’s historical progress is what motivated amateur historians in Canada before history became

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<sup>73</sup> Although Canada academic history departments were established beginning in the 1890s, and G.M. Wrong introduced modern Canadian history at the University of Toronto in 1896, the professionalization of history in this context refers to the establishment of Canadian historiography as an academic discipline and a shift away from history treated as a narrative art to history based upon research. In this sense, the professionalization of history as an academic discipline in Canada climaxed in 1922 with the founding of the Canadian Historical Association in the modern sense of the term and in the modern sense of conducting original primary research.

professionalized. The decades between 1880 and 1920 witnessed the creation of distinctly Canadian amateur historical and literary societies with the purpose of documenting the history of her provinces and the dominion, educating the public and narrating a unified version of a national history.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, before the establishment of Canadian historiography as an academic discipline, these types of amateur gatherings shared a common goal in their exploration of history—the education of Canadian citizens through history and the arts. The members of these societies were mostly Anglo-Canadian, middle-class men and women. Many of these societies were not merely motivated by an interest in historical research, but by a desire to shape the commemoration of historically significant events in order to create an overarching national narrative that, in Benedict Anderson’s words, would forge an “imagined community” (3). Their work was marked, as Cecilia Morgan points out, by an unalienable belief in “the ‘family’ of empire, history as a romantic narrative, and Canadian history as that of the ‘anti-conquest’” (“History, Nation, and Empire” 492). The participation and enthusiastic engagement of women in these societies aiming at forging a national narrative is remarkable given Victorian women’s limited access to the public. Not only did they often constitute a quarter of all members of groups open to both sexes, several groups -- such as the Women’s Canadian Historical Society (WCHS) and the Women’s Literary Club -- were exclusively women’s organizations. Many prominent Victorian Canadian women writers were active members, using these societies as a platform to engage in amateur historical research that in turn informed their prose, poetic

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<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Heather Murray’s *Come, Bright Improvement: The Literary Societies of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (2002).

and dramatic writing. In 1904, writer William Kirby addressed the Women's Literary Club of St. Catharines with the following:

But for the women of the Dominion we should be too much engrossed in considerations of business, money and material advancement to remember those higher duties of patriotism and literature, on which after all the true prosperity of a country is founded. It is the women who like the Vestal Virgins of Rome keep alive the perpetual fire of love and devotion to this country. I hail wherever they are found those historical and literary societies like yours which devote time to such noble purposes. If Canada is to be forever saved to the empire it will be mainly through her patriotic daughters. (qtd in Morgan, "History, Nation, Empire" 491)

William Kirby's address brings to mind Anne McClintock's insight that within the temporal configuration of the Janus-headed symbolic presentation of nationalism, women are configured as backward looking (McClintock, "Family Feuds" 63). If nationalism stresses women's role as transmitters and preservers of national culture and history, Kirby goes even further with his evocation of sanctity and selfless duty through the simile of the Vestal Virgins, a common neo-classical trope that renders women as preservers of the home fires and simultaneously extends this domestic role to a duty to the nation state.

It is commonly argued that Canada in particular has a need for the creation of consensual myths, or as Pierre Berton has called them, "consensual hallucinations" (12), as Canadians lack a common language, religion or ethnicity. A need for a shared history informs Canadian civic ideology; both history and ideology have to be continuously reinforced and recreated through the telling of what Daniel Francis, applying Eric Hobsbawm's theories of "invented traditions" to a Canadian context, has termed Canadian national myth. Indeed, instead of providing precise records of events, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century amateur historians selected and emphasized a

particular set of what they deemed important events, institutions and historical figures and elevated them to legendary status in order to construct a hegemonic, coherent narrative of a common cultural project (Francis 11). On the one hand, this “work of history” (Boutillier 2) could put amateur women historians in a position to construct narratives of national development that emphasized female participation in the key events that shaped the Canadian nation. The discovery and promotion of this genealogy of heroic examples of active citizenship could in turn allow for a redefinition of civic engagement and active participation in politics for women. On the other hand, McClintock’s insight that women in a nationalist discourse always exist in a Janus-faced paradigm of political participation complicates the progressive and participatory nature of writing history for women historians. As Cecilia Morgan explains,

the writing of ‘history’ as a testimony to the ‘progressive’ nation was a complicated project for women historians. For one, ‘women’ as a group had often been defined in nineteenth-century historical writing as existing outside historical time, outside the political, economic and military events and processes that ‘built’ nineteenth-century nations. Thus, ‘women’ existed apart from progress, development and change: their lives and experiences ‘identified with the immediacy and intimacy of social life.’ (“History, Nation, Empire” 492)

Furthermore, until the 1929 victory in the ‘person case,’ symbolically giving Canadian women the right to participate in all facets of public life, “the women who carried out historical research and penned narratives of ‘nation’ were not full members of that entity and risked being excluded from stories of the dominion’s inevitable march of progress to adulthood” (492).

In this chapter, I am investigating how the writing and staging of historical dramas about key events of Canadian history allow for a re-imagining of history that includes

women's experiences and, moreover, an inscription of female subjects as important participants in these events. This chapter follows two lines of inquiry. The first part of this chapter contrasts the efforts of Catharine Nina Merritt to draw attention to a neglected group of Loyalist women and their virtuous suffering in her 1897 play *When George the Third Was King* with the rendition of Laura Secord's courageous walk in Sarah Anne Curzon's 1876 closet drama *Laura Secord, Heroine of 1812*. It is curious to note that, despite a general lack of public interest in the commemoration of female historical figures, Curzon's focus on the suffering individual contributed significantly to Laura Secord's ongoing popularity while Merritt's heroic women often remain a footnote in popular Loyalists' histories. The second part of the chapter contrasts the popularity of Secord in the pan-Canadian imagination with the second most popular female Canadian heroine between confederation and the Second World War, Madeleine de Verchères. Comparing the melodramatic representations of each character by Canadian women playwrights may partly explain Verchères' significantly less important legacy in the national imagination. In both parts, I am investigating how women dramatists re-write national narratives of commemoration in order to include strong female figures in these histories and thereby strengthen women's contemporary participation in Canadian political discourses.

Using rhizomorphic forms of theatricality that include the pageant, amateur theatricals and closet drama, authors like Edith LeLean Groves, Lucile Vessot Galley, Sarah Anne Curzon and Catharine Nina Merritt set out to rewrite historical events and refashion female historical figures in order to include themselves in the community of nation builders and to create role models for Anglo-Canadian women to participate as active

citizens in the public realm. "History ... was a site of education and moral instruction for national identities and participation in the nation" (Coates and Morgan 133). Whether the plays depicted the treatment of the Loyalists or dramatized the War of 1812, the interpretations of history they presented were teleological; although concerning mostly Upper Canada, these dramatized histories were held to be representative of the 'Canadian' experience and taken to show episodes in the development of a national identity. Whether they dramatized the stories of hardship and suffering of Loyalist women in the American Revolution or rescued the names of Laura Secord and Madeleine de Verchères from historical oblivion, the tropes invented and the strategies employed in all historical melodramas by early Canadian women writers are similar. All rely on popular melodramatic properties and plot lines that stir sentimental emotions. Yet the rhizomorphic forms of historical melodrama written by Canadian women between 1880 and 1940 differ in one aspect: their melodramatic focus on either an individual or a group of protagonists. The focus on an individual, lonesome hero in popular melodrama is often seen by critics as a masculine storytelling pattern, while feminist theatre historians have argued that the more egalitarian retelling of the experience of a group of women is a common representational strategy in nineteenth-century melodrama (Bank 140). It is interesting to note that the dramatic strategies the women playwrights under discussion in this chapter chose for their heroines, the way each playwright emphasized either the trials of an individual female protagonist or the hardship of groups of women within a larger historical conflict, have affected the success of their commemorations in capturing the public imagination.

Melodrama with its easy moral alignments allows for an illustration of moral character that reflects the nation embodied in each of the female characters invented. It is interesting to note that all authors under discussion in this chapter were influential members of women's historical societies that actively participated in the commemoration of historical events and figures. The theatrical representation of historical narratives became a means to stage 'history' as a testimony to women as active citizens within the national project. Furthermore, all of the historical narratives examined here staged a Canadian identity emerging under the umbrella of imperialism by commenting on the relations between Anglo-Canadians, French-Canadians and First Nations. The resulting female characters in turn become the corporeal embodiments of the nation and its virtues. Through the epicene construction of Canada as a nation, the Anglo-Canadian writers who staged the historical narratives of Laura Secord and Madeleine de Verchères, two heroic figures who symbolically represent and reconfigure the developing relationship between French and English Canadians and the imperial centre, invented and helped cement their versions of events over other contending narratives of national identity. The staged versions of historical events carefully managed the perceived conflict between public and private self in women by relying on narratives of 'progress,' civic duty, and female moral superiority and, by relying upon a conventional notion of white women's innocence in historical and colonial power relations (Haggis 106), these narratives of gender also worked to mitigate the harsher aspects of imperialism and nationalism.

Performing the War of 1812, dramatizing the Loyalists' exodus to Canada, and other events that similarly depict the perceived ideological separation between Americans and Canadians are popular preoccupations in narratives of Canadian nationalism

(Ferguson 27). The historical conflict between U.S. Americans and Canadians featured prominently as one of the seven episodes of significance in the development of the Canadian dominion in Governor-General Grey's 1908 historical pageant that celebrated the Tercentennial of Quebec City. And in May 2012, in celebration of the two-hundredth anniversary the War of 1812, the ruling Conservative government of Canada spent an estimated \$28 million on events across the country, including a short film, designed to present to Canadians historical experiences that distinguish Canadians from U.S. Americans.

### **Negotiating Female Roles in the Commemorations of the War of 1812**

This tendency to reshape history based on contemporary needs is not new. In her analysis of commemorations of the War of 1812, Elaine Young argues that the popularity of the celebrations and the interpretative meaning given to events like the Battle of Lundy's Lane and its protagonists have significantly changed over the course of time since the late nineteenth century. For example, while most of the 1912 centennial commemorations focused on the Treaty of Ghent and celebrated the end of the war as a peaceful and reasonable Canadian measure, both its sesquicentennial and bicentennial celebrations focused on the beginning of the war and emphasised a difference of military cultures and values rather than a difference in allegiance and a clash of ideas. Young observes that local historical societies in 1912 commonly emphasized "devotion to Britain, anti-Americanism, and conservatism as the basis of Canadian identity." These societies "sought to create a national identity that emphasized loyalty to the Empire, and stressed that Canada's past (and future) lay with its imperial ties" (14). However, later

celebrations turned the commemoration of the War of 1812 into a question of Canada's own national identity and maturity. If the centenary of the War of 1812 did not promote the notion that the war had made Canada -- instead arguing merely that it had preserved Canada for the British Empire -- then, according to Young, all later celebrations interpreted it as an important step towards Canada's independence (4). For example, only recently and to the dismay of leading scholars, in launching the 2012 bicentennial celebrations the Conservative government characterized the war as helping "establish our path toward becoming an independent and free country, united under the Crown with a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity" (qtd. in Schwartz). Moreover, the Ministry of Canadian Heritage produced a one-minute cinematic retelling of the key events to be screened in all movie theatres across Canada in order to inspire Canadians from coast to coast to coast to get involved in activities across the country to mark the anniversary of the War of 1812 ("Harper Government Encourages"). The movie, in what has been called a "one-minute adrenaline-filled distortion of history" with close-up shots of weapons, dark forests and a distressed Laura Secord running in a panic to deliver her message, ends with an ominous patriotic statement and a close-up of male soldiers: "But we defended our land" ("Ottawa's Shock-and-Awe Film"). Here as well (in accordance with many male historians' accounts of fight, flight and exile with regard to Loyalist histories of the war) women remain shadowy figures that appear primarily, if at all, as dependants to be protected (Morgan, "History, Nation, Empire" 495). In this sense, despite the efforts of female playwrights and historians like Catharine Nina Merritt and Sarah Anne Curzon, these historical figures have, with the exception of candy-coated heroine Laura Secord,

been relegated to the historical sidelines, and even Secord's legacy remains under negotiation.

The twentieth-century depiction of panicked femininity and male military bravery differs substantially from Sarah Anne Curzon's monumental 1876 closet drama *Laura Secord, Heroine of 1812* and Catharine Nina Merritt's 1897 play *When George the Third Was King*. Both plays emphasize the female experience in and women's contribution to the successful defense of British North America. But while Merritt dramatizes the group effort and hardship of Loyalist women in the American Revolution and during the Loyalist exodus, modelling it after her own family's history (Wagner, *Canada's Lost Plays* Volume 2 154), Curzon's play dramatizes Laura Secord's brave deed. Both writers were highly active in various historical societies that lobbied to pay special tribute to Loyalist history as part of a larger narrative of Canadian nationalism and sought to draw attention to how women's courage, strength of character, selfless determination and virtue shaped the outcome of the conflict of 1812. For example, an active member of various organizations that included the Toronto's Women's Literary Club, Curzon indicates in the preface to her play that she became interested in the history of the War of 1812 and the role of Laura Secord through a debate about veterans' pensions in the press in 1873-74 (Preface). Curzon argues that to her surprise the story of Secord's heroic walk was only mentioned in passing. She describes her motivation thus:

Yet it could not pass without observation that, while the heroism of that date was dwelt upon with warm appreciation and much urgency as to their deserts, Mrs. Secord as being a woman, shared in nothing more tangible than an approving record. (Preface)

Together with Mary Agnes FitzGibbon, Sarah Anne Curzon founded the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto in 1895. Catharine Nina Merritt was the association's first elected treasurer. Born in Brockville, Ontario January 25, 1859, into a Loyalist family with a military, political and literary tradition, Merritt had, according to Anton Wagner, a strong personal interest in entrenching Loyalists' mythologies and commemorating her own family's participation in the Battle of Queenston Heights and Lundy's Lane. Her grandfather had served as an officer in the Queen's Rangers, a royalist corps, during the American Revolution and fought in the War of 1812. Wagner, in his introduction to *Canada's Lost Plays Volume Two: Women Pioneers* points out that *When George the Third Was King* is loosely based on Merritt's family experience of the war. In addition to the play, Merritt often promoted her grandfather's Loyalist experience through the reading of papers, for example, her talk on "Incidents in the Life of Major Merritt, U.E.L.," presented in February 1913 to the Canadian Women's Historical Society (Knowles 170). Merritt left the Canadian Women's Historical Society in 1896 to support another historical society, the United Empire Loyalist Association of Ontario founded by her brother William Hamilton. In 1905, she founded the U.E.L. branch in St. Catharines and served as its first president.

Feminist historians researching late nineteenth- and early-twentieth women's organizations have cautioned not to assume a similar political aim among all members of the same association. As Morgan points out, while Sarah Anne Curzon was a fervent supporter of women's suffrage, fellow Wentworth Historical Society member and founder of Empire Day, Clementina Fessenden, openly opposed women's enfranchisement ("History, Nation and Empire" 503). Despite their different political

leanings—Curzon a progressive liberal feminist and Merritt a conservative maternal imperialist—in their plays, both Sarah Anne Curzon and Catharine Nina Merritt emphasize the moral and patriotic devotion shown to Britain by colonists resisting the invasion. Both plays set out to narrate and celebrate women's roles in the war effort by dramatizing women's contributions in melodramatic plot structures and characterization. However, their strategies differ substantially. Curzon's *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* celebrates the Upper Canadian 'heroine' and her virtues in order to write her into the official history and thereby, by elevating her into a mythological realm, promote female participation in the Canadian nation through a discussion of the moral virtues that form white women's contribution and relationship to the imperial state. Instead of celebrating a single woman's heroic contribution, Merritt's *When George the Third Was King* assumes the other approach to women's historiography common in the narratives of amateur historical societies. Instead of focusing on one person, her melodrama uses its cast and storyline to emphasize the war efforts of 'ordinary' women. Both plays utilize the properties of melodrama, with storylines that incorporate conflict, crisis, and resolution involving characters faced with moral decisions (Hamilton 43). Both plays adhere to Victorian ideology that the most moral decision must be made by a female character (Bank 239). Curzon's closet drama *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*, despite a lack of publisher's interest for eleven years "owing to the inertness of Canadian interest in Canadian literature at that date" according to the author (Preface), fostered the public commemoration of the war heroine and contributed to the mythological status of her protagonist while Merritt's efforts to pay tribute to women's unrecognized efforts received little public recognition. Indeed, *When George the Third Was King's* opening

night on June 17, 1897 at the Toronto Grand Opera House had, according its reviewers, despite its rather elaborate and well-advertised production “a fashionable, but only very modest” audience (“Indian Warriors Here”).<sup>75</sup>

If one takes Laura Mulvey’s observation into account that melodrama focuses either on several women and their actions or a single female and her deed, and moreover, that the single female lead and perspective challenges the status-quo of the male gaze as the centre of attention, *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*, with its display of female courage in a men’s world, should provide a greater challenge to its contemporary audience than Merritt’s *When George the Third Was King* (76).<sup>76</sup> But this explanation falls short when applied to these two plays. The question remains how Curzon succeeds in making her heroine more acceptable to late-Victorian audiences despite the fact that her actions transgress the boundaries of contemporary gender ideology. Michele Barret in “Ideology and the Cultural Production of Gender” identifies recuperation and compensation among several processes by which literary texts can challenge the status-quo in its representation of femininity while still reproducing dominant gender ideology. For her, the strategy of compensation is the presentation of images and ideas that elevate the ‘moral value’

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<sup>75</sup> Aside from the rather modest attendance, the reviews of *When George the Third Was King* were rather mixed. One reviewer noted, “The play and the performance proved an interesting study from many points of view.... The authoress suffers somewhat in her work from a lack of familiarity with the artifices of stagecraft, but the piece appeals to a healthy Canadian and Imperial sentiment and the fundamental ideal is happily conceived (“Miss Merritt’s U.E. Loyalist Play at the Grand”). Jessica Gardiner suspects a “characteristic anti-amateur bias” from the well-known theatre critic (278). To her, the accusation of a lack of dramatic showmanship is somewhat surprising as all members of the Merritt family, including Catherine, had a long-standing involvement in amateur theatricals and frequently produced and acted in amateur theatricals (see Wagner, *Canada’s Lost Plays Volume 1* and Gardiner 196).

<sup>76</sup> In “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama,” Mulvey distinguishes between two different points-of-view found in melodrama with female protagonists: “one is coloured by a female protagonist’s point-of-view which acts as a source of identification. The other examines the tensions in the family, and between the sexes and generations; here, although women play a central part, their point of view is not analysed and does not initiate the drama” (76).

inherent to femininity and thus justify a temporary transgression of Victorian heroines into the public sphere. Recuperation, the final return of the heroine to her 'rightful place,' is a literary strategy that allows for a defusing or mitigation of a challenging representation within a given historically dominant construction of gender (92). Judith L. Stephens argues that these strategies are not only found in prose but also are common on the stage. To her, unravelling these strategies in any given nineteenth-century text allows for an assessment of how women writers and playwrights were able to successfully challenge dominant gender ideologies (283). To Stephens, melodrama, with its obsession with female virtue and moral imperatives, provides a particularly interesting site in which to investigate the application of recuperation and compensation. Curzon's *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* and Merritt's *When George the Third Was King* rely heavily on recuperation and compensation. However, Curzon's staging of individual female courage and patriotism successfully mitigates gender conventions by offering an alternative to the dominant gender ideology instead of just diffusing challenges to dominant conventions by relying on a conventional marriage plot.

### **Loyalist Politics in Catharine Nina Merritt's *When George the Third Was King***

Merritt's *When George the Third Was King* in particular must be read as part of a larger effort of Loyalist families to establish themselves as part of a Canadian cultural elite. Historians have identified the 1880s and 1890s as a crucial time for the invention and entrenchment of the Loyalist myth. Norman Knowles suggests that "[t]he loyalist tradition was not inherited, but was continuously reinvented by groups to create a usable past that spoke to contemporary circumstances and concerns" (12) in order to "recast the

Loyalists into a principled and cultured elite” (5), enhancing their status as middle-class professionals in an increasingly industrialized society. He points out that the Loyalist commitment to Britain as “a divinely inspired sense of mission” (5) hides the fact that, rather than being the determined defenders of British values, many Loyalists settlers lacked a coherent and cohesive identity before the 1880s and had been ambivalent about leaving their property behind and moving to Canada in the first place (15). Knowles argues that to extend their influence, Loyalist descendants erected monuments, produced historical textbooks and founded historical associations:

Part of this larger phenomenon, the United Empire Loyalist Association of Ontario provided a forum in which its predominantly urban, professional, middle-class members could declare their patriotic and genealogical superiority and assert their claims to influence. Exclusive membership criteria, fraternization with distinguished social and political leaders, and officially sanctioned insignia all were part of a strategy to confer status and recognition upon the association and its members. (162)

Their collective efforts resulted in a cluster of related ideas, “unfailing devotion to the British crown and Empire, a strong and pervasive anti-Americanism, suffering and sacrifice endured for the sake of principle, elite social organs, and a conservative social vision” (3), that has come to be heralded as one of the defining elements of English-Canadian identity.

Written to be performed during Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations, *When George the Third Was King* was part of a movement to secure Loyalists’ privileged status in society. Gardiner suggests that using historical drama to promote the Loyalists’ cause was “unusual given the rarity of local playmaking, particularly from women from families of her status” (271). Moreover, as critics have pointed out, Merritt makes only a

thinly veiled attempt to hide the fact that she stages her own family history by changing the name of the family from Merritt to Fordyce (see, for example, Wagner, *Canada's Lost Plays* Volume 2; Gardiner 275).

Much of the play is based on the persecution of Catharine Nina Merritt's great-grandfather Thomas Merritt and his family during the American Revolution. Her great grandfather Thomas, on whom the character of Henry William Fordyce is modelled, was a captain in the American militia. He had fought for the British in the Battle of Lexington and distinguished himself in the War of Independence. Thomas, great-grandfather to Catherine and William Hamilton, had served under John Graves Simcoe with the Niagara Light Dragoons as a Loyalist. After the war, he settled in New Brunswick but returned to the United States in 1795. Members of the Merritt family returned to Upper Canada in 1796, settling on the Niagara Peninsula. William Merritt Knowles even goes as far as arguing that both Catherine and her brother's engagement with the Loyalist cause was rather self-serving as her ancestors were not true Loyalists insofar as they were not from a family that had resided in Canada since the revolution and had shown uninterrupted loyalty to Great Britain. To him, the advocacy of the historical associations as well as the play was designed to set that record straight. He quotes: "A close friend observed that the Merritts did not hide their desire that 'posterity might know the energies pursued by them to establish an Independent Country and provide a good home as it had done to thousands of families now scattered throughout every portion of this Province'" (32). Family members including her brother William Hamilton, along with friends like Lieutenant-Colonel George Alexander Shaw, who shared a similar background and interest in a

revisionist history casting their own families' loyalty in a positive light, as well as several Six Nations chiefs participated in the play production (Gardiner 275).

The three-act historical drama narrates the Fordyce family's escape from an America thrown into turmoil and anarchy during the American Revolution to a peaceful British Upper Canada. The first two acts are set in the Fordyce residence and depict the increasing violence of the conflict between the rebels and the Loyalists during the Boston Riots. Only the third act is set in Canada. The play interweaves historical suspense with a foreseeable romantic plotline and relies heavily on melodramatic devices and conventions common to nineteenth-century British, Canadian and American melodrama: wronged heroes, virtuous women, and ruthless, immoral rebels. In addition, it utilizes two features popular on the American melodramatic entertainment circuit: an Indian war dance made popular through travelling companies such as Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show and two foolish but loyal Black servants who provide comic relief, common to the popular minstrel shows of the variety stage (features Merritt's play shares with Curzon's *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*).

The first act immediately draws a parallel between the duty and loyalty of a daughter to her family and the duty of a citizen to the King. Margaret Fordyce, daughter of the King's Attorney-General William Fordyce, renounces her engagement to Nathaniel Crawley, a young successful Boston lawyer, who unsuccessfully tried to pressure her into marrying him within the next month. She rejects him, emphasizing her morally superior nature and rejecting a divided duty between her family and her husband:

Margaret: My parents lie in the way, and my brother, he is over-young to be left without me. He has never had another companion or play-fellow beside, and he would miss me more than anyone. In a few years he will be grown old

enough to go to Harvard College, and then, there will not be so great need for me to stay at home, and I shall be of a fitter age to take upon me the duties of a wife.

[...]

Crawley: *Whispers*. Margaret! If you marry me now, I will raise you to be one of the highest ladies in the land, -- your beauty and lofty bearing shall help me to climb up, step by step, into power and wealth, and who knows? one day you may be the wife of the President of the greatest Republic on the world. (163)

Whereas her statements and their symbolic configuration can easily be identified as an allegory of the relationships between Britain, power-hungry rebels and dutiful colony,

Crawley's urging reveals his true nature and the motive for the rushed marriage:

ruthlessly ambitious, he supports the looming rebellion. Margaret responds as expected:

Margaret: Traitor! stand back! Do not approach me! do not touch me! Happily, you have revealed your true nature, by your words, before it is too late; and your effort to win me, by your proffered share of gain, has but lost me to you forever. You must have been woefully mistaken in me if you thought that I, the daughter of a Tory, and one of the most loyal in America, would aid your treacherous design to overthrow the King! (163)

As stereotypical melodramatic fashion demands, the uncouth rebel is immediately juxtaposed with family friend Andrew Wallace who, threatened by rebels, was forced to renounce the King, feels he has "perjured mine honor and my soul" and joins the Queen's Rangers to make amends, foreshadowing the wronged hero as the destined match for the heroine (166). In a complicated plot twist, Andrew's father, a friend of the Attorney-General, is mistaken for William Henry Fordyce and shot by the rebels, indicating the outbreak of the revolution.

Instead of focusing on the masculine acts of military heroism, the second act illustrates the hardship endured by the women and their self-sacrificing commitment to the British

Empire. The Fordyce women dutifully hide British soldiers from roaming American forces, defend the British flag with their lives in the face of an overbearing caricature of a drunken American rebel officer smoking a cigar, and after being taken away as hostages to Albany, are in the final act allowed to join their husbands and fathers in Canada, where the audience learns in a humorous aside “there is three month summer and nine month winter, I am told; yet ’twere better to freeze in liberty, than to boil and burn with indignation here” (173). Instead of complying with submissive standards of female behaviour and following a melodramatic plotline that illustrates male heroism, Merritt’s female characters actively engage in the conflict. Merritt compensates the audience by offering a corresponding gender ideology that emphasizes patriotic self-sacrifice and courageous moral leadership by all three women characters, but foremost by melodramatic heroine Elizabeth. Merritt defuses this somewhat tame challenge to dominant gender ideology in the last act depicting the homecoming by closing the marriage plot and fulfilling the melodramatic contract by wedding her heroine to now worthy, battlefield-honored Andrew Wallace. The drama then remains in accordance with common conventions of Loyalist literature as identified by Daniel Coleman, in which “The loyalist cause must prove its absolute virtue in comparison to the rebel cause, and so it employs the code of military honour and self-sacrifice to counteract any suspicion of less admirable motives” (133). The fulfilment of the marriage contract within these conventions functions to help the reader to forget what he calls the “fratricidal disturbance” that explains the nation’s origin and forms the central action of the plot:

Women who have [commonly] been portrayed as secondary figures throughout the all-male plot of the national allegory of fraternity are suddenly required at its conclusion to

project a future beyond the conflict of brothers. This shift is typically achieved in loyalist narratives by containing fraternity as the story of the nation's past and replacing it with the trope of courtship and marriage as the story of the nation's future (133). In this sense, by adhering to the common conventions of melodrama and Loyalist literature, Merritt's attempt at exemplifying and paying tribute to the hardship of Loyalist women in the War of 1812 is subsumed under the dominant gender ideology that contains the counter-narrative within the common symbolic narrative of Loyalist virtues as central to imperial Canada.

Nonetheless, the play makes explicit statements about the political allegiances that supported British dominance in Upper Canada with several references to untrustworthy French and loyal Six Nations First Nations. Arguably, this serves to show rival groups in the mythical narrative of origin as "a threat to Canadian unity and peace, a threat not represented by the Loyalist settlers" (Gardiner 276).

Elizabeth: Within the past year. I have received but one letter, three months since. By the hand of our friend, Mr. Secord, in which you told me that war was over and the peace with England signed.

Fordyce: Ay! And it never would have been signed so soon if Congress had not feared the French were desirous of retaking Canada. 'Twas signed with the knowledge of the King of France!

Elizabeth: Father, think you that the rebels could have conquered without the aid of France?

Fordyce: Nay! Margaret! They could not, 'tis sure! They never would have sought protection from their late foes if they had not greatly feared their own weakness. But now, 'tis over, they must learn to stand alone. (Merritt 178)

In contrast, the dialogue in the third act stresses the loyal role the Six First Nations played in supporting British troops (although the First Nations' actors are not granted a voice).

Fordyce: [to Elizabeth] How now? You have added to your party in our absence; have you invited these our friends to sup with us? These are likely some of the Six Nations Indians, who fought so bravely for the King's cause all through the war. They, like ourselves, for the sake of loyalty have sacrificed their lands and friends, and though our side hath lost the issue, many lives we owe to these, our allies. *Chief comes forward and makes sign to show they wish to smoke the pipe of peace.* (181)

The threat of the French overcome, the Fordyces at the conclusion of the play find themselves living in Upper Canada alongside their sympathetic, famous Loyalist neighbours, the Secords and Chief Brant's people.

The Loyalist spectacle of *When George the Third Was King* is not only heightened by the comic interludes of the two Black minstrel show characters, but also by choreographed on-stage fighting, the musical interludes of pipe bands and a colourful Indian War Dance to welcome the new settlers to Upper Canada: "Not the least attractive feature of the performance is the massed bugle bands of the Body Guard, Royal Grenadiers, and 48th Highlanders, whose martial strains emphasize the patriotic spirit of the drama" (Music and the Drama"). The Toronto *Daily Star* enthused:

The war-dance as performed by the braves of the Seneca and Cayuga Indians has proved interesting beyond all expectations. Tonight they will add to the excitement by introducing a novel scene, ancient and unique in character, and bestow upon Miss Catherine Merritt, the honor of adopting her as a member of the tribe. Some customs will be introduced which are as old as the tribe itself, and will add another charm to the patriotic Jubilee entertainment. (*Daily Star*, "When George" 2)

The play ends with a patriotic tableau of all characters, one Canada united under the British flag, Indigenous and white settlers pledging allegiance to the empire and a life of service to British traditions. Heroine Elizabeth Fordyce, played in the 1897 production by

Catharine Nina Merritt herself, experiences a rather sentimental vision of Canada's future, here quoted at length:

Elizabeth: Ay! This good old flag doth speak a language of its own that every nation understands. It speaks of peace, of mercy, and of justice wrought to suffering men. But, husband, children! What is this I see before me rise? A vision of a hundred years from now! This little hut has multiplied a thousand-fold; it is the prototype of buildings made of brick and stone. These trees have changed in aspect, as I look, and some are lofty chimneys, some are spires, and in the streets I see the busy men, a steadfast, loyal, law-abiding race. I see the women, and their little ones, and all their faces shine with happy smiles. Within an open space I see a staff, and on it floats the Union Jack. And now the people gather round its base, and there with clasped hands, as if in prayer, they cry with one great voice, "God bless the noble men who sacrificed their wealth, their homes, their friends, their all, to save the good old flag, and plant it safe upon Canadian soil, where underneath its folds we may enjoy liberty and peace. (181)

Any attempt to give attention to the women's hardship is lost in the sentimentalism and jingoism of this final scene. Instead of celebrating the common sacrifice of the women Loyalists' experience, she falls back into what Benedict Anderson has identified as the "deep, horizontal comradeship of fraternity" that constitutes the imaginary community (7) in which women's contributions are sublimated through allegorical marriage.

### **Casting Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord as National Heroines**

If Merritt's mildly successful attempt is solely concerned with the Loyalists' contribution to the formation of Canada through the depiction of heroic female hardship and endurance, it is interesting to contrast this with the popularity of Canada's national heroines and their representation on the Canadian stage, in writing and in the national imagination. In late nineteenth-century English-Canadian literature and drama, women

writers frequently linked questions of national identity and discourses of gender to Canadian history in general and, specifically, to persons perceived to be outstanding figures of national importance. In an attempt to forge national historical narratives, historians and writers believed that commemorating heroes, such as Isaac Brock or Laura Secord, would imbue a sense of patriotism in citizens. Early Canadian women's drama repeatedly focuses on two prominent female figures from Canadian history: Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord: de Verchères as a fourteen-year-old Seigneur's daughter defending a fort, Secord as a Queenston wife and mother warning the British troops of an American attack. Both women became part of an apotheosis of national figures of historical importance during a time of severe changes in the concepts of 'history,' 'nation,' 'femininity' and 'masculinity.' Colin Coates notes that Laura Secord's and Madeleine de Verchères' popularity peaked during the post-Confederation era, a time in which more and more women were beginning to occupy new roles in Canadian society (Coates and Morgan 2002, 10). Both historical figures became primary foci for the processes of scrutinizing and reshaping women's contribution to the Canadian nation and the relationship between gender and national identity (a relationship inevitably reflecting the place of Anglo-Canadian, French-Canadian and First-Nations within the imagined nation).

Being able to point to a 'history' meant that not only could nineteenth-century bourgeoisies claim a common identity based on shared collective experiences in the past, they could also assert their status as members of a modern, progressive community that, bolstered by this knowledge, would be prepared for future challenges. (Coates and Morgan 133)

Both historical figures inspired works in similar genres in which their memory was celebrated: the historical society report, the school book, the monument, poetry, and drama. However, imperial and national political events had a strong impact on how the heroines were conceived. Anglo-Canadian staging of Madeleine de Verchères is complicated by the difference between the French- and English-Canadian versions of national narratives, particularly in the face of contemporary political events like the Boer War that tested national unity. In the second part of this chapter, I would like to draw attention to the strategies that allowed women playwrights to elevate Laura Secord into the female embodiment of Loyalist virtues, a project more successful than Merritt's attempt to pay tribute to a collective female experience of the War of 1812, and that also allowed these playwrights to imagine a heroine on stage who within the parameters of the imaginary construction of Canada as nation becomes the embodiment of the dominant narrative. But Secord was not the only historical figure to be commemorated in such manner. Attempts were made to celebrate Madeleine de Verchères on stage and emphasize the national virtues that would elevate her to a similar status in the national imagination. A comparative analysis of both attempts allows for a revealing insight into the prerequisites for the embodiment of feminine national virtues and highlights the parts of their stories that are not easily subsumed into an Anglo-Canadian national narrative of progress and female heroics and thus relegated Madeleine de Verchères to the sidelines of the national historical narrative.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> This study does not attempt to provide a survey of French-Canadian historiography or theatre history for that matter, and, given its focus on English-Canadian nationalism, does not comment on the status of de Verchères in French Canada's histories and self-imaginings. For this, see Coates and Morgan's 2002 comprehensive study *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord*.

**Sarah Anne Curzon's *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812***

In her closet drama *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*, Curzon sets out to illustrate that “bravery ... is born of noble hearts, / And calls the world its country, and its sex / Humanity” (110). Similar to Merritt’s attempt to commemorate the hardship of Loyalist women, Curzon’s drama—although primarily focussed on Secord’s heroic tale—offers the experience of several women in the conflict between British North America and the United States. For example, in the opening scene of the second act, her sister, also a widow of the conflict, shares with a British sergeant the story of how Laura Secord rescued her wounded husband from the battlefield before listening in turn to his tale about the selfless efforts of Lady Harriet Acland in the American Revolution inspiring Loyalist soldiers. Curzon’s strategies are also often those of Merritt, relying on recuperation and compensation, offering alternates to the expected gender behaviour and mitigating this through adhering to codes and conventions of propriety. In contrast to Merritt, Curzon’s closet drama allows her to persuade not only through its melodramatic structure, but also by offering a sophisticated argument, drawing on literary parallels and offering potential allegorical readings. Instead of following the patterns of a domestic melodrama, Curzon draws attention to one female protagonist and inserts her into heroic melodrama, a form often identified as more masculine (Brooks 112). Furthermore, by offering a historically grounded retelling of an individualized experience that also includes detailed knowledge of the military effort, Curzon successfully combines qualities of domesticity, imperial nationhood and amateur historiography in order to commemorate a female heroic figure within the developing Canadian national mythology. Or, in Celeste Derksen’s words, “with subtle pragmatism, she inserts feminist

policy within the nationalistic position she advocates” in order to present a role model for Canadian women to follow (“Out of the Closet Part 1” 6).

According to her Preface to the play, Curzon found her inspiration for Laura Secord’s commemoration in an article discussing government pensions for veterans of 1812. Curzon refutes claims that Canada has no history worth telling and sets out to “rescue from oblivion the name of a brave woman” to inspire “other hearts” with “loyal bravery” (95). Anton Wagner and Celeste Derksen praise Curzon’s preface as a revealing example of her literary activism and her rhetorical acumen in its ironic rhetorical play, negotiating conventions of femininity and masculinity, thereby exposing gender bias in government policy and commemorative practices (See Wagner *Canada’s Lost Plays* Vol. 2 93, Derksen, “Out of the Closet Part 1” 8). Both draw attention to the following passage in Curzon’s own introduction to the closet drama:

Yet it could not pass without observation that, while the heroism of the men of that date was dwelt upon with warm appreciation and much urgency as to their desserts, Mrs. Secord, as being a woman, shared in nothing more tangible than an approving record. ... To set her on a pedestal of equality; to inspire other hearts of loyal bravery such as hers; to write her name on the role of Canadian heroes, inspired the poem that bears her name. (95)

Not only does Curzon’s preface to the dramatization of Secord’s heroic walk critique gender bias in identifying heroes, through the strategic appeal ad populum it moreover redefines what a heroic deed is. “To save from the sword is surely as great a deed as to save with the sword; and this Laura Secord did, at an expense of nerve and muscle fully equal that are recorded of the warrior” (96). And although Curzon admits that “the story, to a woman’s mind, was full of pathos, and, though barren of great incidents, was not without a due richness of colouring if looked at by appreciative eyes” (95), in what critics

have identified as a feminine self-effacing strategy of referring to herself in the third person (see Derksen 8; Jones 9), her own act of recovery serves a similarly heroic end. Furthermore, it encourages readers to use both their logical reasoning and the capacity for empathy to evaluate historical narratives of national importance.

Despite growing historical evidence questioning the accuracy of Laura Secord's account of her journey and her politics of self-representation,<sup>78</sup> critics have identified commonalities in the way late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women writers like Sarah Anne Curzon and Emma Currie depicted Secord and her depictions by male amateur or popular historians. As Coates and Morgan show, the campaign to commemorate Secord as well as themes, tropes, motifs and other narrative properties do not differ significantly in Secord's representation by male and female writers (149). These narratives always include the themes of suffering, loyalty and bravery, illustrate the wilderness surrounding the pioneer settlement and its potential to become a new Garden of Eden, and depict the relationship between Indigenous and white society. Moreover, all narratives concern themselves with Secord's family genealogy, discuss her virtues, selflessness and feminine qualities and pay particular attention to her physical attributes. A good example can be found in Lucile Vessot Galley's 1916 historical pageant *Famous Women Character Representation: A Historic Entertainment*. Laura

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<sup>78</sup> Pierre Burton in his article "Laura Secord's Candy-coated Legend" highlights some of the historical evidence in Secord's tale that does not add up. He reports, for example, that at the time, Secord told Fitzgibbon that her husband had learned of the planned assault from an American officer stationed at Queenston. According to her granddaughter's account of what Secord told her, Secord herself had overheard the plans from American soldiers who had forced her to serve them food. While the first may be a rhetorical strategy to give her more credibility, complicating the matter is that according to historical records, no American soldiers were stationed in Queenston on the alleged night of the assault on British troops. Indeed, her story only became publicly known around 1860 when the visiting Prince of Wales allotted her £100 Sterling for her heroic deed. He notes that "By this time, the story was being used to underline the growing myth that the War of 1812 was won by true-blue Canadian patriots, in this case a brave Loyalist who single-handedly saved the British army from defeat." Burton concludes that "the tale is as murky as it is heroic" (F8).

Secord's dramatic monologue starts out by mentioning her husband's long-standing loyalism before elaborating on her selfless mission to rescue him from the battlefield of Queenston Heights: "In the final assault he was wounded, and I came to his assistance... I rushed between [the American soldiers], telling them to kill me and spare my husband" (23). Her bravery is constantly juxtaposed with her physical frailty and weak feminine self with sentences like "The Indians ran and yelled 'Woman' which made me tremble, but I did not lose my presence of mind" and "I returned home exhausted and wondering how I had managed to walk most of the night and all the next day under a tropical sun, because I was a frail and delicate woman" (24). Specifically, the gendered body performing the heroic deed is an important element of Secord's representation. Within the context of Loyalist narratives, the male fighting body is often identified as hypermasculine in its physical strength and its depiction suggests the importance of a lasting fraternity created through homosocial sublimation and triangulation. Cecilia Morgan notes that Secord commemorators not only focused on Secord's physical description of her delicacy and slender build, first mentioned in Fitzgibbon's own accounts of the incident, but also contrasted her frailty with the size and strength of the British soldiers in order to show that as a white woman of good birth she was not physically or mentally suited to undergo such hardship. Nonetheless, writers were eager to write about the marks of self-sacrifice such service left on Secord's body: "her innate frailty and slightness of stature, her bleeding feet, the exhaustion she suffered, the heat and insects of late June, and the trepidation and fear she experienced," effectively rendered her gendered body a historical, military, [religious] and political artefact (Morgan, "Creating a Heroine"). While circumstances may have demanded that Secord

step into the public realm in order to exercise her civic duty, her body's ability to transcend its corporeal limitations evokes religious symbolism through the allusion to a martyrdom that saves the Canadian nation.

Sarah Anne Curzon's 1876 closet drama *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* does not diverge significantly from this cultural script. The traditional three-act structure of "crisis, development, and denouement" (Bird 35) allows Curzon to use the first act to establish a scene of domestic bliss into which the war intrudes, inciting a conflict that threatens not only the private idyll of Secord's household but in turn also creates a public moral duty that can only be fulfilled appropriately by reinforcing and expanding the traditionally constructed virtues of wife and motherhood, aptly immersing the audience in the paradox Curzon exploits to further the role of women. The first scene of the first act, with a visit from a Quaker to the Secord's farmhouse, allows Curzon to establish a domestic, patriotic, and religious idyll that comes under threat by the intrusion of American soldiers in scene two (Derksen, "Out of the Closet Part 1"). Furthermore, the Quaker takes centre stage with his narration of his involvement in the Battle of Stony Creek, allowing Secord to display a self-effacing femininity in her hospitality, empathy and care. This introduces a parallel between the conflicting ideologies experienced by a religious pacifist in the face of war and Secord's domesticity threatened by the same forces and yet the Quaker foreshadows in his pronouncement that "innate forces sometimes tell o'er use / Against our will," the conflict for Laura who must choose between her duties to her family and the state. Thus, the play's conflict becomes a conflict of consciousness and a discussion of motherly duties to the nation that allows Curzon, as Celeste Derksen explains, to "expan[d] the female sphere into the active, public domain of the masculine, while

refus[ing] to rescind the domestic realm where women conventionally exert influence.”

Curzon transgresses gender assumptions by showing a woman with great physical stamina, and then undercuts this subversive tack by re-emphasizing Laura’s “feminine frailty.” This doubled, somewhat contradictory, strategy is highly pragmatic, since it allows the playwright to extend women’s roles without alienating her audiences or relinquishing traditional avenues of expression and management (“Out of the Closet Part 1” 12).

In defense of home and country, a woman can even take up arms, as the example of the female tavern keeper in second scene of the final act demonstrates. Although Curzon’s literary strategy of establishing moral parallels, as critics have pointed out, allows for a transgression of the separate spheres through a role reversal, it ultimately never threatens the essential qualities of the separate sexes. Derksen points out that despite the role reversal in the face of duty to nation and empire, as discussed at length in the third scene of the first act between Laura and Colonel Secord, the role reversal is only temporary. Neither Laura nor her husband lose their essential gender qualities throughout the play and will, at the end, return to their ‘proper spheres,’ “with their understanding of each other’s capabilities evolved, but with their respective functions not having been seriously threatened” (12).

The play’s constant identification of the nation as an imaginary family allows for a re-definition of bravery and, as Kym Bird charges, a discussion of what constitutes heroism (*Redressing the Past* 38). Discussions of male and female acts of heroism are constantly brought forward by all characters. This then, if the feminine conventionally resides outside the sphere of heroic action (Jones 10), allows Curzon to critique heroism as

essentially masculine. In accordance with the conventions of public self-effacement, in the play Mrs. Secord's achievements are neither mentioned by the protagonist herself nor displayed directly on the imaginary stage in the reader's mind. The reader only comes to know about her bravery indirectly, eavesdropping, for example, on a conversation between her sister-in-law and Sergeant George Mosier in Act 2, scene 1 in which the two characters discuss how Laura had rescued her wounded husband from the field of battle. To further emphasize Curzon's intention, the Widow Secord counsels in poetic application of several enjambed lines in iambic pentameter, that "Bravery is born of noble hearts / And calls the world its country, and its sex / Humanity" (27). According to Curzon, this bravery does not seek recognition but will find recognition in the eyes of others. Furthermore, the dramatic focalization in the last act shifts from the protagonist's journey to Fitzgibbon and the battle. In accordance with convention and in an attempt to diffuse her transgressions, Curzon has Laura Secord bow and leave the stage in the first scene. Having spent all her energy on successfully delivering her message, she is escorted home in a hammock. In line with the conventions of Victorian femininity, at the end of the drama the audience has to infer the success of Secord's heroic walk. In the last line of the play, Lieutenant Fitzgibbon thanks "a brave woman [for her] glorious deed" (139). The character of Laura Secord does not seek any recognition within the play. Moreover, Curzon never directly relates the significance of her message to the outcome of the historic battle, but lets her audience infer this from the order Fitzgibbon gives to his men in the last act of the play:

Men, never forget this woman's noble deed.  
 Armed, and in company, inspirited  
 By crash of martial music, soldiers march  
 To duty; but she, alone, defenceless,

With no support but kind humanity  
 And burning patriotism, ran all our risk  
 Of hurt, and bloody death, to serve us men,  
 Strangers to her save by quick war-time ties. (137)

In an extension of the well-trodden metaphor, a mother's duty in Fitzgibbon's speech becomes a mother's selfless duty to the nation. The didacticism Curzon writes into another one of his speeches a few lines later, highlighted by an enjambed line and caesura, serves as a reminder to honor mothers and is immediately contrasted by the call to manly action that does not need any further explanation, diverting the audience's attention to the military mission at hand:

Fitzgibbon: Therefore, in grateful memory and kind  
 return,  
 Ever treat women well.  
 Men: Aye, aye, sir.  
 Fitzgibbon: Now, then, for action. I need not say,  
 Men, do your duty. The hearts that sprung  
 To follow Nelson; Brock; have never failed.  
 I'm proud, my men, to be your leader now.  
 (137f.)

The imagined genealogy of heroic leaders that Fitzgibbon can draw on to motivate his soldiers not only seeks inspiration in male heroes like Admiral Nelson and General Brock, but also serves to integrate Secord into the echelon of national inspirational figures, thus extending the role of a female citizen in her duty to Canada. According to Beverly Boutilier, for Curzon "the primary obligation for women citizens ... [was to consider] 'the bearing of civil and national politics upon the home, the real practical life of the nation'" (Boutilier 57). In her view, women's "prescriptive responsibility for the home was transformed ... into a civic obligation to make the 'health, welfare, education,

and comfort' of the people a priority of local and national government" (57). Secord fulfils that role which in turn inspires others.

Kym Bird, in her insightful and extensive discussion of *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* in relation to Sarah Anne Curzon's liberal feminist politics, traces the origins of Secord's drama to W.F. Coffin's history *1812: The War and Its Moral*, often seen as a foundational text for Secord's mythology. Putting the drama and Curzon's other writing in a historical, social and cultural context, she argues that Curzon concentrated a good part of her energy on the recuperation of a national and imperial history, writing a substantial number of papers and addresses about Loyalist history, composing articles and poems about the War of 1812, the Battles of Queenston Heights and Lundy's Lane. According to Bird, Curzon's rhetorical strategies of re-defining both maternal duties to the nation and extending women's rights and responsibilities into the public realm are best illustrated in her address to the Wentworth Historical Society. Curzon's expansion of motherhood from a private duty to the responsibilities of the mother of Canadian imperialism in her fervent address presents, according to Bird, a paradigmatic example of how Curzon draws on both the imperial ideologies of motherhood and ideas of liberal feminism to make her argument to a diverse audience. After establishing common ground through patriotic appeals, she uses the symbolic embodiment of Britain, the United States and Canada in a melodramatic constellation to discuss the responsibility of the imperial centre towards its offspring, only to extend this discussion of virtues into its parallel—the discussion of duties of female Canadian citizens to defend their nation and the inherent qualities that allow women to naturally extend their role from the actual home to the imaginary home. Curzon argues that in the crucial task of nation-building, men and

women share equal responsibility. “Together ... men and women built up this noble country by whose name we call ourselves; together they must preserve and develop it; and together they will stand and fall by it” (23). After conjuring for her audience the familiar metaphor of Canada as “defenceless offspring” in the imperial family of nations, she warns them about the unequal relationship between the United States and Canada, which to her mind parallels the social oppression of women. If at first she defines Canada, in accordance with tradition, as daughter to an imperial mother, she afterwards extends the metaphor of motherhood to describe the relationship between Canada and her citizens, arguing that Canada is a “powerful but beleaguered mother who capably defends her home and children against American ascendancy” (25). Bird notes that by framing both the imperial centre and Canada as benevolent mothers, “Curzon transfers the virtues of self-sacrifice, maternal care, protection, and the succour for her children that exemplify women’s strength within a domestic feminist framework onto the male sphere of battle and war” (*Redressing the Past* 24). Curzon describes Canada’s role in the war of 1812 as a mother fiercely defending her home against the aggressor. In the aftermath of the war, and echoing Mrs. Beeton’s famous pronouncement, Canada “set her house once more in order and turned again to the task of providing for her children” (109). As Bird points out, her strategic definition of Canada as home and mother of a well-managed household allows her to include women in the process of nation building. Curzon sums up her argument by stating that “Man alone cannot make a home, and without homes there can be no country; home is the incentive, the anchor, the object of nation-building, and hard, rough and discouraging though the pioneer’s task be, woman has never shrunk from her share in it” (106). Within the liberal feminist belief in rights for women as equal

human beings and through a strategic extension of the epicene construction of Canada to motherhood, Curzon persuades her audience that the responsibilities of citizenship are shared between both sexes.

The play uses a similar line of reasoning by drawing parallels between the symbolic realm of the nation, its figural embodiment, and the moral duties and virtues embodied by its female citizens. Due to her inherent qualities of motherly care and female self-sacrifice, Curzon's Laura Secord can rise to inspiring patriotic duty and become both the agent for and the symbolic embodiment of Canada patriotically saving her children.

*Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* recovers historical memory to promote imperial-maternal duties and popularize a female role model for participatory citizenship, similar to other historical dramas and pageants of its time. Furthermore, it also makes explicit comments about the relationship of Canada's founding nations and the racial makeup white Anglo-Canadian women envisioned, thus revealing what Alan Filewod calls "Curzon's ideological complicity in the anglocentric structures of race and power that governed nineteenth-century Canada" (*Performing the Nation* 27). Its treatment of secondary characters, Americans, minstrel characters and Indians echoes the common views of Social Darwinism and racial hierarchy. French-Canadian support in the conflict is indicated, but not dwelt upon. Both Black minstrel characters and Indigenous characters, although loyal to the British cause, are presented as less civilized than the white Anglo-Saxon elite. Boutilier points out that although the play characterizes the Mohawk men allied with the British crown as crucial for Secord to complete her quest, Secord's initial encounter in the last scene of the second act imitates the cultural trope of a savage attack by scripting sounds of "Indian war-whoop" and evoking unseen raised

tomahawks. This common trope juxtaposes “white woman’s imperilled femininity ... with the stereotypically ‘savage’ masculinity of aboriginal man” (“Women’s Rights and Duties,” 64). Secord persuades the Mohawk warriors using well-chosen words that mimic imagined ‘noble savage’ speech patterns. Although the chief recognizes her bravery and sends a young chief to assist her, Curzon nonetheless presents the Indians as noble savages bought with “a few plugs of tobacco” (64). In this, the text remains anchored in its late-Victorian ideology of racial hierarchy in which “the political authority of white women ... accord[s] with the racial authority they already wielded as ‘civilizers’ within the empire” (64). Thus, “In Curzon’s dramatic world, bravery, loyalty, patriotism and all other ‘high’ ethical values belong to the Loyalists. ... While Curzon attempts to render a more active and respected role for women, she does not challenge the hierarchical order and moral orthodoxy of the dominant class, of which she is a member” (Derksen, “Out of the Closet Part 1” 11). Additionally, while the American soldiers are characterized by blunt manners and brutality through their treatment of women, children and the two Black Secord house servants, they are not completely beyond redemption, as Laura’s encounter with the sentry on the road suggests. Indeed, Bird draws attention to the fact that the same sentry who is first rendered as an enemy mutters that America would be better served fighting the Indians and opening up the Pacific Northwest than quarreling with the British (*Redressing the Past* 40). The two Black characters, rather than being representative of race relations of the future Canadian nation, function according to Alan Filewod as “memes of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and minstrel shows” (*Committing Theatre* 36). He charges that despite the anti-American sentiment common to Curzon’s time, Uncle Tom’s ethnic caricature had become an iconic template in popular conventions of

racist impersonation, thus adding to the careful mediation between the high culture poetic drama and the imperial spectacle that Curzon envisions (*Staging the Nation* 28).

Beyond the symbolic identification of Secord as (racially and ethnically specific) embodiment of the virtues of the budding Canadian nation, Sarah Anne Curzon carefully manages to integrate Secord's story into the biblical metanarrative that informs Loyalist discourse. The second act traces Secord's movement from civilization through the Canadian wilderness, relying heavily on the religious allusions common to Loyalist mythology (Duffy 4). The adaption of the biblical subtext common to all Loyalist texts provides a powerful example of Curzon's skillful use of re-signification, compensation and recuperation in order to commemorate Secord's heroic walk, integrate it into the public narratives of Loyalist mythology and, at the same time, use Secord's example to argue for the extension of women's roles into the public as equal partners to men in their responsibilities to the nation-building enterprise. Boutilier demonstrates that Curzon within the first act establishes a strategic biblical reading of Mark 12.30, "as thyself / Thou shalt regard thy neighbour" ("Secord" 21), both to condemn the American attack and to overcome the husband's objection against Laura Secord's arduous journey by arguing that the biblical figure of the neighbour has no gender and Mrs. Secord is thus commanded to aid Fitzgibbon by warning him. This subject position within a Christian discourse that finds a common humanity outside of sexual difference is echoed in several of the discussions of male and female heroism in the play. Kym Bird concludes that this parallel between the existence of the ungendered neighbour in the New Testament and the ungendered human in Curzon's liberal politics "displaces biologically determined

views of women's nature onto a liberal view of human beings [as equal and that this] liberates Laura to undertake her mission" (43).

Furthermore, Curzon builds recuperatively upon the common Victorian ideal of female capacities for empathy and suffering in order to render Secord as female martyr defending Canada, viewed as the Loyalist Garden of Eden. Canada, through the setting of the second and third acts, is presented as the Eden that with "a few cool drops to slake [a] parching throat" aids the weary Secord on her quest. Moreover, as Derksen and Jones have pointed out, the encounter with a rattlesnake leads Laura to transform the Christian creation myth by re-signifying Eve as banisher of Satan from the Garden (14). Jones reads into the depiction of the landscape tropes of traditional Marian iconography (11) and argues that Curzon goes as far as paralleling Secord with the description of Mary as a model woman. Furthermore, she argues Secord's encounter with the snake references another Loyalist trope, Canada as the new Garden of Eden. In this sense, Jones argues that by establishing a parallel between this symbolic defence of paradise against the outside intruder and Secord's journey, Sarah Anne Curzon boldly removes the curse of the snake from Eve. Not surprisingly, within the next scene, the U.S. American enemy is equated with the snake in the biblical garden:

No sound is heard, but, peaceful all enjoy  
 Their sweet siesta on the waving bough,  
 Fearless of ruthless wind, or gliding snake.  
 So peaceful lies Fitzgibbon at his post,  
 Nor dreams of harm. Meanwhile the foe  
 Glides from his hole, and threads the darkling route,  
 In hope to coil and crush him.  
 Ah, little recks that a woman holds,  
 The power to draw his fangs! (121)

Secord's unwavering belief in the narrative of Christ's redemption allows her to overcome the physical limitations of her sex in defending her country: "Yet I must try. Poor hands, poor feet, / This is rough work for you, and one small slip / Would drown me in the stream, perchance to drown? Not drown! Oh, no, my goal was set by Heaven" (123). The emphasis on hardship, in combination with the attention paid to her bruised hands and feet echoing stigmata-like signs of suffering, against the backdrop of the Loyalist subtext of a biblical exodus and return to a Promised Land, allow Curzon to create a narrative that promises redemption and reward in a New Garden of Eden, all in service of the Loyalist cause with the help of "those various [female and Christian] arts that times like these entail" (124). This rhetorical strategy of re-identifying masculine and Christian signifiers as inherently female virtues is defused through an overemphasis on female empathy and suffering. Laura Secord in Curzon's rendition thus becomes the embodiment of true Canadian virtues, masculine and feminine, defending the colony against the American traitor and promising redemption for a new Garden of Eden based on equality.

Anton Wagner's assessment that finds the third act and the conclusion of *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812* "almost anti-climactic" (*Canada's Lost Plays* Volume 1 143) may be partly due to Curzon's reliance on the defusing strategies that emphasize Laura Secord's return to her proper sphere. Curzon certainly adheres to the convention of feminine self-effacement. Having successfully delivered her message, Secord's conventional 'feminine' gesture of swooning and being carried away by male soldiers relinquishes the stage to a heroic two-scene all-male conclusion. Without drawing attention to herself or her successful mission, Secord returns home unassumingly, outside

of the closet drama's imaginary stage. Celeste Derksen puts it aptly: "Curzon is very clear to show that neither man nor woman has lost their 'essential' gender qualities and that they will indeed return to their 'proper spheres,' with their understanding of each other's capabilities having evolved, but with their respective functions not having been seriously threatened" ("Out of the Closet Part 1" 12). Instead of dwelling on the success of Secord's mission, the play concludes with a victorious assault and entertaining military spectacle. Only Fitzgibbon's last line reminds the audience to give "thanks to a brave woman's glorious deed" (Curzon, *Laura Secord* 139).

Readers of Sarah Anne Curzon's closet drama have commented extensively on the drama's rhizomorphic form, drawing attention to the various traditions she incorporates.<sup>79</sup> While this pastiche of styles and genres may look contradictory to modernist critics,<sup>80</sup> this conscious hybridity of form not only serves Curzon's self-proclaimed mission to rescue Secord's memory, but allows her to highlight certain attributes about Secord's heroic deed while carefully negotiating gender ideologies to aid her commemoration. Her manifold aims of advancing women's citizenship, establishing herself as credible amateur historian, writing Loyalist history and commemorating Secord require a strategic synthesis of styles. Likewise, her elaborate argumentation within the play, similar to her work in *The Sweet Girl Graduate*, requires strategic synthesis to accommodate different schools of thought and address multiple audiences. For example, the style of versification and closet drama stand in the long tradition of British poetic dramas by male authors like

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Bird, *Redressing the Past* 43; Derksen, "Out of the Closet Part 1" 14; Jones 51 and Wagner's introduction to Curzon's play in *Canada's Lost Plays* Volume 1 143.

<sup>80</sup> See, for example, Celeste Derksen's assessment of modernist assumptions in "Out of the Closet Part 1" or Alan Filewod's analysis of the dismissal of early Canadian theatre's hybrid forms in *Committing Theatre*.

Shelley, Tennyson and Browning to indicate the serious character of her work. Moreover, she appropriates a genre often dedicated to the commemoration of male heroism (Derksen “Out of the Closet Part 1” 12).

Closet drama by itself was not only the most popular form of nineteenth-century Canadian theatre (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 23). As feminist critics have noted, nineteenth-century women dramatists almost exclusively wrote closet drama to avoid the signification playwright, which given the reputation of the popular stage and music hall, could have been “detrimental to their social reputations” (Burroughs 76). Closet plays in accordance with this argument allowed women playwrights to participate in public discourse as “unlike published stage plays, [closet drama is] uniquely capable of conflating public and private discourses” (79). Derksen points out that in its association with poetry and history, a closet text is produced and consumed in the privacy of the home. This genre also helps the reader to accept Secord’s transgression into the public, male domain of war heroes and, in turn, aids Curzon in fashioning her via conventions that merge domestic and heroic melodrama. At no point in the text is Secord’s “heroic deed” exposed publicly on the imaginary stage of the play; her exploits remain second-hand knowledge through the anecdotes and references other characters report.

As works depicting history, Filewod argues that the “Consciously monumental” nineteenth-century verse dramas by Canadian authors like Charles Mair and Sarah Anne Curzon were “consciously retro-chic” in their employment of “pompous verse, tedious speechifying, and bombastic patriotism” in order to stress their literariness (*Performing Canada* 8). For nineteenth-century amateur historians, the writing and commemoration of heroes such as Isaac Brock or Laura Secord aimed at stirring strong emotions in their

audiences. History, as Hayden White has argued in “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality,” was seen as instructive and moral through an engagement of both rational and emotional faculties (6). Historical narratives are marked by both the intrinsic moral they emphasize and the moral authority of the narrator. Curzon contributed significantly to the uncovering of Secord by transforming the historical record into an identifiable heroine who stirs patriotic emotions through her inherently moral conviction and the arousal of sympathy. Indeed, Curzon perceived no contradiction between the facts of the story and its embellished presentation. As Bird’s research reveals, the play’s original 1887 edition was accompanied with detailed historical footnotes describing battles, military units and political terms of the treaties (*Redressing the Past* 39). She concludes that

Curzon’s text [with its historical apparatus and footnotes] presents itself as a history as much as it does a drama. To experience the whole of it, one must *read* the text, flip back and forth from scenes to footnotes, from dramatic action to historical documentation, and in so doing examine its facts, ponder its claims and context—in short, engage in the very activities involved in reading history. (39)

Although Sarah Anne Curzon had trouble finding a publisher for her work in 1876, the year the play was written according to her introduction, when it was finally published a decade later, her reviewers praised the 1887 edition of *Laura Secord, Heroine of 1812* for its “passages of much feeling and poetic worth, sincere appreciation of nature, art and domestic subject ... [and its] very copious historical notes [that] testify to Curzon’s conscientious researches” (*The Week*, 20 October 1897). Albeit Boutilier remarks that Curzon’s only option to publish the dramatic work was to pay for the publication herself (57), but the decade between its date of conception and publication had seen an increase

of patriotic feeling, not alone witnessed by the founding of several Canadian literary magazines. Furthermore, Filewod suggests that the success of Charles Mair's *Tecumseh*, a similar popular closet drama of historic monumentalism, may have contributed to the publisher's willingness to consider verse drama (*Performing the Nation* 16). In contrast to Curzon's adherence to propriety in Secord's acts and speeches, the dramatic text in other respects relies on a mixture of imagined spectacle, evocations of epic, and the trappings of historical drama (supported by scholarly documentation). The stylistic eclecticism included imagined musical pieces, war dances, and fighting scenes common to popular melodrama. This hybridity of form carefully marries popular melodramatic and sentimental conventions of the stage with poetic historical narrative in order to give the play sophistication and cultural cachet.

If the Diamond Jubilee, for which Merritt wrote her play, sparked an outpouring of patriotic fervour and inspired a renewed interest in historical writing and research, it certainly helped Sarah Anne Curzon to self-publish *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*. While her critics question the effectiveness of her strategy of inserting feminist thought into a play that never fully challenges the status-quo (Derksen 11), Curzon nonetheless succeeded in reconfiguring the notion of what constitutes heroism by "transfer[ring] female 'virtues' to the public/male sphere" (Bird, *Redressing the Past* 46). Most importantly, she succeeded in raising Secord's profile to the level of national legend, one that physically and spiritually embodies the ideals of Loyalist and Empire spirit within late-nineteenth-century budding Canadian nationalism. Furthermore, as critics have noted, Laura Secord is said to have inspired "the formation of several historical societies

and organizations,” including the Women’s Canadian Historical Society in 1896 with its motto: “Deeds Speak” (Bird, *Redressing* 31).

Although both Merritt’s play and Curzon’s closet drama rely on similar melodramatic strategies of recuperation and compensation to legitimize their subjects and aid the commemoration of women’s contribution to the Loyalist history of Canada, Curzon’s (albeit limited) canonical status indicates that her choice to give voice to one woman’s experience and thus rewrite the masculine-identified lonesome hero narrative may have contributed to the success of the play and Secord’s commemoration. But the choice of focus on individual heroism rather than collective endeavour is only one factor that can affect the success of literary attempts to write women into Canada’s history and potentially gain them symbolic entry into the public sphere. Several other factors come into play in commemorating Madeleine de Verchères.

### **Theatrical Commemorations of Madeleine de Verchères**

Although they took up a similar story of steadfastness and bravery, playwrights were not as successful in creating a similar veneration for Madeleine de Verchères. Madeleine de Verchères was the second-most popular Canadian heroine in pageants and historic spectacles between 1880 and 1920. Her story was almost as frequently dramatized as Secord’s. But the dramas written about de Verchères quickly lost their popularity. Laura Secord’s easy alignment with the paradigm of imperial Anglo-Canadian nationalism resulted in a preference for celebration of her Loyalist contribution, whereas French Canada was uneasily included in the prevalent imperial nationalism of post-confederation

Canada. Eventually, Secord was elevated over de Verchères into the pantheon of popular canonical historical figures.

Compared to other prominent stories of female hardship in Canada's pioneering mythology, de Verchères' story is equally heroic. On October 22nd, 1692, a fourteen-year-old girl saved the occupants of her family's isolated fort to the east of Montreal. De Verchères' parents had left the fort to fetch supplies from the nearest town. Caught by surprise in an Iroquois raid outside the fort, Madeleine de Verchères ran quickly back to the fort. According to her letters as cited by Morgan and Coates, she barely escaped the Iroquois warriors, losing a precious scarf during her flight, but managed to close the gates on the impending attack (20). As the oldest child of the absent Seigneur and necessitated by the situation, Madeleine assumed the leadership over the remaining people, organized the defence and went about making hasty repairs to the palisades. For the next eight days, Madeleine, in an act of cross-dressing, paraded the barricades in a soldier's uniform along with her younger brothers and frequently fired warning shots from the canon. Even more remarkable, during the time of the raid she famously opened the gate of the fort three times: to obtain neglected laundry from the riverside, to take in unexpected visitors who arrived in their canoe, and to greet the French troops coming to their rescue. Similar to Secord who, forgotten during her lifetime, asked for financial assistance in the face of poverty (Bird, *Redressing* 64), we know of de Verchères' story through epistolary accounts, letters in which an aging de Verchères pleaded for financial assistance from the colonial government (Coates and Morgan 20). Although Verchères was mostly forgotten through most of the nineteenth century, late nineteenth-century amateur historians showed renewed interest in her in their attempts at uncovering suitable Canadian

narratives of pioneer hardship during post-confederation. Madeleine de Verchères was thus often cited by nineteenth-century amateur historians in the latter half of the century as the pre-eminent heroine of the period of French colonisation of the New World.

Despite the attempts of late-nineteenth-century amateur historians and playwrights to commemorate her, and although she is still celebrated as one of the preeminent heroines for French Canada (Coates and Morgan 33), her status in English Canada waned over the course of the twentieth century.

The parallels between Secord and Verchères are certainly recognizable. In his 1937 *History of Canada Through Biographical Sketches*, William J. Karr, for example, contended that Laura Secord ... is to Upper Canada what Madeleine de Verchères is to Lower Canada” (172). Although the story and identification with the young heroine are very much entrenched in nationalist and sovereigntist French-Canadian discourse, her story was frequently picked up by English-Canadian historians and incorporated into their narratives of Canadian nationalism. Early twentieth-century English-Canadian historians’ and playwrights’ use of the figure can be seen as an attempt to appropriate the past of French Canada in order to provide a longer genealogy for the young Canadian nation. By appropriating the literal and metaphorical defence of family in Madeleine de Verchères’ story as a pan-Canadian colonial narrative, playwrights and historians often implied a continuous record of progress that linked French and English Canadians as one nation. Moreover, rendered as part of one mythical genealogy of the Canadian nation, French-Canadian colonial experience became a prelude to British domination and gendered imperial practise (Coates and Morgan 12). One example is Verchères’ inclusion in Governor-General Grey’s 1908 Tercentennial of Quebec City, discussed in

more detail in the third chapter of this dissertation (Nelles 404). In historical pageants and plays of the late-nineteenth century, English-Canadian women playwrights frequently staged their own version of the popular “Canadian Joan of Arc” (Harley), commemorating Verchères as an inspirational female figure unifying Canadian history as well as commenting explicitly on the relationship between English-Canada, French-Canada and First Nations. To illustrate this, the remainder of this chapter will focus on a brief discussion of Ida M. Davidson’s two-act play *Madeleine de Verchères*.<sup>81</sup> Davidson (19??-1944), a Winnipeg schoolteacher, turned to playwriting after 1913. Her plays, often for young audiences, focus exclusively on inspiring persons in Canadian history. And while her representation of femininity differs significantly from the conventions of female propriety evident in the dramas of Merritt and Curzon, her vision of the nation and its founders is in line with the often rather conservative view found in their work.

Ida Marion Davidson’s uneven two-act play restages the siege of Fort Verchères by the Iroquois. The first act focuses on the lead-up to the impending Iroquois attack inside the Fort. Most of it is spent on a discussion of heroic action and the duty to defend one’s country, but also features a lengthy recollection of the history of the colonial conflict between French settlers, British colonialists and the Iroquois nation—all under the conceptual umbrella of one Canada—by two characters depicted by the author as common French soldiers. But before launching into its exploration of history, the first scene opens to evoke a sense of folksy, domestic bliss. The curtains open and Madeline’s femininity is immediately highlighted as she sits over needlework. She then proceeds to

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<sup>81</sup> Although archival records indicate twelve plays about Madeleine de Verchères by English-Canadian women playwrights between 1880 and 1930, I unfortunately was unable to recover any other script. In a similar vein, little of the performance history of Davidson’s play can so far be recovered.

dance to a selection of J. Murray Gibbon's *Canadian Folk Songs* before the focus of the scene switches from the play's protagonist to the two experienced soldiers. The audience overhears a discussion about the historic rights and wrongs committed on all sides, French, English and First Nations. The soldier's popular imperial version of Canada's French colonial history is outwardly Francophile in its references to Frontenac, the Siege of Quebec and the smattering of an occasional "Mon Dieu!", but their remembrance of events and their historical explanations reinstate the popular British-identified meta-narrative of colonial expansion of two competing empires that inevitably will lead to the Battle on the Fields of Abraham:

Lavolette: There's the cause of all the trouble. Both the French and the British claim this great continent of North America, and neither will be satisfied with a smaller part. The raids that are taking place so constantly are only the opening assault of the great battle that must inevitably come. The Iroquois nation is the pawn in the great game of empire building. (34)

Indeed, according to this reading of the colonial encounter, the savagery displayed is a mere result of the brutality with which the attacks were made on all sides:

Lavolette: We must not forget that it was the attacks started by the Comte de Frontenac on the New England frontiers that angered the English and led them to retaliate by attacking the French colonies in Canada. The massacres of the English at Schenectady and at Salmon Falls do not reflect much credit upon the Comte de Frontenac or upon our own French people. ...There was no military advantage gained by these attacks, and the chief result has been a more active and bitter campaign against our people by both the British and their Iroquois allies. (33)

Here, the soldiers trace the perilous political situation outside of the fort's gate back to Frontenac, rendering the counter-attacks by both British militia and Iroquois allies as retaliation instead of acts of colonial aggression.

Madeline is presented at the onset of the play as a naive young girl, unaware of any impending danger. Overhearing the soldiers' conversation, she candidly exclaims that "A soldier's greatest happiness is in doing his duty." Her own sense of patriotic duty remains somewhat naive throughout the play. When the Iroquois attack dismays the men and women assembled within the walls of the fort, she encourages her fellow prisoners with patriotic aphorisms: "By our fathers this land was discovered, explored and settled, and by their descendants it shall be held" (34).

The fourteen-year-old girl symbolically embraces her masculine leadership role and duty by replacing her bonnet with a steel helmet, seizing a gun and rallying her small company:

Madeline: You miserable coward. Be a man. ...let us fight to death. We are fighting for our country and our religion. Remember that father has always said that gentlemen are born to shed their blood in the service of God and the king. (35)

In addition to the bravery and moral leadership she displays, Madeline is allowed to temporarily take on a man's job by transgressing several gender boundaries—like Secord—to perform heroic deeds marked by both courage and empathy. Furthermore, in a miracle of settler resilience and heroic action, she is able to open the gates briefly during the siege in order to rescue a stranded family. Her story thus epitomizes the capacity to survive often identified by earlier critics as a core virtue of Canadian colonists in a hostile wilderness facing threatening indigenous forces.

While the notion of settler resilience remains the same in Davidson's version of the siege, her treatment of gender in the play differs significantly from the conventions and patterns in prior accounts. Traditionally, retellings of Verchères's heroic resistance rely on certain feminine conventions to render the gender transgression of Madeline acceptable. In the French tradition of women warriors, most notably Jeanne D'Arc, retellings generally emphasize the heroine's young age and innocence to render her as pure through the use of symbols (Burnett McInerney 12). Jeanne D'Arc, for example, is often portrayed with a white flag as symbol of her purity and can only pick up a sword once she has cut her hair short. In order for Verchères to put on a soldier's uniform before parading the battlements to fool the Iroquois into miscalculating the manpower of the settlers left behind, the prior accounts all establish her virginity through the symbolic use of a red scarf. While rescuing the Fontaine family outside the fort from the Iroquois onslaught, Verchères almost loses a scarf in the escape from an intruding warrior, signifying a symbolic defence of her virginity. If her public account tested the boundaries of appropriate gender behaviour through masculine military effort and cross-dressing, her thus established purity enabled her unsexed body to transgress into symbolically masculine territory and allowed her to become a warrior (Coates and Morgan 24).

Similarly, Davidson's dramatization draws attention to Madeline's age through a display of an almost childlike innocence. Her depiction of Verchères' costume on stage also includes a scarf. However, Davidson removes the symbolic significance of the scarf and omits the part of the story that connects Verchères to a French-Canadian female warrior tradition. While the traditional Roman Catholic context of the virgin warrior would have demanded that only the assumed unsexed body could transgress gender

limitations, put on a male uniform and lead soldiers into battle, and this exceptional status would have required additional symbolic reassurances, Davidson removes the traditional French intertext by omitting these details. Davidson's modernized Madeline, stripped of these symbolic gender conventions and allusions to Roman Catholic sainthood, can simply switch her bonnet for a helmet by virtue of status and courage without any potential threat to her innocence. She moreover does not have to change into a soldier's uniform, an act of cross-dressing significant in the stories of female warriors like Jeanne d'Arc. This depiction of Verchères dressed as a woman but with a soldier's helmet conveniently strips her of her French-cultural heritage and allows for a more suitable heroism for a pan-Canadian narrative of pioneer bravery. Moreover, Coates and Morgan argue that even though she was not the only female heroine in the history books about French-Canadian colonization, Verchères became a popular subject in the English-Canadian imagination through these literary strategies, as without her symbolic connections to Roman Catholicism her "heroism fit comfortably alongside the other [both English and French-Canadian] stories of pioneer bravery" (18).

If Davidson strategically omits the symbolically loaded conventions of the earlier accounts, she nonetheless retains other markers of Verchères' femininity—although sometimes just in passing. For example, accounts of Verchères all include a second episode that emphasizes Madeleine's ongoing sense of female duty. Despite her near-fatal escape from the Iroquois, Madeleine returns to the river to fetch the laundry left behind during the initial attack without any masculine disguise. Davidson retains this part of the historical account that illustrates Madeleine's natural femininity as unchanged

despite her changed outward appearance in masculine garments (or at least soldier's helmet) when dutifully on patrol on the walls of the fort (18).

If the first act was set inside the fort, the second act shifts the audience's focus to the siege party outside of the fort's walls. Davidson's depiction of the Iroquois warriors in the second act serves to reinstate the exoticism of long-established stereotypes of vengeful savage Indians in colourful speech and war dances by the Indian characters with names like Lone Wolf, Eagle Feather and Black Hawk. Additionally, it conveniently renders the Indians as deceptive and cunning by juxtaposing their debates about devious military strategy with the bravery and resilience of the French-Canadian settlers:

Black Hawk: They are waiting to trap us. There are many soldiers in the fort. Twice they sent their woman out. One time she went alone to meet the man on the river. Once she came out with the little boy to take a few white rags that were lying on the grass. Would they send their woman if they did not plan to trick us and draw us closer to the fort so that they could kill us? (39)

The warriors plot to capture the fort during the night. Instead, Davidson quickly ends the siege with the arrival of French soldiers in canoes. Madeline surrenders her arms to the saviours and the play wraps up with another selection from Murray Gibbon's popular book of Canadian Folk Songs, "Vive la Canadienne" (43). Davidson never transgresses culturally established narratives. She uses the popular French-Canadian heroine and appropriates her by stripping her of her French-Canadian symbolism but retains her association with familial and feminine duties. Her soldier's helmet is enough to fool the raiders. Madeleine does not need to disguise herself to display leadership and bravery. Davidson transforms her from a French woman warrior into a brave young woman who

can temporarily trespass into a masculine sphere without losing her sense of feminine duties.

All three plays under discussion use melodramatic sentiment to fulfill nationalist goals and commemorate historical female figures that embody the virtues of Canadian nationalism by rendering them as performing feminine duties. Furthermore, all three playwrights consciously chose to recover women's contribution to history to inspire future generations. As the editors of a collection of biographies of famous Canadian heroines published by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire wrote in 1930: "We hope through these stories of Heroism, Hardship and Loyalty you may more fully understand how much had to be endured by the Early Pioneers of our Country" (McKinley 1). However, the work of amateur historians, including popular writers and playwrights, came under attack in the late 1920s. Historians have pointed out that the 1920s and '30s saw the professionalization of history as an academic discipline (Coates and Morgan 11). Academics sought to strip amateur history of its romantic features and establish a more objective history. This, according to critics, had a greater impact on Verchères' commemoration than on Secord's, not least due to the commercialization of Secord's candy-coated image. Moreover, Coates and Morgan contend that Secord's popularity was strengthened by, and in turn increased the importance of, the events of the War of 1812 for the Canadian national narrative. Curzon's strategy of giving history a personalized face and embodying the virtues of the nation in one person's body have over time proven more successful than Merritt's attempt to commemorate the contribution of a group of women. As Coates and Morgan point out, "certain groups and individuals have, historically, responded to the same narratives and participated in the same

commemorative processes—but for different, if at times overlapping reasons” (Coates and Morgan 8). All three dramatizations, those of Secord and Verchères as well as the commemoration of Loyalist women, shaped both the stories and our perception of these women. They were recovered from history in order to invent symbolically unifying representations of Canada as embodied in these figures. All three plays consciously foreground gender and set out to celebrate female heroines’ contribution to Canadian history. All three playwrights present to their audiences inspirational dramas that depict and legitimize acts of courageous civic duty by women during the most concerted efforts to establish a unique Canadian history between 1880 and 1930. However, the dramatic strategies they employ in depicting their heroines, as well as the culturally-determined popularity of the historic figures they represent, strongly affect the success of their commemorations. The relationships of founding nations and conflicts among competing narratives are touched upon in all three histories in the course of promoting one unified vision of Anglo-Canadian hegemony that would unite Canadians within the legacy of a shared history.

The performance of history as envisioned by Anglo-Canadian women playwrights like Curzon, Merritt and Davidson in many ways is more than just a *mise-en-scène* of a shared selective view of Canadian history which entailed a similar choice of events and heroic martyrs in order to construct a unifying narrative of maturation from dependent colony to self-governing Dominion. The embodied performances of history fit in several aspects Ann McClintock’s definition of a fetish in the display of “nationalism as fetish spectacle” (368). More than serving as simply an invention of “a usable past,” to borrow a well-worn catch phrase, historical figures like the Loyalist women, Secord and

Madeleine de Verchères were obsessively researched, continually dramatized and staged, and the meaning of their stories publicly negotiated. However, I am hesitant to cast them as fitting McClintock's hypothesis that these colonial fetishes mark "a crisis in social meaning as the embodiment of an impossible irresolution" (184). Fetishes are often, but not always, erotic, and are microcosmic expressions of social contradictions and repressions in McClintock's use of the term: "The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition" (idem). The desire for a common history that acknowledges women's contribution and, to evoke the Janus-faced allegory of history once more, enables these early women dramatists to see themselves as active citizens participating in civic engagement is not a manifestation of a repressed contradiction leading to obsessive repetition as much as a conscious negotiation of identity and meaning, a paradigmatic relationship of legacy, vision and revision. Sarah Anne Curzon, Ida Davidson and Catharine Nina Merritt actively contributed to the attempts by late-nineteenth-century female amateur historians and playwrights to rewrite historical events and refashion female historical figures in order to include themselves within the community of nation builders and to create role models for Anglo-Canadian women as active citizens in the public realm.

## Conclusion

It is the discursive operation of power in culture, its constituting of itself and its working in and through language, that makes the issue of literary power so complex and elusive. (Davey 1-2)

Most human performances are unrecorded. They pass by as unremarked. Theatre history, then, is for the most part a history of the forgotten and unremarked, traced through the survival of the exceptional. (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 2)

Looking through the developing historical corpus of Canadian dramatic and para-theatrical works, Filewod's succinct assessment of both the ability of his discipline and its limitations can be extended to all four academic discourses that have been employed in this dissertation— theatre history, cultural studies, postcolonial studies and women's history— in order to describe how Canadian women between 1880 and 1930 used a wide spectrum of dramatic, theatrical and para-theatrical choices to engage themselves with the ways Canada saw itself, projected itself to others and told stories about itself (Bhabha, Introduction 3). In *Nation and Narration*, Bhabha draws attention to the ambivalent nature of the nation with its competing discourses of identity, representation and belonging. Theatre, in that sense, becomes a space in which the imaginary nation is performed, constructed and contested. Theatrical and para-theatrical practices are more than just an offering that enriches a national culture, more than just a space for civil discourses or a forum to explore national histories. Theatre, writes Nadine Holdsworth, "is deeply implicated in constructing the nation through the imaginative realm and

provides a site where the nation can be put under the microscope” (6), whether this is in the establishment of a National Theatre and dramatic corpus to assert Canada as a nation, in the contribution to a thriving national culture through the Little Theatre movement and similar amateur engagement, in dramatists’ iconographic representation of the nation and its history on stage and beyond, or whether this can be found in their interrogations of national dilemmas in state-of-the-nation plays.

Tim Edensor in *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* argues that a sense of a national identity is more often and more successfully produced and reproduced in the everyday and in the realm of amateur and popular culture than in the works of cultural elites and the dominant discourses of authoritative culture and invented traditions, as previous studies of nationalism have often suggested. He contends that performance is both an interesting site for analysis and also a useful metaphor to assess how “identities are [constructed], enacted, and reproduced, informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity.” Echoing Butler’s assertion that the notion of performance foregrounds identity as dynamic, he argues that an analysis of performances of nationhood and belonging cannot limit itself to page or official stage (whether this is an actual theatre stage, the ballroom or the imagined imperial stage of historical pageants, parades and enactments), but “needs to explore where identity is dramatized, broadcast, shared and reproduced, how these spaces are shaped to permit particular performances, and how contesting performances orient around both spectacular and everyday sites” (69). Accordingly, in this dissertation I have argued for a need to broaden the definitions of theatrical practices to account for the variety of forms that early Canadian women playwrights and culture makers developed and employed in order to construct, contest,

reproduce and challenge conceptions of identity in the intersection of nationhood and gender for women in Canada between 1880 and 1930.

To describe theatre, as Alan Filewod writes, is a balancing act between “a historically defined set of performances and spectatorial routines against a vaster set of practices that cannot easily defined, or even discerned” (*Committing* 2). Filewod evokes Brecht’s theories of theatre here and argues, along with earlier critics that especially para-theatrical practices and theatre activism along the lines of what Bertold Brecht has identified in his theory of *gest*, a dramatic spectacle as a means for human interaction and communication, are often ignored as these rarely leave discernible traces, let alone reproducible or marketable texts (see, for example, Bishop 267). Following this argument, both the more institutionalized theatre with actors, stage, and audience as well as para-theatrical practical practices such as pageants, protests, fancy dress balls and parades are testimony to “a desire to articulate social visions, to express political convictions, and advocate social change” (Filewod, *Committing Theatre* 3). This dissertation and its remaining pages hopefully underscore that it is important to continue the archival work needed to recover these works, works that are often buried in archives or are only alluded to in reviews and secondary sources, as their elusive and ephemeral nature often betrays their cultural significance. Theatrical and para-theatrical practices deserve recognition and preservation.

If scholars need to pay special “attention to the way in which women were differently excluded, marginalized and punitively viewed by, and within the nation” (Sangster 260), equal if not more attention needs to be paid to their strategies that allowed for participation in the construction of the nation. As the last four chapters have hopefully

illustrated, Canadian women artists between 1880 and 1930 used the intersection between nation, gender and performance to discuss agency, governance and participation on stage, in print and in public spaces through theatrical means as varied as closet drama and, as I will discuss below, fashion shows. In this sense, the broad variety of theatrical and para-theatrical works of Canadian women playwrights between 1880 and 1930 needs to be read as both a desire to engage in the construction of a nation in the making and a response to the economic, ideological and political limitations imposed on late-Victorian and Edwardian women in Canada.

To clearly define intersections of gender and nation in the theatrical and para-theatrical performances of Canadian women artists between 1880 and 1927 is difficult. It is often complex and complicated, as the various influences such as imperialism, liberalism, the early women's movement and a variety of social reform movements impact the theatrical offerings as much as these ideological forces shape the characters presented and the ways in which an audience recognizes itself in the presentation. It is important to carefully assess them within the context of their time, in order to understand the various conceptions of identities, ironies, complications and contradictions that early Canadian women artists presented in their theatrical and para-theatrical practice.

What has been most striking for me in this research is the determination and ingenuity of the female artists to find ways to create dramatic works and performances and, moreover, how these culture makers used the intersection between nation, gender and performance to create and discuss agency, governance and participation on stage, in print and in public spaces, often skilfully and creatively navigating contestation of identities to give themselves the required agency as culture makers and contributors to a Canada in

the making. The difficulty of finding publishing and performance venues was alleviated towards the end of this period with the growth of amateur theatre societies between 1880 and 1914, the rise of the Little Theatre movement in the 1920s and the development of radio and radio drama in the mid-twenties. These cultural players were looking for and promoting Canadian one-act plays but, in turn, provided limited economic opportunities. Isabel Ecclestone MacKay's 1924 letter to Ryerson Press' Dr. Lorne Pierce illustrates the efforts authors made to find these opportunities:

Of course I know that plays, like poetry, have only a limited sale. Perhaps a good way to see whether it would pay or not would be to find out how Merrill Denison's book sold. The growth of the Little Theatre Association has created a certain demand for one-acts which can be not only read but acted. And I have Mr. Forsyth's word that all of these plays are eminentlyactable. Do you think you would care to have me send on the plays for your opinion?  
(MacKay to Dr. Lorne Pierce)

I want to illustrate the particular ingenuity that all of the women playwrights shared to find opportunities against all odds and use the remainder of this conclusion to discuss probably the most unusual case of playwrighting ingenuity, Madge Macbeth's 1918 "Scientific Salesmanship."

Madge Macbeth is one of the few women writers who, out of necessity--a widow at age thirty, left with two sons--as much as creative endeavour, made a successful career in journalism, writing novels, short stories, drama and essays as well as advertising at the turn of the century. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1878<sup>82</sup> to an upper middle-

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<sup>82</sup> There is a controversy surrounding Madge Macbeth's date of birth. Published suggestions are as follows: 1878 (Boone); 1880 (Gerson, "Madge Macbeth"), 1878 (Jones), 1878 (Rhodenizer), 1881 (Thomas, "Canadian Novelists"), and 1883 (Tunnel). Knowles writes that the official register of birth in the Philadelphia Municipal Archives discloses that Macbeth was born on November 6, 1878 (Knowles). Gerson reports that she was unable to verify Macbeth's birthdate, despite the fact that she contacted the Philadelphia Municipal Archives (Gerson, "Madge Macbeth").

class family, Madge Hamilton Lyon Macbeth was the granddaughter of Adelaide Clayland Maffit, one of the first generation of professional women journalists in the United States and a close friend and supporter of the renowned American feminist and abolitionist Susan B. Anthony. Macbeth grew up in Maryland as what she described as “Southern Gentlefolk” (Knowles 20), and was educated in exclusive private schools, culminating in Hellmuth College, a prestigious finishing school in London, Ontario. Hellmuth College provided her with skills that would bolster her later career: languages, art, and deportment, as well as journalism skills she honed by editing the school paper.

After a brief career as a professional musician and vaudeville actress under the stage name of Eleanor Leonard (Kelly, Introduction 3), and in the employment of the Governor General of Canada’s wife, as Lady Aberdeen’s social secretary from 1895 to 1898, Madge Macbeth married Canadian engineer William Macbeth (1876-1908), with whom she had two sons. She moved with her husband to Ottawa in 1901 and became one of the founding members of the Ottawa Drama League (she was elected its president in the spring of 1915) (Curtis 75). Due to the early death of her husband from tuberculosis in 1908 and the resulting difficult economic situation, Macbeth found herself in need of providing for two young boys. Determined to keep up her social class in the face of the limited opportunities open to ladies in the nation’s capital, she took up writing. Writing offered a better chance to achieve economic equality than teaching, for example, where a woman commonly earned half the salary of a man. Macbeth reflects on her economic situation in her autobiography with a candid sense of humour:

The opportunities open to “ladies” were very limited. You could operate a refined boarding house, taking only refined

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guests, without losing caste. You could be a governess or teach school in a small way. I say in a small way because you were less likely to be in competition with men. (*Over My Shoulder* 54-55)

Macbeth, future three-time president of the Canadian Author's Association, elaborates that writing became her only option; she "had to buy boots for the boys and there was only one way I could make a living—write" (53).

Macbeth began her literary career in the field of journalism, by selling photographs and interviews of public figures to *Canadian Magazine*; she also worked for other journalists by taking pictures for their articles. Her first short story appeared in *Canadian Magazine* in 1908;<sup>83</sup> her first novel was published in 1910. As a professional who, as she put it, wrote "everything but hymns" (*Over My Shoulder* 96), Macbeth combined commercial interest with creative endeavours. Macbeth became an active participant in the Ottawa theatre scene as early as 1909, and she acted in, wrote, and directed plays for many years (Kelly, "Cultural Nationalism" 381-2). As the president of the Ottawa Drama League (now the Ottawa Little Theatre), she managed to put the organization on Ottawa's cultural map and turn it into a profitable business.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, Macbeth can also be considered a first despite these adverse circumstances: she would become the first female president of the Canadian Authors' Association, its only three-time president, and she is

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<sup>83</sup> The Canadian National Archives hold a copy of the letter by the editor, dated Toronto, Nov. 15, 1907, in which Macbeth is offered the price of five dollars for her dramatic monologue titled "Freia's Engagement." Tara Curtis has identified the handwriting in the upper left hand-corner as Macbeth's (*Life and Times* 306). It reads: "My entry into Canadian magazines. First of a series. Closely followed by successes in '*Canadian Monthly*' and others."

<sup>84</sup> A manuscript article titled "A Canadian Lady Gregory" by Francis vanTuyl in the National Archives' Madge Macbeth Fond describes Macbeth's enterprising leadership to the Ottawa Drama League as follows: "In less than two months, Mrs. Macbeth had not only paid the debt [of the League] and contributed two beds to the Duchess of Connaught Hospital—these beds bearing the inscription 'The gift of the Ottawa Drama League'—but she had opened a bank account . . . Besides, she had placed the League on a social footing which is no small task in a capital city (5-6).

credited with writing the first Canadian play written specifically for radio. Her short radio play “Superwoman” aired on CNRO in 1926 (Curtis 4).

The course of Madge Macbeth’s literary and journalistic career was closely tied to the material condition in which she operated. The early decades of the twentieth century saw changes that resulted in the final transition from a producer society characterized by self-reliance, homogeneity, locality, and collectivity into a consumer-based society “that championed convenience, diversity, abundance and individuality” (Schlereth 373). As a marker of modernity, the rise of industrialism did not simply increase quantities of consumer goods; it distributed them in particular ways, concentrating mass populations in cities. Modern Canadian life became urban life. A range of new products, which included household appliances, phonographs, Kodak cameras, soaps and cosmetics, factory-made clothing, motion pictures and canned food of all varieties, helped to make consumerism a part of everyday life (Levine 7). From the 1890s onward, the publishing industry rose to unprecedented productivity with a technology capable of printing, advertising, and distributing to millions of readers all over North America (Karr 5). Responding to the rise in literacy rates, a variety of general interest magazines were launched that offered an extravagant menu of short stories, non-fiction, business, poetry and art reviews with additional photographs and advertising in colourful, attractive formats. Middlebrow mass market magazines such as *McCall’s*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Ladies’ Home Journal* and their Canadian equivalents such as *Maclean’s*, *Saturday Night* and the *Canadian Magazine*, were read by tens of thousands of Canadians and left a distinct, more urban metropolitan-oriented imprint on everyday culture (Irvine 5). The years before the First World War saw a rise of magazines, catalogues and literary journals that

catered to specific audiences. In the emergence of the consumption of mass products, women had become the target audience of advertisements and marketing campaigns (Wright 231, Dodd 135).

In her archival notes on advertising and her draft pitch for the commercial pageant, Macbeth writes about her ideas on advertising, specifically her belief that all advertising media had their day (“Are You Interested”). Although she had several years’ working experience in advertising, Madge Macbeth’s 1920s proposition to department store owners seems bold: “Are you interested in Advertising? Of course you are! You are always alert, looking for some new and attractive means of bringing your goods before the public. You realize that the day of the sandwich man is past; handbills and mailed circulars are used as food for waste paper schemes; talking signs are unavailable in many cities and newspaper advertising is becoming almost prohibitive in its demands. WHAT ABOUT SOMETHING NEW? WHY NOT TRY THEATRICAL ADVERTISING?”

read the first lines of a letter Madge Macbeth wrote to a dozen Ontario businessmen and department store owners in the latter years of the First World War to make her commercial endeavors known (Letter undated, capitalization given). Macbeth hoped that her idea, the “Commercial Play,” was to become “the latest word” (Letter undated). A second draft letter in the National Archives promoting “the commercial play” describes her idea in more detail. “The commercial play,” she writes, is not only “a vehicle for displaying [...] goods, but a get-together medium between customer and salesman.” In her letter, she reassures potential investors that the medium of theatre can be a novel form of marketing of overstocked goods: “Acting makes a universal appeal, beyond the range of newspaper advertising. I use it as a powerful ally for explaining the virtues of your

goods to the public, with your store as my stage and members of your staff as my actors” (Letter undated). The letter was accompanied by a list of endorsements from earlier productions, including productions at A.J. Freiman’s of Ottawa, a production in New York City, as well as productions at Frieman’s, Pedlow’s and W.C. Miller of Toronto. Furthermore, Macbeth’s journalistic skill in building social connections becomes apparent, as the letter includes an endorsement by Mr. Trowern, Secretary of the Retail Merchant Association of Canada, and Mr. Pedlow and Mr. Towed, Presidents of the London Auto Association to corroborate her claims of producing something worthwhile.

The advertising business paid better than other artistic endeavours (Dodd 136), particularly theatre; while the importance of the performing arts in Edwardian Canada cannot be downplayed, it was confined to local projects that were often run on a voluntary basis by middle-class community leaders, especially in Canada’s capitol. Combining theatre and advertising was one way for her to commercialize the skits and scenes she had written for the theatre and to introduce them to a larger audience. She saw advertising less as an art of persuasion, but more as a methodological approach of selling: a systematic process of repetitive and measurable milestones, by which a salesperson relates his offerings, enabling the buyers to visualize their desires. She proposed displays in dramatic form—an advertising play, in other words, produced in the department store itself (Letter undated). She called them "commercial pageants," and insisted emphatically that they were unlike the old-style or fashion shows (“Don’t forget the Commercial Pageant”).

The progression of pictures and scenes she wrote and pitched to department store owners displayed the specific goods the department store wanted to sell. She herself

would wear several of the costumes on display and make a running comment upon the virtues of whatever lines the store wanted to push. All this would be incorporated in a play of her own writing, which would be acted out on the women's floor of the department store. The play would provide a unique medium for the department store's particular needs in advertising. Fifteen salespeople should be cast in parts for the play (Letter undated).

A choice of three plays to pick from, each a half-hour long, completed Macbeth's offer. "The Romance of the Sweat Shop Model," a parody on moving picture methods, was particularly useful to emphasize a particular brand of clothing, for example Niagara Silk ("I Offer"). "When a Man Buys Gloves," a gender satire playing with the notion of the uninformed male consumer, displayed in Macbeth's own words both "specified articles and exhibiting models at the same time." The third skit, "Scientific Salesmanship," is a farce on the idea of the female consumer. The main character shops for an affordable husband in the department store that offers a variety of different types of male companions ("I Offer"). To Macbeth, the commercial pageant was not meant to take the place of newspaper advertising; it was to supplement it ("Are You Interested In Advertising"). The basic idea was to display certain goods more attractively than can be arranged over the counter. Her goal was to impress them in people's mind by aid of the lines in the play, and then advertise them again in a review of the pageant.

One of Madge Macbeth's first clients was Freiman's Department Store in Ottawa. A.J. Freiman, heir of a rich merchant family and long-time friend and benefactor to Macbeth, judged the Commercial Pageant to be a valuable and original medium for advertising. More than just a medium for advertising, the event also became a fundraiser organized by

the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club in an endeavor to increase home front donations for returning soldiers and sailors. The *Ottawa Citizen* reports on 25 February 1918 of the success of "The Fashion Show." It comprised "ten charming scenes," all in different settings, including "the part that women workers are filling to help the 'war', exemplified in the showing of costumes of women in many fields" ("The Fashion Show"). Macbeth's skit "The Model Wife Shop" became the seventh item in the programme that ended in a Grand March. Freiman congratulated Macbeth on her success in a handwritten letter on March 2, 1918 (Letter from Freiman to Macbeth).

Consequently, A.J. Freiman hired her for three years in a row to do two shows annually—one for the spring collection and one during the biggest week in Ottawa's social calendar in the early twentieth century: during Exhibition Week (Letter undated). She charged him \$200 for the campaign, another \$50 for each following instalment, and an extra \$50 for expenses. The invitation, titled "Don't forget about the commercial pageant September 23rd and 24th," replaced the usual advertisement A.J. Freiman's Department Store had running on the women's page of the *Ottawa Citizen* in the fall of 1920, and called upon the leading Ottawa ladies to join in for "a splendid spectacle of beauty adorned in the most fetching habiliment. Certain it is that the people of Ottawa will never have a better opportunity for receiving information on fashion topics in so humorous and entertaining a manner" ("Don't Forget the Commercial Pageant"). An undated, unidentified review in Macbeth's clipping scrapbook from 1918-1925 describes the enterprise as "Paris under Ottawa Skies" and enthuses that "This Commercial Pageant strikes a new note in dramatic art..." ("Paris under Ottawa Skies").

Contracts with Freiman's in Ottawa, Miller's, and Pedlow's in Toronto, a department store in Hamilton, and the London Auto Association followed her 1920s pitch to business owners. According to Macbeth, the farce "Scientific Salesmanship" became so popular that Ottawa's Retail Merchants' Association endorsed the scheme and presented it at their annual smoker with Ottawa's leading merchant figure participating in the skit ("Scientific Salesmanship Wins Husband"). The reviews printed in the *Ottawa Journal* after the April 6-7, 1920 pageant and in the *Ottawa Citizen* on September 24, 1920 speak of success.

The anonymous reviewer in the *Ottawa Journal* is full of praise: "[U]ndoubtedly the star feature of the evening was a one act farce entitled 'Scientific Salesmanship' .... Mrs. Madge Macbeth was the saleslady, as well as the author of the farce, the lines of which were decidedly clever, as well as, reminiscent of the best of Ibsen, Bernard Shaw and George M. Cohan" ("Scientific Salesmanship Wins Husband"). Madge Macbeth also relates the story that A.J. Freiman visited her in New York in 1919/1920 to "offer her own price if she would come back to Ottawa to produce another one" (Undated letter). To this date, no other record of further performances and similar projects has been found.

Madge Macbeth's short-term successful venture leads to more questions than it answers. Foremost, it asks readers how it should be read. In addition to the historical facts, what do we make out of the double helix of play and audience: form, content, and response? Why did the female (and male) middle- and upper-class audience identify with it? Certainly, it presents a skilful case of advertising. But the Commercial Pageant is easily dismissed as a means to guarantee a writer a source of income, comparable in its intent to fundraisers. This is especially true of critical arguments reaffirming the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow culture by stating that the shows staged in

Canadian theatres during the decade of the First World War offered little other than escapism (Litt 334). At first glance, *Macbeth's* enterprise looks like the link between the travelling salesman shows and the shopping channel. I would like to investigate the challenge these skits pose so paradigmatically for all the plays discussed in this dissertation if read against and within their cultural context. Critical about their own position as core of a female consumer culture, they functioned at the same time as vehicles for other issues at stake: nationalism, modernity, and, given its First World War context, the cause on the home front.

In her article on the rise of consumer culture in twentieth century Canada, Cynthia Wright argues that the history of consumer culture is necessary for an understanding of the specific experience of women (229). She points out that with the progress of industrialization, women were excluded from many areas of paid production, while consumption increasingly became their particular responsibility. By the twentieth century, shopping had come to form a major part of most women's lives. The first department stores offered a public space outside the traditional home for urban middle-class women (233). In addition to selling goods, many stores featured reading rooms, art galleries, and lounges where one could rest and socialize with friends. Critics suggest that department stores operated as the equivalent for women of the men's club. For this reason, maternal feminists celebrated the department store as an arena of freedom for women. The "right to buy for themselves, their children, and their households" became, in the words of suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a "freedom from bondage, which afflicted their sex in other parts of the world" (Stanton qtd. in Wright 236). Thus it comes as no surprise that the reviews of *Macbeth's* 1918 Commercial Pageant celebrate the

creation of a distinct urban space for middle-class women that is urban Canadian as well as metropolitan European: “The average shopper of today would perhaps resent an implication of ‘coming from Missouri’ [through a mail order catalogue], but just the same she is no longer satisfied with the newspaper recital of the articles she wishes to buy” (“Paris Under Ottawa Skies”).

The anti-American sentiment the review reveals is not surprising. Canadian nationalist concerns about the influence of American culture range back to a time before Confederation. The United States’ late entry into the war spurred this nationalistic feeling that has been famously treated by B.K. Sandwell (quoted in an earlier chapter) addressing the Montreal Club in December 1913. The drama critic argued that theatre was the realm in which vast and ever-increasing numbers of Canadians acquired their ideas and opinions. Unfortunately, the plays Canadians saw were selected by ‘two groups of gentlemen from New York City’ who had come to dominate the business over the previous ten or fifteen years. In Sandwell’s mind, and quoted earlier, this situation was unhealthy for “a nation in the making” (121). Three months after that particular address journalist Beckles Willson argued in front of the same audience that ‘material things were trivial [...] compared with ‘the minds and intellectual tastes, tendencies, and achievements; that confirmed Canadians’ status as a civilized people’ (qtd. in Litt 324). Both speakers appealed to their audiences to exercise their power as consumers in support of Canadian products and culture. Leaders in the large women’s organizations launched a ‘Made in Canada’ campaign in which they persuaded female consumers to use their power: “We women are the buyers of the nation and if we insisted on the made in Canada for our homes, and also a certain standard, we would soon make our men sit

up” (Wright 236). Within this particular intellectual climate this dissertation has covered, culture and consumption had work to do in improving and maturing Canada to a country with international status.

Macbeth was critical in her focus on consumerism. In an article titled “Do Women Pay” she critically comments on the single middle-class women’s selfish consumerism and the misleading freedom it offered: “in order that we may spend money, we are condemning ourselves to a half-baked line—spinsterhood. To do without crepe de chine underwear has become more terrifying than to do without a fully rounded existence, love, children. Our demand for money, which we spend mostly on ourselves, forces men, who have to spend theirs on us, into striking for higher wages. Men, under present conditions, need more money than we do” (qtd. in Lang 120).

Much more appealing to her was the emphasis on the caring mother of the nation, a second prominent key theme in the self-construction of maternal feminists during the First World War. War mobilization, the state, and gender ideology, as feminist historians have argued, were interconnected in important ways (Sangster 159). The dominant iconography during the First World War revealed woman as the moral mother, sacrificing her sons to the cause (162). Women’s political organs like the National Council of Women as well as commercial advertisers used this trope and applied their talents to raising money for wartime charities such as the Belgian Relief Fund, the Salvation Army and the Canadian Red Cross. They also devised campaigns to promote recruiting, Victory Bonds, and thriftiness on the home front.

Macbeth’s class position predisposed her to support Canadian nationalism, imperialism and the war effort. A note in her memoir reflects on her creative collaboration with other

literary personalities and her duty to support the war effort. Certainly, her pageant was not the only patriotic theatrical offering:

During the next four years, [Duncan Campbell Scott and I] worked together on various patriotic projects. And I met him quite often socially. [...] he produced his own play, *Pierre*, in Ottawa and later in Hart House, and he produced *Low Life*, by Mazo de la Roche in the early days of her career in so unlikely a place as The National Art Gallery. [...] When our committee (probably war relief) decided to present the de la Roche drama, we asked what assistance he would like from us. (*Over my Shoulder* 136)

Theatre, including Macbeth's commercial pageants, was frequently used to appeal to the mothers of the nation to support the cause and to raise funds (Sangster 162). Several letters from Ottawa personalities and organizations like the Polish and Jewish Relief Fund thanked Macbeth for her effort. A.J. Freiman, who during the Conscription Crisis had urged Macbeth to include the war effort more explicitly in the Commercial Plays, congratulated her afterwards in reference to her originality, ability and tact for her successful efforts regarding the cause and did not fail to include a token of his appreciation for those who depended on her (Letter from Freiman to Macbeth).

Nevertheless, the main emphasis of the pageant was the play that displayed the goods—most of the times overstock—that needed to be sold. The dramatic piece included in the pageant that was most popular with both audiences and department store owners was the aforementioned farce “Scientific Salesmanship.” “Scientific Salesmanship” describes the troubles of a saleswoman in the men's department in her attempt to sell the latest models of husbands to a spinster. The customer is introduced to various stereotypes of men made in Canada, for example, a plumber, a minister, the ordinary citizen, a banker, and a young lover, but cannot make up her mind. The perfect

mixture between the stereotypes, a man that is “a medium, rather serviceable, and yet handsome enough to be ornamental, something which can live comfortably in the home and yet not too perishable to take out; something not easily damaged or let astray,” cannot be found and the customer is advised to consult the autumn leftovers in the widower’s department (“A Demonstration of Scientific Salesmanship” 5).<sup>85</sup>

The role of the sales agent is modelled on the stereotype of the New Woman. The New Woman, who had at the time of the Great War developed into a distinct caricature in mainstream media, was rendered as of unconventional new female behaviour. The New Woman in the scene, as commonly depicted in other texts, defied society by engaging in unconventional relations with men and claiming independence of movement and action. As Ardis points out, “A tremendous amount of polemic was wielded against [the New Woman] for choosing not to pursue the conventional bourgeois woman’s career of marriage and motherhood” (1). In a 1913 *Saturday Night* article, an anonymous author writes:

One of the most disturbing problems for those who concern themselves with the future of the Anglo-Saxon race and the continued existence of the British empire, is that which arises from the steady decreasing birthrate ... Fashionable women and those who wish to be thought fashionable are openly declaring that motherhood ... is nothing but slavery, and neither for the sake of perpetuating the honored names of their husbands, nor for the future benefits of the state, will they make martyrs of themselves. (“Superfluous Woman” 31)

Although the author’s lexical choice of “fashionability” does not in the strictest sense apply to the fashion Macbeth was trying to promote through her pageant, read against

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<sup>85</sup> Although the play script in the NAC is titled “A Demonstration of Scientific Salesmanship,” Macbeth and other authors refer to it as “Scientific Salesmanship.”

Macbeth's protagonists in "Scientific Salesmanship" it gives a sense of the controversy around the New Woman that Macbeth strategically uses to challenge boundaries of social decorum.

Critics argue that New Woman literature, blending romance and psychological realism, often reinstates gender hierarchy by focusing on a conservative ending in which the New Woman overcomes her difference and embraces her feminine nature as a way to shield from criticism (Dean, *Practicing Femininity* 61). The satirical structure of a literary work such as "Scientific Salesmanship," or for that matter texts discussed earlier such as Sarah Ann Curzon's closet dramas, are commonly defined to allow a writer to locate his or her work in relation to another textual and cultural tradition while giving the parodist an opportunity to refashion established texts and generic models into new and liberating forms. These texts, including Macbeth's "Scientific Salesmanship," remain ambivalent in both the parodic structure and the conservative but open end. At the end, the customer in "Scientific Salesmanship" in search of a husband cannot make up her mind and feels reluctant to subscribe to the practice of buying her husband. She leaves the stage uneasily, pondering how to fulfill both roles: a mother in national duty and a successful businesswoman.

Although Macbeth is frequently classified as a New Woman writer for her representation of female characters who in their struggle for selfhood challenge contemporary boundaries of societal expectations and social decorum, critics point out that she would not have called herself a New Woman. Peggy Kelly notes that "there is no record of Macbeth's formal participation in the struggle for female enfranchisement, apart from her publication of an article supporting female suffrage" (Introduction 16). As

Dean has argued, Macbeth's choices are similar to many contemporary Canadian women artists who believed in white female suffrage and equality in work and education, such as Sarah Ann Curzon and Sara Jeannette Duncan, but who rejected the term "emancipation" for fear of being connected to the "stereotype of the [unfeminine] suffragette" and *New Woman* (Dean, *A Different Point of View* 65). Madge Macbeth is as ambivalent about the changes for women as the customer in her farce. In "Letter to Aimee" she asks: Can woman do this? Can she justify herself in her own eyes for evading the petty duties and functions nature and tradition have imposed on her? If so, then she has no need to make a compromise with her ambition. She can be free." Nevertheless, she cautions: "Emancipation, like everything else, is to be purchased at a price" ("Letter to Aimee" 9).

Employing ideas about maternal feminism and modernisation, Madge Macbeth's plays cater to and construct a new urbanized female Canadian audience. Nevertheless, like many of the other authors discussed, she was critical of the progress the *New Woman* and maternal feminism was able to claim. She writes in "Letter to Aimee" (which serves as the introduction to her 1926 novel *Shackles*): "The changes affecting women have been fantastic. Think of the petticoats we have taken off and the responsibilities we have taken on! Think of the yoke (and in some cases yokels) we discarded when, legally, we became *persons!* Think of the independence we achieved when we were permitted to work outside the home and especially when we were privileged to stand before a comfortably seated male in a streetcar" (9)!

Uniquely among early Canadian drama by women playwrights in the first two decades of the twentieth century in the niche that they occupy, Macbeth's plays nonetheless almost iconically summarize the efforts and lengths female cultural makers went to as

well as the challenges in representation to gender and nation the same works posed. Most of all, they are testament to the creativity and ingenuity in all of the plays discussed in this dissertation. Curtis points out the contradictions in Macbeth's life that are similar to many of the other contemporary female authors. Macbeth was a writer "who worked in almost every literary genre [...], was both praised and criticized for her frankness, who was both widely popular and virtually omitted from the Canadian literary annals during her own lifetime, and since." (89) She speculates that "because of all the contradictions in Madge Macbeth's life and writing, her career exemplarily reflects the complexities which existed in the lives of women living and writing in the first half of this century" (2). The results impacted social and cultural constructs in use during the first decades of the twentieth century, created "an avenue for political self-assertion" and pushed accepted artistic and professional boundaries for women.

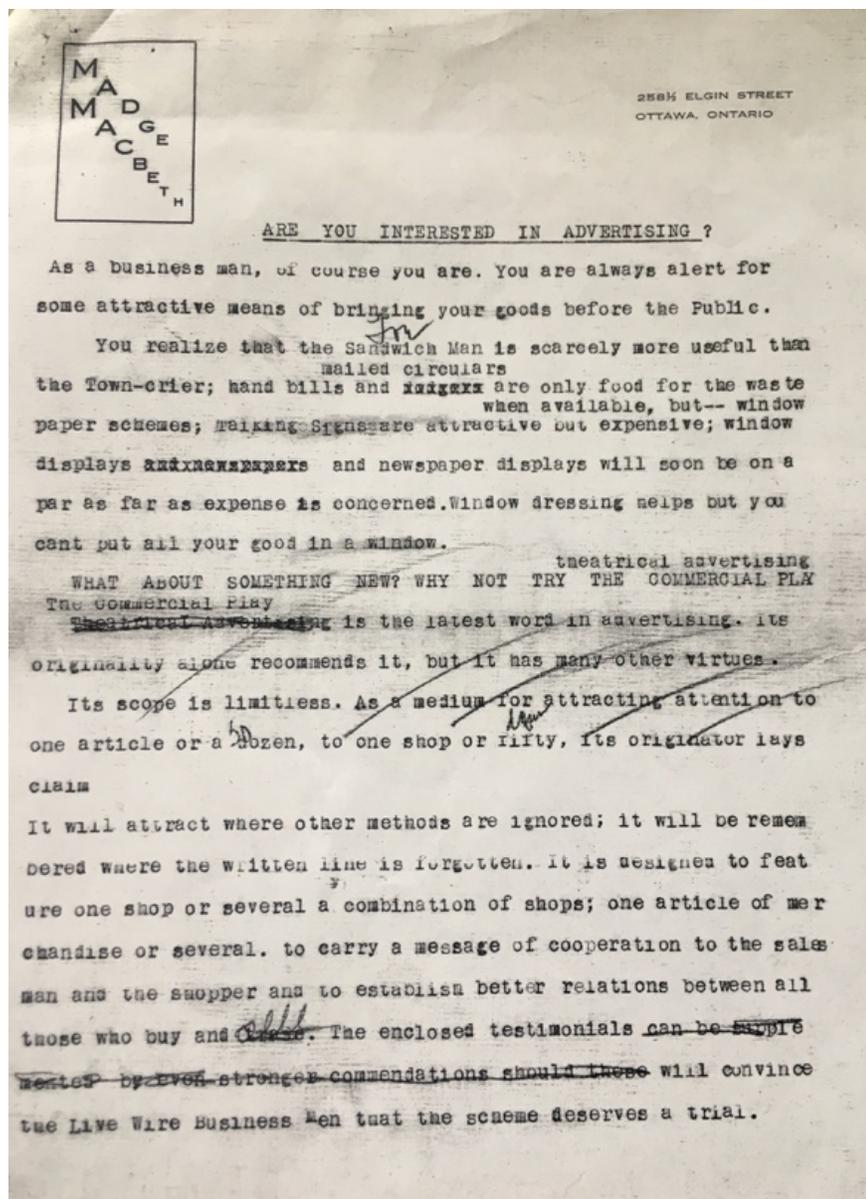


Fig. 7. Macbeth, Madge. "Are You Interested in Advertising." Version 2. National Archives of Canada (NAC). MG30-D52. Volume 1 File: correspondence unsigned undated 1900-1920.

**Don't Forget  
the Commercial  
Pageant  
September  
23rd  
and  
24th**

**DON'T FORGET THE  
COMMERCIAL PAGEANT**

**WHY COMMERCIAL.** Indeed, why 'pageant,' the people of Ottawa are asking when the fashion **PERFORMING AT A. J. FRYMAN'S** is under discussion. Because that's exactly what it is, Pageant, according to our patrons, is a splendid spectacle, a showy display, and the attraction set for September 23rd and 24th is all of that and more. For it not only presents beauty adorned in the most fetching habiliment, but suggests by a rational succession of pictures, the type of garment Beauty should wear during the progress of a busy day.

In the opinion of the author and director, Mrs. Macbeth, it would be incomplete without showing the shopper to herself, and as she appears to many others. The difference between the male and female—**Male and Female is not a moving picture** (as the billboards frequently say) is set forth in a comedy sketch carrying not only a humorous plot and witty dialogue—but incorporating an exhibition of more than a dozen costumes, as well as several by-products, all of which bear heavily upon the fascinating subject—**DRESS**. Certain it is that the people of Ottawa will never have a better opportunity for receiving information on fashion topics in so humorous and entertaining a manner.

Fig. 8. "Don't Forget the Commercial Pageant." *The Ottawa Citizen*, 20 September 1920, p. 22.

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