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Canada

Heroes of a Different Sort: Representations of Women at Work
in Canadian Art of the First World War

Kristina Huneault

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1994

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ISBN 0-315-90859-9

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ABSTRACT

Heroes of a Different Sort: Representations of Women at Work in Canadian Art of the First World War

Kristina Huneault

During the First World War Canadian artists began to demonstrate a broader cognizance of working women's involvement in the social and economic fabric of the nation than had previously been apparent. Working either independently or under the patronage of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, artists represented women at work in fields and munitions factories, as nurses and as Red Cross volunteers. From a contemporary perspective, many of these works seem to challenge the conception of a passive and domestic femininity prevalent at the beginning of the century. When placed in their historical context, however, the disruptive potential of the artworks is largely dissipated by the discourse of patriotism into which the artworks were received--a discourse that functioned to isolate the perception of women's economic activity within the limited struggle of the war effort. Characterized by this negotiation of contending ideologies of femininity and patriotism, representations of women at work created during the War occupy shifting positions simultaneously inside and outside of the perimeters of femininity set out by the conventional sex-gender system.

To Larry Deck

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Janice Helland. Her academic, professional, and personal support has enriched me both as a student and as a person. I owe much to the other members of my thesis committee as well; Dr. Brian Foss and Dr. Christine Ross have both been generous with their time and their knowledge.

During the preparation of this thesis staff members of various institutions were of critical assistance. In particular, I am indebted to Laura Brandon of the Canadian War Museum. I also wish to thank Dennis Reid, Alain Giroux, and Deeptee M. Sarma of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Eric Vanasse of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Linda Cobon of the Canadian National Exhibition Archives, and Kate O'Rourke of the National Archives of Canada.

Finally, thanks to my husband, Larry Deck, and my parents, Triena and Bert Huneault. Their boundless encouragement and unflagging interest played the most important role in the completion of this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We need art in our business of winning the war. We need Art to clarify our understanding of the ever-changing situations of the conflict. We need art to help us create a single mind out of the many minds which confuse our country. American Magazine of Art, 1918¹

The highest purpose of art is to make a truthful record of the life of a people, and those Canadian artists who witnessed Canada's struggle are to be congratulated on their portrayal of the strenuous days of the war effort.... [It] was as if any summer day in 1917 or 1918 had been picked up and put on the wall. It was not art that one looked at but life...crystallized memories of those days that we thrill to remember. And the appeal of these pictures is not to artists alone; it is to the people who lived through the days and did the work that is here on canvas. Canadian art has done something in these paintings, something that the so-called common man, the munitions worker, the ship builder, the lumberman, the farmer, any Canadian worker who kept his eyes open as he went about his tasks during the war can understand. Toronto Star Weekly, 1919²

Two critics, one writing toward the end of the First World War, the other some months afterwards, discuss the role of art during wartime. The first sees art as a tool with which to mould the reality of experience and opinion; the second views it as a

¹Duncan Phillips, "Art and War," American Magazine of Art 9 no. 8 (June 1918): 303-4; quoted in Maria Tippett, Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art, and the Great War (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 6.

²M.L.A.F., "Splendid Exhibition War Work Canvasses [sic]," Toronto Star Weekly, 18 October 1919, 38.

mirror in which the reality of experiences and opinions are reflected. The positions, though seemingly antithetical, are in fact two sides of the same issue: the relationship of art and life. Alone, each contention is somewhat simplistic, but taken together they form a more complex vantage point, from which art may be perceived as both constituted by and constitutive of external social realities. Among these realities, and implicit in the ending of the second quotation, is the social construction of gender roles and identities. The question of gender inscription and its multi-faceted relationship to visual culture forms the basis for this study of Canadian representations of women at work during World War I.

Representations of working women in Canada were newly invigorated by the First World War. Canadian artists began to demonstrate a broader cognizance of working women's involvement in the social and economic fabric of the nation than had ever been apparent in the Victorian genre scenes that had predominated for the previous half century. Ubiquitous images of Québec habitantes in tranquil fields or Breton peasant women in picturesque costumes were replaced by paintings and sculptures of women making armaments, doing Red Cross work, building airplanes, working on railroads, and engaged in strenuous agricultural activity. A new strain of painting and sculpture emerged in which Canadian artists cast off a decades-long concern with respectable feminine gentility (or, alternatively, a less-than-proper sexual availability), and allowed their representations of women at work to assume a new air of vitality and consequence.

The majority of these artworks, but not all of them, were executed under the

auspices of the Canadian War Memorials Fund (CWMF) and are now housed in the Canadian War Museum. Established in 1916, the CWMF was initiated by Sir Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook), acting in his capacity as Officer in Charge of War Records. Under the guidance of British art critic Paul Konody and National Gallery of Canada Director Eric Brown, Aitken commissioned artworks by leading British and Canadian artists³ for the purpose of providing "suitable Memorials in the form of Tablets, Oil Paintings, etc. to the Canadian Heroes and Heroines of the war."⁴ In its 'Home Work Section', which memorialized civilians' homefront contributions to the war effort, the CWMF paid special attention the employment of women in war-related activities. George Reid (1860-1947), Henrietta Mabel May (1884-1971), Frances Loring (1887-1968), Florence Wyle (1881-1968), Dorothy Stevens (1888-1966) and Manly MacDonald (1889-1971) were all requested to document women's industrial or agricultural labour. Their works were displayed for the first time at the Art Gallery of Toronto in the autumn of 1919, along with the rest of the 'Home Work Section'.⁵

³It should be noted that the artists who were commissioned to portray women at work for the CWMF represent a limited segment of Canadian society; all were anglophones living in either Ontario or Quebec.

⁴Application for Registration in the Matter of the War Charities Act, 1916, 7 Nov. 1916, Records Office, London Guildhall; quoted in Tippett, 26.

⁵The Canadian War Memorials were exhibited in two phases. The first phase, consisting exclusively of works executed overseas, was first displayed at London's Burlington House in the winter of 1919. Thereafter it travelled to the Anderson Galleries in New York, the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, and the Art Association of Montreal. The second phase, which included the 'Home Work Section' and is therefore of greater relevance to this study, was first exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto from October 18 to November 12, 1919. It was subsequently shown at the C.N.E. from August 28 to September 13, 1920 and at the Art Association of Montreal from September 24 to October 23, 1920. Works from each phase were

The Toronto exhibition presented a new vision of women workers as active, even heroic figures whose labour was indispensable to the nation. Consequently, it provides a suitable point of departure for an examination of the relations between visual representation and the public construction of working women's gendered identities during the War. Perusal of newspaper reviews of the exhibition quickly indicates that this relationship is by no means direct or transparent, and that apparent changes in the visual art of a nation do not necessarily indicate a revolution in the broader social perception of women's roles. Such a discrepancy is evident in the words of the Toronto Star Weekly reviewer quoted at the outset, who described the exhibition as a collection of the crystallized memories of "any Canadian worker who kept *his* eyes open as *he* went about *his* tasks" [italics mine].⁶ The reviewer was not unaware of women's contributions to the war effort (there is enthusiastic mention of Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's bronzes on the subject), yet in his opening litany of the workers who kept Canada strong throughout the War there is no room for these women. When he writes of the spectator who truly belongs in the gallery hall he writes only of "hard-handed workmen recognizing the scenes amid which they toiled, and explaining processes to their wives and families," never of women workers describing their jobs to boyfriends or sisters.⁷ The reviewer's choice of terminology is revealing in its gender exclusivity, alerting the critical reader to the fact that while

combined for the War Memorial exhibitions at the National Gallery, which took place from January 5 to March 31, 1923 and January 18 to April 30, 1924.

⁶M.L.A.F., 38.

⁷Ibid.

art may indeed reflect experience, it will nevertheless be interpreted through the distorting mirrors of personal memory and social ideology.

The personal memories and subjective impressions of the thousands of people who viewed these representations of women at work are largely impossible to reconstruct; however the social ideologies or belief systems through which the works were interpreted can be established. Their traces are still visible in the press coverage of the exhibitions⁸ and in the broader arena of wartime social discourse on the 'woman question'. Key among them is the ideology of gender. Feminist scholars, among them Mary Poovey, Teresa de Lauretis, and Lynn Pearce, have found Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as "the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" to be a useful point of departure in the discussion of gender issues.⁹ The definition is particularly serviceable in its ability to reveal the ideological nature of gender as a system of social beliefs which constructs and differentiates masculine and feminine identities and activities according to--but not

⁸In my search for press coverage of the exhibitions I consulted daily and weekly newspapers from the cities in which the exhibitions were shown (Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa), as well as cultural and political reviews and magazines such as The Canadian Magazine, The Rebel, and Saturday Night. Newspaper reviews are listed in a separate section of the bibliography, while journal articles are included in its main body.

⁹Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 162; quoted in Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3. See also Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 6-7; and Lynne Pearce, Woman/Image/Text: Readings in Pre-Raphaelite Art and Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 6-7.

determined by--actual biological sex.¹⁰ As ideology, gender may be understood as the imaginary (socially constructed) relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (sex). Furthermore, as Poovey points out, ideologies do not exist solely as ideas, but are given concrete form in cultural practices and social institutions.¹¹ So, too, do gender system consist not merely of a set of socially constructed roles and identities, "but also of a discourse that gives meaning to different roles within a binary structure."¹² This thesis is an attempt to evaluate how the discourse of art¹³ gave meaning to the different social roles occupied by women workers during World War I.

It is characteristic of gender systems that they are not fixed, but partake of social change with a remarkable facility to assimilate new social phenomena.¹⁴ The highly publicized participation of women in labour outside the home during the War offers a well-defined opportunity to observe gender systems in operation, reconstituting the fundamental distinction between masculine and feminine identities even while economic realities seemed to mitigate against those distinctions as never before in the

¹⁰Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al, eds., Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 3.

¹¹Poovey, 3.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Lynda Nead defines the term discourse as "a particular form of language with its own rules and conventions," further specifying the discourse of art as "the concatenation of visual images, the language and structures of criticism, cultural institutions, publics for art and the values and knowledges made possible within and through high culture." I cannot improve on this definition, and it is in this sense that I will employ the term throughout the thesis. Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988; reprint 1990), 4.

¹⁴Higonnet et al, 3.

modern age. Fine art representations of women workers entered into that process. By examining how events such as the employment of women are constructed in artistic discourse, and how gender figures in those constructions, we can begin to disclose the connections between art and gender.

Portrayals of working women from any time period form a challenging field for this type of analysis because they problematize a conventional understanding of the idea signified by the category woman. It is a commonplace of feminist art histories that representations of women centre around a politics of looking which divides into binary positions: activity/passivity, subject/object, producer/produced. In most Western art the masculine artist/viewer is firmly identified with the first of these terms and the female model with the second. The neatness of these dichotomous separations is disrupted, however, when the images in question portray working women. As workers, these women are allied with the forces of production; they are the subjects of their own actions. Accordingly, their depiction confuses the traditional meaning imputed to women. In the pages that follow I will attempt to determine how English-Canadian artists and viewers negotiated this predicament.

In the words of historian Arthur Marwick:

Because of its very intensity as an experience, because of the way it projected people into new situations, the First World War revealed very starkly the assumptions and attitudes which were widely held about women and the sorts of discrimination which were customarily practised against them.¹⁵

Thus the advent of the War had specific and far-reaching effects on the ways in which

¹⁵Arthur Marwick, Women at War 1914-1918 (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 11.

artists represented working women: gender systems stand in a particular relationship to wartime society. As a parameter of political thought, the workings of gender were exposed by the intensification of ideological structures in wartime propaganda.¹⁶ As a parameter of economic practice, the arbitrariness of gender designations was revealed by women's occupation of roles previously defined as 'masculine', i.e., heavy-industry employee, primary wage-earner, or member of the military. During the War, changes in the material role of women were spotlighted, necessitating a reconfiguration of the relationship between the rhetoric of gender and the assignment of gender-specific tasks and roles.¹⁷ The process of reconfiguration highlights the ability of gender systems to adapt to new social phenomena, bringing us to the frequently asked question: Did the Great War transform or simply reproduce gender systems? Margaret and Patrice Higonnet attempt an answer to this question by introducing a metaphor of a social double helix, in which male and female strands change positions as they intertwine about their axis, yet maintain a constant relationship to each other even as their positions alter. In Margaret Higonnet's words:

When the homefront is mobilized, women may be allowed to move "forward" in terms of employment or social policy, yet the battlefield - preeminently a male domain - takes economic and cultural priority. Therefore, while women's objective situation does change, relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations.¹⁸

¹⁶Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in Higonnet et al, 41.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Higonnet et al, 6.

Thus it is clear that gender systems are comprised not only of women's actual experiences, but of the ideological construction of women's role in the broader social sphere as well. Because of this, historians have begun to suggest that in order to fully answer the question of whether or not gender systems were transformed by the War we must consider not only the terms of women's wartime experience *per se*, but the metaphoric uses of gender in wartime culture.¹⁹ This thesis is an attempt to initiate that kind of discussion in the field of English-Canadian visual culture.

The methodology I employ in order to achieve this end varies in accordance with my personal responses to the different artworks. Also, it is my conviction that the works participate in a process of gender inscription that is not limited to the period in which they were created, but continues even today to shape contemporary opinion about Canadian women. Accordingly, I bring together readings based in social art history with those grounded in contemporary theory and formal analysis. I hope that the resultant shifts in approach will serve as a reminder of the varied ways in which we may gain access to artworks and, furthermore, of the differences between the artworks themselves; the fact that I have grouped them together under the rubric of 'representations of women war workers' should not eclipse the differences of style and content between the individual works. For example, the difference between the readings proposed in the two chapters on images of munitions work reflects the important distinctions between the paintings of George Reid and Mabel May and the sculptures of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle. The first set of paintings, which are

¹⁹Joan W. Scott, "Rewriting History," in Higonnet et al, 26.

so clearly situated within the social fabric of the factory floor and Canadian society at a certain juncture in time, facilitates a reading grounded in an examination of that society--a social reading. The women portrayed by Loring and Wyle, on the other hand, are isolated from that context. Plucked out from the visual background of the factory setting and imbued with a three-dimensional tangibility and corporeality that is absent from the paintings, these figures fostered and sustained a theoretical reading of the gendered body that simply did not suit the images in the preceding chapter. What does remain consistent throughout the thesis is an effort to place my own contemporary readings of the artworks--whether they be grounded in history or theory--side by side with a reconstruction of the ways in which the works were interpreted by their original publics. In so doing, I hope to offer an analysis which is cognizant of both the historical and contemporary implications of works of art in the process of gender inscription.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that the vast majority of the women represented in the artworks I will examine are anonymous figures. Paralleling the social discourses surrounding working women during the war, women portrayed in the nation's artworks are members of an homogeneous group, largely undifferentiated by traits of class, race, or other distinguishing characteristics. Thus, only in the rare case of a positively identified subject, such as John Russell's portrait of his sister, discussed in Chapter 5, am I able to tread into the specifics of individual women's lives. More frequently I am concerned with the universalizing category of "women". As Leila Rupp points out in the introduction of her book Mobilizing Women For War,

public images are not concerned with diversity; despite their individual differences, one of the most important bonds women of all backgrounds and status shared during the War was precisely their common public image.²⁰ In the light of contemporary feminisms of difference this is clearly a limitation, but it is a limitation that is imposed by the nature of the public images of women that Canadians have inherited. Thus, this thesis is about the public image of women rather than about the actuality of women's lives and experiences of work during the War. Analysis of that image as it was constructed in the domain of the visual arts in English-Canada will be the main focus of study.

Finally, at every step, my interpretations have been guided by a fundamental feminist insistence that gender must be recognized as an historical force of equal significance to any of the other social matrices privileged by art history or cultural analysis.²¹

²⁰Leila J. Rupp, Mobilizing Women for War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 5.

²¹Griselda Pollock, Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), 5.

CHAPTER 2

MUNITIONS WORK

To mark the Christmas season of 1918, Britain's Underground Railway Company published a portfolio of twelve prints. The prints, some of which circulated in Canada, were intended to commemorate the wartime efforts of the Company and its workers. One of the images, *Woman's Work*, depicts two women in baggy overalls striding energetically toward the viewer (plate 1). Sleeves rolled up, hair pulled back, each with a hand in her pocket, the women appear both casual and confident. Their figures are sturdy, and they grin as they march away from a railroad building, perhaps on their way to lunch, perhaps heading home after their shift. They project an air of happy determination.

The image exemplifies a vision of women that briefly transfixed the eyes of the nation: the industrial worker in trousers. Boarding a streetcar alone at night, clad in overalls and sporting her six-months service badge, the ordnance labourer was the most immediately visible type of female worker during the war. Perhaps because of this visibility, women employed in heavy industry--most particularly those engaged in munitions production--were allotted a very public identity that encapsulated a complex and contradictory set of convictions about femininity, patriotism, and the desired role

of women in society. The female munitions worker became emblematic of women's wartime efforts. She was the subject of books, articles and films. Her figure was illustrated in women's magazines across North America and Europe, and when the administrators of the Canadian War Memorials Fund decided to commemorate women's home front activities, they chose to emphasize her contributions above all.

Women's ordnance work was depicted by six of the artists commissioned by the CWMF.²² George Reid and Henrietta Mabel May each completed preparatory studies and a large canvas on the subject. Frances Loring and Florence Wyle sculpted a series of bronze figurines representing the various industrial tasks performed by women. Dorothy Stevens devoted two of her six homefront etchings to women working on shells and fuses, and C.W. Jefferys (1860-1952), although he was never expressly asked to record women's labour, contributed a pencil drawing of women working on airplane construction. Each of these artworks was informed by and contributed to the conceptualization of women workers prevalent during and immediately after the War. That same conception continues even now to affect contemporary perceptions of women and labour in Canada at the beginning of the century.

²²The precise circumstances of the commissions varied for each artist. In most cases the artists were advanced certain sums at intervals throughout the project, based on a projection of the work they were expected to complete. George Reid decided the general subjects for his canvases in consultation with Eric Brown and Edmund Walker. May, MacDonald, Loring, and Wyle were specifically asked by Brown to document women's war work (although Loring and Wyle later requested permission to include some sculptures of men). Steven approached the CWMF directly, with her own ideas for etching subjects.

Women, Munitions, and Visual Culture

Munitions work did play an important part in women's wartime labour even though it did not account for the first jobs opened to women as a result of the War; that distinction went to banks, shipping companies, and the Red Cross. Initially, arms manufacturers hung back from increased female employment despite the economic boom generated by a surge of war contracts. By the summer of 1916, however, overseas casualties and increased military enlistment had resulted in a critical labour shortage. Canadian industry was compelled to turn to women workers in order to meet its contracts. The first women entered munitions factories in October 1916 and, by the end of the War, over 35,000 others had joined them.

The sudden entry of women into munitions work, combined with the high visibility of these women (both on the streets and in visual culture), created two erroneous conceptions of women's employment that have persisted to this day. First, it is often thought that World War I initiated a drastic and unprecedented surge of Canadian women into the work force. Ceta Ramkhalawansingh has shown, however, that any increase in the number of women working during the War was "merely an acceleration of a trend that began at the turn of the century. . . . World War I did not mark a significant departure from this slow rise in female employment."¹ Second, there is a pervasive but inaccurate impression of a massive influx of women into the industrial labour force during the war years. In actuality, most munitions workers had

¹Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women During the Great War," in Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 261.

already been employed in factory labour before the War but switched to military production because of higher wages.² In London, Ontario, for example, 70% of the applicants for munitions work came from other factories or shops, as compared to only 9.6% from domestic employment.³ After the War these metal tradesworkers left their jobs and returned to the textile, garment, leather, rubber, tobacco, confectionary and shoe factories they had originally left, where they had, for some time, constituted well over half of the work force. In her 1919 study Changes in the Industrial Occupations of Women in the Environment of Montréal during the Period of the War, 1914-1918, Enid Price found that at least half of the industries she investigated had employed women for years, citing high performance and low wages as reasons.⁴ In contrast, the majority of the women who did enter the work force during the War became clerks, book-keepers and secretaries, despite the belief that women's greatest inroads into the labour market had been made in the field of manufacturing.⁵

²Joan Sangster, "Canadian Working Women," in Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History, ed. W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey (St. John's and Toronto: Committee on Canadian Labour History and New Hogtown Press, 1985), 67.

³ Report of the Toronto Employment Bureau - Trades and Labour Branch, Ontario Department of Public Works, reprinted in Barbara Wilson, ed. Ontario and the First World War 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Champlain Society, for the Government of Ontario, 1977), 109. The Report also indicates that approximately one-third of the Bureau's applicants for munition work were married women.

⁴Enid Price, Changes in the Industrial Occupations of Women (Montreal: McGill University Publications Series 6 no. 5, 1924), 52.

⁵Joy Parr, "Women Workers in the Twentieth Century," in Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History, ed. W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey (St. John's and Toronto: Committee on Canadian Labour History and New Hogtown Press, 1985), 80.

The erroneous perception of an inundation of women into non-traditional jobs during the War has been linked by historian Joy Parr to the sudden abundance of visual images of female munitions workers produced between 1914 and 1919.⁶ Beginning in 1916, the Imperial Munitions Board (IMB) launched a propaganda campaign to promote women's industrial employment. Photographs and film footage of women successfully operating industrial machinery were used to encourage women to join the workforce and to convince reticent employers of the benefits of female labour. The campaign included a widely-seen film and a fully-illustrated booklet entitled Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada (1916).⁷

Fine art representations of female munitions workers should be considered in the context of this IMB imagery. Together with photographs, newsreels, and brochures, CWMF artworks contributed to a national wartime iconography, emphasizing what was, by implication, a new role for Canadian women. The sudden plethora of journalistic photographs of female munitions workers fostered a false perception of a drastic shift in women's social and economic position; this same dynamic is reiterated in fine art production. Among Canadian artworks predating the War, I have been unable to locate a single image that clearly portrays women engaged in wage or industrial labour. Despite the fact that since the 1880s much of industrial society's most mechanized work had been performed by women, women's realm was still constructed as the natural and/or domestic one. Only with the advent of CWMF

⁶Ibid, 80.

⁷Sangster, 28.

patronage was the industrial labour of women finally committed to canvas and bronze. Thus, the body of Canadian art reaffirms the misconception that the First World War presented women with a whole range of economic opportunities unavailable to them before the conflict began.

As a government initiative, CWMF images may also be linked more directly to the IMB campaign to encourage the introduction of women into all levels of industrial production. The chronicling of women's munition work by such a respected artist as George Reid, for example, was bound to advance the IMB's efforts to legitimize industrial employment for women. Although the pictures were not commissioned with the express purpose of recruiting women into the factories, the Memorial Fund administrators were conscious that the works "would partake in the nature of publicity."⁸ Ultimately, the pictures did not fulfil this function, since they were not ready for exhibition until after the War. At the time of their commission and conception, however, a major concern of the Canadian Government was still to stimulate public support for all aspects of the war effort.

While there is no evidence to suggest that CWMF artworks were ever envisioned as propaganda tools in the way that IMB photographs were, there is an important coincidence of spirit in the representations of women's industrial labour produced for each body. In its booklet Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada, the IMB praised the spirit and competence with which women performed

⁸Lord Beaverbrook, "Canadian War Records Official Report," 27 March 1918, 6, Sir Albert Edward Kemp papers, National Archives of Canada, vol 170; quoted in Tippett, 76.

industrial labour. Terms such as "confidence", "independence", and "strength" were used to describe the workers. "Experience has proved," boasted one caption, "that there is no operation on shell work that a woman cannot do, and, as a matter of fact, is not doing, even to the heavy operations which require great physical strain."⁹ To judge from such comments, it would seem that the War had effected a significant change in perceptions of women predicated on feminine domesticity, dependence, weakness, and passivity. Turning to the Canadian War Memorial artworks, this conclusion, at first glance, is confirmed.

Women's Roles: Changing Visions

The overall impression created by artworks representing women in munitions factories is one of competence, productivity, and even gender equity. In what today appears as a striking demonstration of workplace parity, women and men were represented working side by side on similar tasks. C.W. Jefferys's drawing of an airplane assembly shop presents the clearest example of this (plate 2). In *Stretching Linen on Aeroplane Wings*, Jefferys shows both men and women sewing canvas into place on wing frames. There is no apparent hierarchy among the workers, and all appear intent on their labours. Even the most physically active of the tasks, pulling the canvas onto the frame, is shared by a man and a woman who work together to accomplish the job.

⁹Imperial Munitions Board, Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada (Ottawa: IMB, 1916), 32.

Dorothy Stevens's etching *Munitions - Heavy Shells* (plate 3) also spotlights a new working relationship between men and women. In the foreground two figures flank each side of the picture, one male and the other female. Both workers are independently occupied, concentrating on the jobs in front of them. The woman reaches up to control her machinery, the man reaches out to the side. They are both active, and their tasks are accorded equal prominence in the etching. Immediately behind them another pair of workers pause by a row of shells, apparently inspecting them. The man and woman stand together, heads close, shoulders touching, postures relaxed. Here Stevens has depicted a casual workplace familiarity between male and female employees. The artist's inclusion of such intimacy betokens a marked change in attitude from the turn-of-the-century obsession with completely separating male and female factory workers whenever possible. Instead, Stevens emphasizes women and men working together to a common end. This pragmatic consideration appears to have prevailed with the public as well, for not a single reviewer lamented the moral dangers imperilling any young female worker within earshot of a man's foul language.¹⁰

The close collaboration of women and men depicted by Jefferys and Stevens, however, was not the norm in most industrial settings. Sexual division of labour persisted throughout the war and factory jobs were increasingly sex-typed through association with so-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' character traits. In particular,

¹⁰See footnote 7, page 5 and the bibliography for details on which periodicals were consulted.

the feminization of repetitive tasks, such as grinding, facilitated a continued division of the workplace along gender lines.¹¹ More representative of standard factory gender divisions is George Reid's *Women Operators* (plate 4). The canvas shows a group of women in blue coveralls and orange head scarves working together, engaged in moving, cutting, and boring holes in cumbersome 9.2-inch shells. A sole male figure who stands still and erect at the left side of the canvas, surveys their activities. He is a shadowy but authoritative presence, monitoring the factory floor. The gender dynamics of this relationship, i.e., a male supervisor authorizing and overseeing the actions of female labourers, were standard wherever large groups of women were employed.

Despite this spectral reminder of workplace power structures, the overriding impression of women conveyed by Reid's painting remains one of competence and productivity. As a reviewer for the Toronto Globe noted, the work has an especially vigorous quality.¹² The paint is energetically applied to a heavy, rugged canvas. Reid has represented women actively engaged in physically demanding tasks such as pushing, pulling, and bending. The main figure operates a particularly substantial and powerful piece of machinery with evident facility. Most importantly, though, she

¹¹ This attitude is apparent in the IMB's own publication, Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada (21), which claimed of its female employees that: "The grinding of milling taps, cutters, general cutting tools and other repetition work is particularly suitable for them." The feminization of repetitious tasks also provided employers with a justification for the introduction of increasingly mechanized machinery into the workplace, and served to confine women to jobs that precluded the development of specialized skills or workplace advancement.

¹²"Art and Artists," Toronto Globe, 21 October 1919, 10.

herself is represented as a substantial and powerful figure. By choosing to focus on the solidly-built body of a mature woman Reid forcefully counters the excessive feminization so common to wartime constructions of women.¹³ Under the terms of this feminization, even the women who forged weapons of destruction were routinely represented as 'girlish' figures, dutifully responding to the needs of a wartime society. In stark contrast to this, Reid chooses as his focal point a woman who appears capable and strong. In fact, Reid is so far from accentuating the femininity of women workers that in his preliminary sketches for the CWMF canvases the gender of the figures is frequently ambiguous.¹⁴

¹³'Excessive feminization' is a term used by Denise Riley to characterize the representation of women as passive objects in British wartime social policy ["Some peculiarities of Social Policy concerning Women in Wartime and Postwar Britain," in Higonet and others, 261.], but the trend is discernable in most areas of discourse on women. During World War I it is most clearly seen in the fervent exaltation of motherhood. By the Second World War it is manifested in the intense sexualization of homefront women from Betty Grable to the Bren Gun Girl. It may be that images of excessive femininity were invoked to reassure society of the stability of fundamental gender identities. Sandra Gilbert has described the crisis of masculinity unleashed by the war: "as young men became increasingly alienated from their prewar [masculine] selves, increasingly immured in the muck and blood of No Man's Land, women seemed to become, as if by some uncanny swing of history's pendulum, ever more powerful. . . . [As] munitions workers, bus drivers or soldiers in the 'land army'. . . these formerly subservient creatures began to loom malevolently larger." ["Soldier's Heart," *Signs* 8 no. 3 (1983): 425.] Sonya Rose writes that female employment, with its threat of reduced wages and greater competition, threatened equally to "unravel the fabric of male personal identity, intricately woven from pride in skill and family headship." ["Gender at Work: Sex, Class and Industrial Capitalism," *History Workshop* 21 (1986): 115.] The excessive feminization of women in wartime society may constitute a response to male fears of emasculation ensuing from the gender turmoil unleashed by the war and increased female employment.

¹⁴This gender ambiguity is apparent in many of the figures in Reid's sketch for *Women Operators*. It is even more evident in his pastel drawings *Forging 9.2-Inch Shells* and *Shipping Rooms for 6-Inch Blanks*, Canadian War Museum Collection.

The 'girlish' worker is not entirely absent from the Canadian War Memorials, however. She is quite clearly in evidence in Dorothy Stevens's etching *Munitions - Fuse Factory* (plate 5). Here the principal figure stands mute and listless in the forefront of the picture. Her lowered eyelids and drooping shoulders may be read as indications of the exhaustion of fourteen-hour split shifts on a hot and noisy factory floor, yet when they are combined with her delicate, almost pubescent body, her sweet, storybook face, her vacant expression and fantastically large eyes, the cumulative impression is one of a frail and docile young girl.¹⁵ Even her apparel is reminiscent of a schoolgirl's pinafore. Fragile, passive, vulnerable, the figure arouses a sense of pathos which is entirely absent from Stevens's etchings of male ordnance workers. Not only does she epitomize a formulaic femininity, she embodies industrial capitalism's vision of the ideal female employee: to management she is anonymous and tractable, a tool to be manipulated in and out of the workforce with impunity--just as in the etching, she is neither more nor less significant than the machinery that surrounds her; to the male labour force she is absolutely non-threatening, a mere child who wants nothing better than to leave the factory and never return, as soon as

¹⁵Severe fatigue was widespread among munitions workers. Many women worked over eighty hours per week and were still responsible for domestic duties. One spokeswoman described a co-worker who fell under the wheels of a streetcar because her shift had left her too tired and dizzy to hold on to the railing (Canada, *Debates*, House of Commons, 2 August 1917, 4063; quoted in Ramkhalawansingh, 283). I do not mean to diminish the significance of this exhaustion in my discussion of Stevens's etching, but it is possible to represent the fatigue of industrial labour without portraying women as passive children. The left-most woman in Frances Loring's frieze *Noon Hour in a Munitions Plant* (plate 11) is a good example.

someone gives her permission.¹⁶ Furthermore, to the returning soldier whose sweetheart had tasted increased social and economic freedom in his absence, she is a welcome reassurance that working 'girls' were still feminine, and that the social order he had left behind remained essentially intact.

Comparison of the principal figures of Reid's *Women Operators* and Stevens's *Munitions - Fuse Factory* reveals two markedly different representations of women war workers: in one we perceive a mature, productive member of the workforce, in the other a placid, childlike tool of industry. The images stand at opposite ends of a spectrum of CWMF representations of women and industry that tends, for the most part, to accentuate the more spirited view of women. In this the CWMF was not alone. Indeed, acclaim for the magnificent spirit with which women conducted their labour formed a common refrain for social commentators of all types during the War. Among the Canadian War Memorials, this spirit is set forth most evidently in Henrietta Mabel May's *Women Making Shells* (plate 6). Seven feet high and six feet wide, the size of the canvas itself immediately lends a sense of grandeur and importance to the subject. The pulsating activity of Montreal's Northern Electric plant is fuelled by the bustling movements of scores of working women. As in Reid's *Women Operators*, the subjects do not hesitate to exert themselves; they bend, reach, lift heavy objects, and operate machinery. Unlike Reid's canvas, though, male figures

¹⁶Canadian trade unionists were fearful of the impact of increased female employment. Women were widely regarded as unskilled intruders, and it was generally feared that the introduction of women would break down the labour process and cheapen the costs of labour. Sangster, 67.

are not cast in a position of authority; instead, they work together with the women. Yet with respect to the question of spirit, or attitude, the smiling face of the woman in the foreground of the painting speaks more effectively than any demonstration of strength, productivity, or equality could do. Her face, gazing cheerfully down at the shell casings in front of her, sets the tone for all of the faceless workers behind her. In all likelihood it was her enthusiastic and conscientious countenance that prompted a Toronto Globe reviewer to describe the canvas as "full of *eager* [italics mine] figures . . . concentrating on their new tasks".¹⁷ To the wartime Canadian public this cheerful worker (absent from all three of May's preliminary studies) represented more than a woman who enjoyed assembling shells. Like the rows of smiling women in the IMB publicity photos, May's earnest munitionette exemplified the *spirit* with which women entered the war effort. How this spirit was popularly constructed--what attributes were called forth to characterise it--mediated both the public reception of CWMF images and attitudes toward women war workers generally.

Women's Spirit and the Patriotic Impulse

A consideration of 'spirit' as it relates to women war workers introduces a new channel of access into the CWMF artworks. Up to this point I have constructed a reading of images of female ordnance workers based primarily on the visual attributes of the artworks. My analysis has centred on the material presentation of women at work. How do they *appear*: passive or active, delicate or strong, weak or powerful?

¹⁷"Art and Artists," 10.

What is their relationship to male employees and their working environment: are they fully involved in the process of production, or are they extraneous to the real work at hand? While I have incorporated historical data for the sake of comparison and suggested possible motives and repercussions attendant to the images, my primary point of departure has been the visual content of the image itself. From this I have constructed a reading of women workers in Canadian art that reveals a decided departure from the delineations of femininity traditionally allied to the male-defined sex/gender system.

Meaning, however, is never solely resident in the visual content of a work of art. In the case of representations of female munitions workers, consideration of the images within the context of social views about working women's *spirit*, compels a revision of any reading based exclusively on visual evidence. During the War, phenomena as varied as the visual arts, public policy, economics, journalism, and philanthropy placed great stress on the patriotic and self-sacrificial spirit of female munitions workers. I suggest that this construction of working women's spirit as the spirit of patriotism was powerful enough to absorb and neutralize the challenges to traditional conceptions of femininity posed by the works of Reid, May, Stevens, and Jefferys.

In English-Canada, patriotism provided the public with a conceptual framework to assist in its comprehension of the growing entry of women into the paid labour force. Prior to the War, most of the population dealt with the issue of increasing female employment (and the corresponding challenges to fixed gender categories) by

ignoring it.¹⁸ The War furnished an acceptable vehicle with which to bring notice of women's employment into the public arena, but it also functioned to contain acknowledgement and acceptance of women's changing roles within the confines of the war effort and the discourse of patriotic sacrifice. At every turn, discussion of women's work was framed in a patriotic context. The National Council of Women couched its recommendations on women's labour in exceedingly patriotic terms. Demands to Parliament for equal pay for equal work, technical training, and a minimum wage for women, were peppered with phrases such as "give us a chance to serve," and "let us reinforce our men at the front."¹⁹ Popular literature referred again and again to the "heroism" and "patriotic fervour" that motivated women to work, and much was made of middle- and upper-class women's patriotic work initiatives, such as the Women's Emergency Corps, a group of some 3,000 Ontario women prepared to work in war production industries to free men for the front.

While in all probability patriotic considerations were not the primary motivating factors for the majority of women entering war production,²⁰ government, business, and the media repeatedly invoked "the magnificent spirit that prompts

¹⁸Ramkhalawansingh, 264.

¹⁹Ibid., 286.

²⁰During World War II a survey conducted by the Toronto Employment and Selective Service Office revealed that as few as 9% of women seeking war-related employment listed patriotic reasons as their primary motivation. Unfortunately, no such survey of attitudes was conducted among women workers from 1914-18. Ruth Roach Pierson, They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 47.

women to make the sacrifice involved [in paid labour]."²¹ This sentiment is echoed in David Carnegie's 1925 history of munitions production in Canada. Writing of the women who were employed in this capacity Carnegie declares:

The motive of self-interest or self-preservation was not the mainspring of their conduct during these dark years. There was behind these very human interests a something which few could clothe in language and analyze, but which found expression in the common word patriotism.

The virtue of self-sacrifice, in its patriotic context, was an especially prevalent motif in discussions of female munitions workers. It was extolled with particular vehemence by British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, who wrote in his preface to Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada:

We have been too comfortable and too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish, and the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation, the great peaks we had forgotten of honour, duty, patriotism, and clad in glittering white, the towering pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven.²²

Wartime literature on female munitions workers is strewn with statements such as these, indicating a widespread credence in the patriotic explanation for women's new economic and social roles. The result of this belief is that "war work became a vehicle for women to shoulder their civic and moral responsibilities as good citizens rather than a way to become more independent and powerful."²³

²¹ President of the Canadian Manufacturers Association at the Association's 1916 convention, as reported in the Labour Gazette (1916), 1347; quoted in Ramkhalawansingh, 285.

²²Imperial Munitions Board, 4.

²³ Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 6.

CWMF images of women war workers did not remain untouched by this construction of these workers as paragons of patriotism. As a whole, the art commissioned by the CWMF was envisioned as "a memorial of sacrifice and heroism, expressive of a concentration of effort and production and denial."²⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, wartime representations of working women were more often considered in terms of the nationalistic self-sacrifice Canadian women were willing to endure in support of their fighting men than in terms of women's heroism. An article in the Canadian War Records Office magazine Canada in Khaki reflected this perspective quite clearly when it described the CWMF collection:

The whole vast significance of this war upon the life of the nation will be reflected in these paintings, which will deal with the military training of men accustomed to the peaceful avocations of the city office or the land [and] the self-sacrificing devotion of their womenfolk.²⁵

British art critic A.B. Cooper was also particularly impressed by the "splendid patience, the pathetic devotion, the utter self-abnegation of the women" depicted in the work of Western war artists.²⁶

The concepts of devotion and self-abnegation introduced by Cooper and Canada in Khaki are crucial to the assessment of the role that images of working women played in the inscription of gender during and after the War. In a particularly

²⁴P.G. Konody, Art and War: Canadian War Memorials (London: Colour Ltd. and the Canadian War Records Office, 1919), 15.

²⁵"The Canadian War Memorials Fund: Its History and Objects," Canada in Khaki 2 (1917): 26.

²⁶A.B. Cooper, "War Themes in Modern Art," Windsor Magazine XLI (January 1915): 259; quoted in Tippett, 72.

effective ideological manoeuvre, the notion of self-abnegation manages to reaffirm traditional configurations of the feminine, while simultaneously offering justification for the workers' lack of conventionally feminine attributes such as passivity, fragility, and dependence. For men the ultimate sacrifice was loss of life. For women sacrifice was conceived along different lines. Abnegation is the willing renunciation of one's self, of one's nature--and in the case of women who have for so long been perceived in relation to an essential gendered core, it is the renunciation of one's gendered identity, of one's femininity. And yet, the willingness to make that sacrifice, particularly in the context of women's "pathetic devotion" to their sons and brothers overseas, is the quintessential feminine gesture, offered in support of the men by virtue of whom women are seen to have identities at all. As with other public representations of female war workers, the social meanings constructed around paintings and etchings of munitions workers were filtered through the mechanism of patriotic self-sacrifice, according to which the trappings of conventional femininity could be temporarily suspended while, at the same time, the essence of feminine allegiance and commitment to men was reaffirmed.

Given their explicit purpose as testaments to a nation at war, the emphasis on patriotism and sacrifice surrounding CWMP representations of female ordnance workers is predictable. Nevertheless, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that these ground-breaking portrayals of women employed in heavy industry do not seem to have sparked *any* discussion about femininity or women's experience of work outside of the patriotic context. In the press the images were well received, but the women they

portrayed were clearly situated in the loyal and supportive role of the "women behind the men behind the gun."²⁷ Reviewers were pleased to see representations of the "Patriotic Canadian girl who stayed at home and worked."²⁸ This unifocal attention would appear to confirm in the art world what has been proposed with respect to society at large: instead of being perceived as challenges to the boundaries of femininity, representations of industrial women war workers were interpreted as visual symbols of the lengths to which society had been driven by the War. Potentially radical images were absorbed into the patriotic ideology of a people who had become accustomed to the idea of temporary divergences in the perceived natural order-- aberrations which were necessitated by the War, but which were viewed exclusively within the context of that crisis, and which seemed unrelated to the general social order.

²⁷"More Paintings of War Activities," Toronto Mail and Empire, 20 October 1919, 10.

²⁸"Canadian War Art Exhibition," Montreal Herald, 25 September 1920, 3.

CHAPTER 3

FRANCES LORING AND FLORENCE WYLE - MUNITIONS SCULPTURES

During the war the arbitrariness of gender designations stood briefly exposed. Seeing this, historians have asked why women failed to capitalize on wartime disruptions of gender norms.

-Margaret Higonnet, Behind the Lines, 6.

The disruption of gender designations and the exposure of their largely arbitrary nature was a corollary of the wartime employment of women in the hitherto masculine purview of munitions production. Given this, it is perhaps inevitable that representations of such labour participate in those disruptions. Certainly the works of Mabel May, George Reid, C.W. Jefferys, and Dorothy Stevens all presented, to a greater or lesser extent, a view of women that broke with the representational boundaries of femininity inherited from their artistic predecessors. Their works show women who are strong, active, productive, and involved in the economy of the nation. These qualities are repeated and magnified in the final group of representations of female munitions workers that I will discuss: the series of bronze sculptures by

Frances Loring and Florence Wyle (plates 7-14).¹

Disrupting Gender Codes

Three-quarters of a century after their creation, Loring's and Wyle's sculptures are startling for the unprecedented challenge they seem to pose to gender definitions in the post-Edwardian era. When viewed from a contemporary perspective, informed by the reading strategies of feminist scholarship, these works appear to constitute a radical departure from the visual codes normally employed in the depiction of women by Canadian artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The physical appearance of the women produces the first unanticipated interruption of gender codes. From a distance, the workers represented in Frances Loring's *Girls with a Rail* (plate 7) do not seem to be women at all. The appearance of two female figures in caps and overalls, straining with obvious effort to hoist a segment of rail is so unexpected within the context of early twentieth-century art production in Canada, that it is not until one approaches and notices the breasts of the figures that their sex is ascertained.² There is a ruggedness of style in the character of the modelling which

¹There are fifteen sculptures in the series, eleven of women and four of men. Two of the sculptures by Florence Wyle represent 'land girls', and are further discussed in chapter four; the rest show women involved in industrial labour.

²With the exception of one woman in Loring's frieze Noon Hour in a Munition Plant all of the munitions workers represented by Loring and Wyle wear pants or "womanalls", a feminized version of standard male overalls, which accentuated the fashionable female silhouette of the period. Such garments were worn by women in factories during the War, but there is some question about the extent of their use. For example, in the many photographs of munitions workers included in the IMB pamphlet Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada not a single woman wears pants.

disrupts the visual language of smooth refinement or pastoral tranquillity that predominates in other representations of working women. Gone are the soft, delicate facial features in Wyatt Eaton or George Reid's paintings;³ Loring replaces them with bold, angular faces, set with determination. Gone are the demurely self-encompassed women of William Brymner or William Cruikshank;⁴ these figures move in space, claiming it as their own and not simply occupying it. They stand resolutely, legs set firmly apart, knees and backs bent in a position of activity and exercised strength. Likewise vanished is the coyly sexualized posturing of Paul Peel's working class girls, whose skirts he lifted to display their highly coded legs.⁵ Here, Loring bares a forearm to show the almost exaggerated muscularity and power of a very different code. By so emphatically rendering the women as act-ors, rather than passive objects of external actions, Loring simultaneously secures their position as agents and problematizes their definition within a male-defined sexuality. If, as Teresa de Lauretis argues, "it is objectification that constitutes women as sexual, instating

Whether this discrepancy indicates the IMB's desire to allay fears about the feminine nature of women workers or Loring and Wyle's desire to call that nature into question is unclear.

³I refer here to such works as Eaton's *The Harvest*, 1884 (Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) or Reid's *Meeting of the School Trustees*, 1885 (Collection of the National Gallery of Canada); see plate 21.

⁴See William Brymner's *Woman Sewing*, ca. 1900 (Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts) and Cruikshank's *Anne Cruikshank*, n.d. (Collection of the Art Gallery of Canada).

⁵See Peel's *Adoration, Brittany*, 1885 (Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario; plate 22) and *The Spinner*, 1881 (Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts).

sexuality at the core of the material reality of women's lives,"¹⁶ Loring's active challenge to objectification brings the nature of the figures' sexuality into question. By giving these women status as agents, Loring has opposed the ordering of a phallographic symbolization of sexuality, whereby the objectified woman "is so much the sign of sexed-ness that she loses her own libidinal corporeality in the process of becoming the incarceration of sex."¹⁷ In contrast, these women project an immense sense of physicality, but there is no hint that it is channelled into the project of making themselves into erotic objects for men. Arms, necks, and upper chests are revealed, but in the context of figures so far removed from the passively objectified feminine norm, they do not incite scopophilic arousal on the part of the viewer as much as they seem to endow the female figures with their *own* sense of embodiment.

This sense of embodiment, so strong in Loring's *Girls with a Rail*, is intimately linked to the potential of the sculpture to challenge gender inscription, for such a corporeal concept immediately places the discussion on tricky footing. It may be that the image of the female body is already so saturated with meaning that it has become impossible for women to invoke their own bodies without signifying the fixed and essentialized gendered categories of identity that they are attempting to question.⁸ Certainly, it is no longer tenable to ignore the fact that visual representations of

¹⁶Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," Feminist Studies 16 no. 1 (Spring 1990): 119.

¹⁷Rosi Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance: A study of women in contemporary philosophy, trans. Elizabeth Guild (New York: Routledge, 1991), 194.

⁸Linda M. Zerilli, "Remembrance or War? French Feminist Narrative and the Politics of Self-Representation," differences 3 no. 1 (1991): 8.

women's bodies have predominantly propagated a notion of 'Woman' as the idealized projection of male expectations.⁹ And if, as Monique Wittig says, "the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you,"¹⁰ is it possible for an artist to deploy the language of the female body in order to circumvent a masculinized semiotic appropriation of that body?

The question is a compelling one, perhaps impossible to resolve satisfactorily. Nevertheless, I wish to propose two readings of *Girls with a Rail* that may furnish potential pathways towards a more constructive understanding of the role of representation of female bodies in gender construction. The first reading takes as its point of departure the personal impact of the figures on me, as viewer; the second is founded in a theory-based interpretation of the body as interface.

As I looked repeatedly at the women of *Girls with A Rail*, I was struck by the unyielding sense of bodily integrity that the figures manage to assert. They are characterized by a sort of unbroken wholeness or self-sufficiency. This integrity, which seems to stem from the women's self-absorption coupled with their vibrant activity, creates a sense of embodiment, a physicality which exists in and for the figures themselves. Loring's women occupy their bodies in such a complete and self-contained way, that they place under scrutiny the feasibility of successfully imposing masculine terms of identification onto those bodies. Through the integrity of their

⁹Braidotti, 273.

¹⁰Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David LeVay (New York: Avon, 1973), 114; quoted in Zerilli, 9.

embodiment, the figures offer an alternative to those modes of representation which unquestioningly foster the co-optation and the fetishization of the female body in patriarchal culture.¹¹

Admittedly, this reliance on the notion of integrity to counteract the prior signification of the female body by a masculine agenda, labours wearily under modernist notions of a unified subject position. Current theorizing on the function of the body in gender inscription has dislodged the idea of one's physicality as a discreet, self-dependent position, proposing instead a view of the body as a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed.¹² The acknowledgement of the body as a field of *intersection* of cultural forces (rather than simply the ground for the material oppression of women) opens the door to possibilities of contestation in the culturally inscribed meanings of the female body. In this light, Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender as an effect produced through the altogether cultural stylization of the body, viewed not as biological entity but as physical surface, is especially germane. Gender, Butler writes, "must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the

¹¹I am indebted to Linda Zerilli for the idea of bodily integrity as a strategy to challenge patriarchal co-optation, although that author uses the term in a somewhat different, and more literal, manner. Zerilli, 11.

¹²Braidotti, 219. Judith Butler also puts this issue quite clearly when she writes that "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality...." Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender Identity (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 139.

illusion of an abiding gendered self."¹³ Thus, not only should challenges to gender not be cut off from corporeality on the grounds that the female body is always already a co-opted territory, but in fact, the body is precisely the grounds on which the struggle for gender re-definition--or de-definition--must take place. The bodies of Loring's women are particularly well placed to undertake this struggle, since their very nature as artworks (i.e., culturally constructed objects) facilitates a recognition that gender definitions are primarily constructed upon bodies as physical surfaces, exterior spaces. Butler argues that it is through a "stylized repetition of acts"¹⁴ occurring on the level of exterior physical performance that gender is produced and can be challenged. Loring's *Girls with a Rail*, with their 'masculine' dress, determined expressions, muscular presence, active labour, and firm stances, offer on a very physical level a stylization of women that runs counter to masculinist definitions of the feminine. Through their physical, bodily appearances, the women in *Girls with a Rail* challenge conventional delineations of femininity. In so doing they reveal that the dominant account of the female body is unable to fully contain the femininity it seeks to inscribe.

This new stylization of women should not, however, be regarded as a simple substitution of a valorized 'female' body for a denigrated one. The effect of Loring's and Wyle's representations of female war workers on gender inscription goes beyond any simple project of dialectical reversal. Their sculptures may be understood as truly

¹³Butler, 140.

¹⁴Ibid.

radical in that they challenge the actual logic of dualist opposition upon which the traditional gender system is based. A comparison between two of Florence Wyle's works, *Noon Hour* and *The Harvester* (plates 14 and 15), will serve to better illustrate this point. Wyle's challenge to gender does not come at the point of the physical differences of the two sexes. On this level she acknowledges difference and celebrates it in her careful attention to the folds of the garments over the woman's breasts, stomach, and buttocks, and the delineation of the musculature of the man's chest. Instead, the challenge is posed in Wyle's refusal to use these differences to establish an exclusionary and oppositional difference in social meaning between the figures. In each figure the confident pose--hands on hips, chests pressed forward, heads thrust back, arms raised in a gesture of self-replenishment--suggests a nobility, a dignity, and even a heroism involved in the act of physical labour. Although they are depicted in a moment of rest, it is clearly the identity of each figure as a working subject that is being ennobled. Through the similar physical posturing of the female and male workers, Wyle makes it clear that her representation of gender will not repeat the heterosexual model of gender differences based on opposition, in which the One is identified as dominant through the subjugation of the Other--in which the One's subjectivity, presence, independence and strength are assured by an Other that is objectified, lacking, dependent and weak. The heroism in Wyle's female figures is not the glorification of the female body *qua* female. Rather it is the valorization of the woman as active subject of physical action, and as a bearer of a social significance dependent not on a sexual opposition to a physical other, but on active participation in

social activity outside the terms of oppositional otherness posed by the traditional gender system.

In their refusal to recognize those terms, Loring and Wyle may be seen to have gone beyond challenges to femininity alone, and to have entered the project of destabilizing the institution of heterosexuality, understood here as the dominant social construct that "(re)produces a specific power differential between men and women through gender."¹⁵ In this sense, the heterosexual contract is not primarily a question of personal sexual practices, but a model for social relations based on "the agreement between modern theoretical systems and epistemologies not to question the *a priori* of gender and hence to presume the socio-sexual opposition of 'man' and 'woman' as the necessary and founding moment of culture."¹⁶ Social discourses on sexuality take place in a very public sphere, and in its social aspect heterosexuality has been constructed around precisely those oppositional elements of gender relations that Loring and Wyle refuse, namely the self-legitimation of the One through the exclusionary opposition of the Other. At the level of their own private experience,

¹⁵De Lauretis, 128. For further discussion of the institution of heterosexuality see Catharine MacKinnon, Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in her Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); and Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," Feminist Issues no. 1 (Summer 1980): 103-110, and "One Is Not Born a Woman," Feminist Issues no. 2 (Winter 1981): 47-54.

¹⁶Ibid., 148. For further elaboration of this point see Teresa De Lauretis, "The Female Body and Heterosexual Presumption," Semiotics 67 nos. 3-4 (1987): 259-79. Here de Lauretis discusses the presumption of the socio-sexual opposition of man and women in terms of significant Western theoretic systems, including those of Saussure, Rousseau and Freud.

Loring and Wyle did live outside the heterosexual contract of gender: they lived together for fifty-five years; they did not marry; they had no children; they considered their work to be the most important element of their lives. At the level of public practice, I suggest that Loring's and Wyle's artworks also transgressed the boundaries of heterosexuality. In their refusal to inscribe men and women within oppositional differences these sculptures do contest the *a priori* status of gender, and thus may truly challenge gendered norms.

Popular Patriots

Given Loring's and Wyle's apparent challenges to the standards of femininity reflected in and constructed by Canada's legacy of visual imagery, one might expect to find that the sculptures were met with some reticence, if not outright disapprobation. This was not the case. Instead, the figures encountered popular and critical approval. A Toronto Globe review of the 1919 war memorials exhibition, for example, ended thus:

Scattered through the rooms are more than a dozen bronzes by Florence Wyle and Frances Loring. These two brilliant Toronto sculptors seem here to have excelled their own past achievements. Single figures and groups of types engaged in war work at home seem to step out from the hectic days of the war, and compel warmest admiration.... In a word, these bits of bronze should compel a new admiration for sculpture for their rendering of epic characters in the life of a nation at war.¹⁷

The review, while providing a good indication of the enthusiasm with which the sculptures were received, also offers a key to understanding how this reception was possible--how viewers were able to negotiate the sculptures' overt challenges to

¹⁷"Art and Artists," Toronto Globe, 21 October 1919, 10.

traditional configurations of the feminine. The key is in the use of the term "types" to describe the workers. We have seen that during the War women as wage earners were brought to visibility in a new and widespread way. The mechanisms of this process are integral to the construction of women's identities and their relation to hegemonic structures. I suggest that the designation of women workers as "types" is one of these mechanisms.

In her examination of nineteenth-century British representations of working-class women, Deborah Cherry adopts a Foucauldian analysis of the function of visibility in the strategic field of power relations. This analysis warrants some elaboration, for it proves particularly applicable to the Canadian reception of Loring's and Wyle's war sculptures. Beginning from Foucault's position that the individual is constituted in and by discourses and institutional practices, and that knowledge about the individual is central to the workings of power, Cherry demonstrates the ways in which the identities of working-class women were constructed and defined by forces outside their own control. When, in nineteenth-century England, working-class women became subject to description, that description itself became a type of knowledge and a tool of power:

In crossing the threshold of visibility, in becoming observed and classifiable, individuals were subjected to, and became subjects of, disciplinary power. . . . High-cultural images of working-class women formed an integral part of the systematic acquisition of knowledge on individuals and social groups by investigative journalism, social work, state commissions and colonial administration. Women artists were among the new constituency of professional experts who collected information on working-class women, who brought them to visibility and categorization. . . . Discursive categories transformed the population into easily recognizable individuals classified according to their work

and productivity: the seamstress, the prostitute, the servant, the factory girl, the flower seller.¹⁸

The process of individuation described by Cherry in the development of discursive categories of working women is equally relevant to the Canadian experience. Faced with the sudden visibility of working women during the War, Canadian society struggled to find a way to understand and control the challenges that these women might represent. Through the act of categorization images of working women became intelligible, the boundaries of their categories functioning to define and contain their identities. Public reaction to Loring's and Wyle's representations of women war workers reveals that these images functioned in precisely this fashion. Newspaper reviews repeatedly framed the sculptures in terms of their representation of certain categories of women. Each solitary figure was clearly seen to represent a specific *kind* of woman. Again and again, reviewers used the words "type" and "class" to identify Loring's and Wyle's women as members of a discursive category who were individuated but never individualized.¹⁹ In this case, the category was that of the patriotic war worker.

The process of the public construction of women munitions workers as devoted

¹⁸Deborah Cherry, Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists (London: Routledge, 1993), 144.

¹⁹The women represented by Loring and Wyle were referred to as "types" or "classes" in the following reviews: "Art and Artists," 10; "More Paintings of War Activities," Toronto Mail and Empire, 20 October 1919, 10; "Art at the Exhibition," Toronto Globe, 28 August 1920, 32; "Women Artists' Work Exhibited," Montreal Daily Star, 2 October 1920, 30; "Truth, Beauty, and Strength," Toronto Star Weekly, 1 August 1925, 4.

patriots that was discussed in the previous chapter holds especially true for the Loring and Wyle sculptures. Repeated references to the "heroism" and "patriotic fervour" that motivated women to work acted as an *apologia* for their new economic powers. The same concepts provided a rationalisation for new portrayals of women workers as strong, independent subjects--portrayals such as those by Loring and Wyle. Maureen Honey, in her study of popular-press representations of working women in America during World War II, outlines how progressive images of working women functioned as propaganda tools. Her analysis presents a new avenue of interpretation for the public reception of Loring's and Wyle's sculptures:

One of these [magazine propaganda strategies] fostered a progressive view of women as strong workers, well equipped to play an equal part in public life. This was the creation of an inspirational figure with which the country as a whole could identify in order to have the courage and faith to believe in and work towards victory. The woman doing a man's work filled this role as she symbolized American adaptability and hardiness. She became the standard-bearer for all civilians who were taking on new tasks, challenging themselves to expand their limits and shedding old habits in order to move forward.²⁰

Surely these are the women we see in the works of Loring and Wyle. As Honey is quick to point out, however, the other side of this coin was that "as defenders of liberty, women were cast into a selfless role that conflicted with the concept of female self-actualization through new work opportunities."²¹ Once again, the dual paradigms of patriotism and self-sacrifice were drawn upon to discursively encode the wartime

²⁰Maureen Honey, Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda during World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 215.

²¹Ibid.

changes in women's material status and their public image in a way that limited their potential to transform gender relations.

Bombshell Beauties

Patriotic justification was not the only ideology summoned to defuse Loring's and Wyle's sculptures. Equally reaffirming to standard readings of femininity was the rhetoric of beauty invoked to justify and praise representations of female war workers. Eric Brown eulogized the young women who laboured in munitions factories and provided the artist with "a beauty of subject worthy of fifth century Greece."²² Barker Fairley commended Loring and Wyle for their success in turning the dress and attitude of war workers from the butt of snide jokes to "a source of a beauty that is finely nervous and supple."²³ This emphasis on women workers as a source of physical and aesthetic beauty, conspicuously absent from discussion of representations of their male counterparts, is revelatory of a mainstream effort to bolster a concept of femininity that appeared ready to burst its seams from the economic pressures exerted by self-sufficient women war workers. Naomi Wolf has described the institution of the cult of essential feminine beauty as "a bulwark of reassurance against the flood of change" brought about by women's struggles for increasing independence throughout the twentieth century.

²²Eric Brown to Sir Edmund Walker, 17 October, National Gallery of Canada Archives, File 01.01.

²³Barker Fairley, "At the Art Gallery," The Rebel 4 no.3 (December 1919), 125.

In her discussion of the "beauty myth" Wolf focuses primarily on late twentieth-century events and attitudes, but her arguments are equally applicable to women's experiences earlier in the century. Wolf writes that in the face of challenges to the institutions on which a male-dominated culture has depended, it is necessary to maintain stability either "by directing attention away from the fearsome fact, or by repackaging its meaning in an acceptable format."²⁴ For decades Canadian society had attempted to deal with the consequences of increasing women's employment in the former manner. When the exigencies of war production and propaganda made this impracticable emphasis shifted to the latter strategy. There is no doubt that women's wartime labour was anxiety-inducing. It troubled male workers and trade-unionists who feared new job competition and lower wages; it worried government officials who struggled to fend off demands for daycare, new training programmes and minimum wage legislation; and it distressed returning soldiers who came back to find some unexpected changes in the women they had left behind. The preoccupation with the beauty of the women war workers portrayed by Loring and Wyle is indicative of a reactionary response to the fears generated by women's open entrance into the arena of industrial economic activity. Even in images which today appear revolutionary for their open challenges to definitional norms of femininity, the concept of "nervous and supple" feminine beauty could be called upon to reassure the public that even though they were workers, they were still *Women*. Their beauty, coupled with their patriotic

²⁴Naomi Wolf, The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 17.

self-sacrifice, was certainly proof.

A View from Elsewhere

In this chapter I have endeavoured to construct a credible reading of the interaction between cultural narratives of gender and Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's sculptures of female workers during the First World War. From a late twentieth-century standpoint, the sculptures indicate a new and revolutionary attitude to early twentieth-century women. The figures' dress, postures, and expressions, their apparent strength and sense of physical embodiment, even the movement and modelling of the physical medium in which the women are cast--all of these qualities would appear in themselves to demonstrate the significant implication of these works in a new social and cultural inscription of gender. Viewed in the light of their historical context, however, the disruptive potential of the sculptures seems to have been dissipated, even co-opted, by the discourse of patriotism in which the works were immersed from their conception to their reception by the Canadian public. The logic of crisis diffused the many changes to femininity posed at the turn of the century by categorizing them as social aberrations occasioned by the War. Loring's and Wyle's new vision of working women was rendered acceptable through the machinations of the ideology of patriotism, which granted a certain latitude in its representations of women, but according to which the tremendous efforts of the munitions worker were but supportive backdrops to the bigger drama played out by the men on Flanders Fields or Vimy Ridge.

The task is not now to weigh the contemporary and historical interpretations against each other in order to determine which is the more legitimate reading, as if such a supra-historical judgment seat could be occupied. Neither is it to bring the two together and effect some synthesis from the confrontation. Their opposition is a useful reminder of the complexity of the field within which meaning operates. But the recognition of the historical discourse of patriotism may have a role to play in even the most contemporary reading of the re/de-definition of gender in Loring's and Wyle's works.

Teresa de Lauretis writes that we need a "view from elsewhere". We need a new perspective from which to pose the terms of a different construction of gender, terms that will take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation. I suggest that the images of women war workers created by Loring and Wyle provide a glimpse of what that view can look like. De Lauretis locates the ground for this "elsewhere" in the "social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chunks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus."²⁵ Loring's and Wyle's bronzes occupy precisely such an interstitial space. At the intersection of patriarchy and patriotism emerged a vision which was outside the strict boundaries of either. The hegemonic discourse of gender during the 1920s provided the visual formula of the female body as a suitable object for aesthetic contemplation. The ideology of patriotism, with its predisposition to heroism, opened up a bit of room in the image of the ideal woman.

²⁵Teresa de Lauretis, Technologies of Gender: Theory, Film and Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 25.

Loring's and Wyle's figures move back and forth across the boundaries of representations of patriotism and of gender in its male-centred frame of reference, and into that "elsewhere" beyond those representation. By their conflating of categories, these representations of working women problematize what it means to see a woman or to see a patriot. The knowledge (and the corresponding power) which sprang from the ability to identify and define femininity and heroism is equally disrupted. This is the space of the self-representation of women. It is the space of Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's evocation of Woman through the bodies of historical women. It is the space in which two women who lived and worked together, independent of many of the claims of the conventional gender system, were able to create representations of women that echoed the challenges they themselves lived. Loring's and Wyle's figures of active, noble, working women stand as road markers in the self-representation of women, and in women's own efforts to engage the definitional boundaries of gender in serious debate.

CHAPTER 4

AGRICULTURAL WORK

Although the most dramatic entrance of women into the labour force was made in munitions production, industrial jobs were by no means the only employment opportunities open to women during the War. The white-collar sector was revolutionized by the entry of women into clerical positions during and immediately after the War, and to the 35,000 temporary jobs in munitions were added almost 57,000 long-term posts for female stenographers, typists, and clerks.²⁶ But though a female bank teller may free a man for the trenches just as effectively as a factory worker, her image lacks the visual impact of loyal exertion so readily apparent in representations of her industrial counterpart. Unsurprisingly, the female clerk was not included in the CWMF monument to patriotic effort.

The female agricultural worker, on the other hand, occupied a type of middle-ground between shell-filler and secretary. Not as glamorous or as immediately linked to military contribution as munitions work, food production was nevertheless an essential aspect of the war effort. Furthermore, like munitions workers, female land

²⁶Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 140.

workers were viewed as "picturesque types"¹ that were "peculiarly the creation of the great war"². As such, they made ideal subjects for inclusion in the CWMF collection.

Of primary concern to Eric Brown and Edmund Walker, the CWMF's Canadian administrators, was the representation of Ontario's National Service land workers, commonly known as "farmerettes". In 1917 the drain on the agricultural labour pool, initiated by military recruitment and worsened by conscription, became critical. It was greatly feared that Ontario would be unable to produce enough food to satisfy even the needs of the province, much less meet the demands of overseas soldiers and the hard-pressed British population.³ In an attempt to avert this crisis, a 'land army' of young urban women was recruited through the joint efforts of the Ontario Government's Public Employment Bureau and the National Service Department of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). During 1917 and 1918 over two thousand women picked fruit, pitched hay, hoed, weeded, planted, handled horses and did what was required to harvest Ontario's crops.⁴ The novelty of

¹In a letter to Sir Edmund Walker, Eric Brown of the National Gallery of Canada recommended women war workers as "picturesque types", likely to make good subjects; 4 September 1918, National Gallery of Canada Archives, File 01.01.

²"More Paintings of War Activities." Toronto Mail and Empire, 20 October 1919, 10.

³Barbara Wilson, ed. Ontario and the First World War 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Champlain Society, for the Government of Ontario, 1977), lx.

⁴A similar programme was also established in British Columbia through the provincial government and the British Columbia Women's Institutes, but this programme is not as well-documented archivally or pictorially. See Carol J. Dennison, "They Also Served: The British Columbia Women's Institutes in Two World Wars," in Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British

female students, teachers, milliners, office workers, domestics, and home-makers leaving the city, living in camps, wearing bloomers, and doing heavy farm work, coupled with many farmers' initial reluctance to hire women, made the 'farmerettes' somewhat of a *cause célèbre*. Their labour caught the attention of the public and the imagination of CWMF artists and administrators, and steps were taken to ensure documentation of this as part of women's contribution to victory. Manly MacDonald completed five large canvases and twenty-two oil studies on the subject (plates 18-20 and 24).⁵ Florence Wyle contributed two bronzes, *On the Land* and *Farm Girl* (plates 16 and 17), which are similar in style to her sculptures of munitions workers.⁶

In actuality these women were but a small addition to the estimated 750,000 Canadian women who laboured on their husbands' and fathers' farms prior to the war⁷; but unlike the perennial efforts of rural farm women, the work of the farmerette could be viewed exclusively within the context of the European conflagration and

Columbia, ed. Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdra (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984), 215. Prairie farmers, reluctant to believe that urban women could make any substantial contribution to their farms, turned down offers by the National Council of Women to help organize similar programmes throughout the west.

⁵MacDonald's canvases are entitled: *Women Gathering Carrots, Harvesters, Land Girls Hoeing, Women in the Hayfield, and Apple Picking*.

⁶Wyle's *Farm Girl* differs somewhat from her munitions sculptures in the extreme youthfulness and somewhat fragile appearance of the subject (who is vaguely reminiscent of Degas' *Little Dancer*, 1880-81). Many of the National Service farm volunteers were in fact still high-school students, and perhaps this circumstance accounts for the change.

⁷Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, "Women During the Great War," in Women at Work: Ontario 1850-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 266.

women's patriotic exertion in support of their fighting men. As with representations of munitions workers, patriotic contextualization provided a framework for the recognition of women's agricultural employment⁸, and images that presented a radically new view of working women were met by the public with barely a blink of the eye. Like Loring and Wyle's bronzes of munitions workers, Manly MacDonald's canvases of 'land girls' offer a vision of women workers as integral members of the economic community--strong, active, independent, and productive. And like these sculptures, MacDonald's paintings were popular. Among the visual memorials of this sombre period, his works are unique for their joyous tone, and were greatly appreciated for that reason.⁹ Displayed in conjunction with the grimmest scenes of trench warfare, the brilliantly coloured views of pastoral plenitude must have provided a welcome counterpoint to the carnage, and a vivid reminder of the fertile lands and

⁸Reviewers often discussed land workers in primarily patriotic terms: "Manly MacDonald has gone to the farm for his subjects and shows the work undertaken by women to release men for sterner duties" ("War's Last Phase Shown in Paint," Montreal Gazette, 30 September 1920, 5); "Manly MacDonald a illustré l'effort des femmes aux champs pendant que les maris faisaient leur part dans les tranchées" ("Tableaux de Guerre" Le Canada, 25 September 1920, 5); "The Canadian section should make a very strong appeal to both the women and men who played their part during the great struggle by conscientiously striving . . . on the farms at home to supply the men of the fighting forces, and it is quite fitting that their efforts should also be permanently recorded on canvas, marble and bronze for future generations" ("Women Artists' Work Exhibited," 30).

⁹Eric Brown thought MacDonald's canvases to be "the happiest and most joyous" of the pictures in the exhibition because they were the "furthest removed from the grimness of war." Eric Brown, "Canada's Own War Memorials' Exhibition in Toronto," 28 October 1919, Canadian War Museum, Wodehouse File; quoted in Tippett, 91.

noble women that Canadian soldiers had sought to defend. Yet these women were by no means simply the passive recipients of masculine protection; their labour was an active contribution to the war effort, and MacDonald clearly represented it as such.

MacDonald's various treatments of the land worker theme are particularly distinguished for the unprecedented sense of energy and vitality with which the female subjects are imbued. In *Land Girls Hoeing* (plate 18), for instance, all three women are actively engaged in their labour. The last figure is bent over in a posture of obvious effort and the two front figures are caught in mid-step, heads and torsos leaning into their activity with a forward motion that is echoed in the whipping blur of trouser bottoms on the foremost worker. The figures' energetic movements are pictorially reinforced by the strong diagonal lines of their thighs, their hoes, and the cultivated field. The overall sense of vigour and motion is further heightened by the firm, broad brush strokes and vivid post-impressionist palette common to all MacDonald's war works. Again in *Apple Picking* and *Harvesters* (plates 19 and 20), posture, colour and brushstroke indicate a zest and strength that is indicative of a new perception not only of women's role, but of their nature as well. Strength, energy, and animation were little mentioned virtues for women before the War, but in MacDonald's workers they constitute the labourers' main appeal.

MacDonald's wartime canvases evince distinct changes in the established parameters for the representation of women. They bespeak a new esteem for women's labour, and present challenges to gender ideology which become more fully apparent when the works are considered against the backdrop of earlier Canadian

representations of agrarian women. Unlike the depictions of women ordnance workers, which were without precedent in Canadian art, MacDonald's canvases are heirs in substance, if not in spirit, to a legacy of academic representations of female farm labourers, among them Wyatt Eaton's *The Harvest* (1884), Paul Peel's *Adoration, Brittany* (1885), and William Cruikshank's *Ploughing, Lower St. Lawrence* (n.d.) (plates 21-23).

The image of women that emerges from these earlier canvases is strikingly different from the active, productive, independent women painted by MacDonald. Whereas, for MacDonald, the identities of the female figures are constructed in terms of their labour, for Eaton (1849-1896), Peel (1860-1892), and Cruikshank (1849-1922) farm labour is only a fashionable guise for a construction of identity that emphasizes gender and offers a clear symbolization of femininity. All three canvases focus on female farm workers--identified as such by their clothing--yet in each painting the woman's labour is subordinated to other concerns. Productive activity may be suggested, as by the scythe of Peel's reaper who briefly pauses to attend to her child and who is presumably about to return to her work, or it may be relegated to the masculine domain, as in Eaton's image of a pastoral madonna figure who has been sitting long enough for her child to have fallen fast asleep on her lap, while a nineteenth-century Joseph toils in the background. Even in William Cruikshank's canvas, where the young woman does stride forth with some energy, the labour-value of her activity is dubious: she is a helpmate to her father or husband who struggles to make his mark on the land, but no more strenuous exertion is required of her than a

slow-paced walk through twilit fields. These women are placed in the countryside, but unlike their counterparts in *Farm Girls Hoeing*, direct intervention with the land (and its correlative of acknowledged contribution to the economic fabric of Canada) is denied them. The strength and power of exertion manifested by the women of MacDonald's *Land Girls* or *Harvesters* contrasts sharply with the leisurely saunter of Cruikshank's young woman or the laconic posture of Eaton's resting mother. The independence of MacDonald's 'farmerette', working as an equal among other women, is replaced by the maternal, marital, and filial obligations of the *peasant* woman--obligations which are rendered as the 'natural' domain of femininity by the elision of the rural woman and the timeless, fertile world of nature.

Gender is raised as an issue in the canvases of Eaton, Peel, and Cruikshank not only by the differentiation of male and female roles within a labour setting, but by the representation of women as objects of aesthetic contemplation, carefully rendered to conform to an archetype of feminine beauty that privileges gentle, delicate facial features, silken complexions, tender expressions, and soft, rounded, youthful figures. These are attributes that are, for the most part, conspicuously absent from Manly MacDonald's views of land workers. Where Eaton makes a special effort to give his subject an attractive and wholesome face, MacDonald ignores the faces of his workers, concentrating instead on their overall activity. Where Peel pays particular attention to the reaper's figure, following the example of Jules Breton in his glamorisation and

classicization of "the erotic charms of the peasant girl",¹⁰ MacDonald concentrates less on the women's bodies than on their incorporation into integrated scenes of dynamic occupation. In his numerous oil sketches, the gender of the figures is frequently difficult, if not impossible, to determine (plate 24), and in finished canvases such as *Apple Picking* he is content to indicate gender through clothing (kerchiefs, bloomers, skirts and bonnets), and the broad, gestural shapes of the workers (wider at the hips, narrower at the waist), not pausing to dwell on the charms or grace of the women, and never posing them in order to display their figures to best advantage. In this MacDonald differs not only from turn-of-the-century academics, but from his contemporaries as well, as a comparison of *Apple Picking* to Bertha Des Clayes's (1877-1968) *Acadia* (plate 25) illustrates.¹¹ While the subject matter of the works is the same, the paintings diverge greatly in their representations of women's labour and the consequences of gender. *Apple Picking* portrays a group of women sorting apples. They are absorbed in their occupation even to the point of ignoring the approach of a team of horses, and have turned their heads and bodies completely to the task at hand. The physical setting of the scene is broad and open. MacDonald situates women's labour in a social dimension which is clearly indicated in the figures' interaction over the canvas table. Furthermore, in his inclusion of the cluster of barrels to the left of

¹⁰Linda Nochlin, "Women, Art, and Power," in Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 20.

¹¹Des Clayes's canvas is undated and its current location unknown, but it was illustrated in the April 1916 issue of the Canadian Magazine (vol. XLVI no. 6, pg 454).

the scene the artist acknowledges the economic impact of this labour.

How different from MacDonald's image of women is Des Clayes's representation of the fruit picker--a solitary woman who poses for the artist viewer, peering out rather coquettishly from under her bonnet. Standing sideways, with her arms raised to the branches but her attention focused frontally, outside the picture frame, her activity claims less of her attention than her existence as an object of aesthetic contemplation and admiration. The woman's posture is frozen and contrived, but it gives occasion to a most becoming silhouette of her figure. She stands alone, liberty of space severely constricted by the mass of the tree on one side and the rigid vertical line of the window frame on the other, while the pervasive presence of the house in the background indicates an interior and domestic sphere of existence. Her social dimension is limited to the attention of the viewer, and the economic significance of her activity is completely disregarded; she does not even have a basket to collect the fruit she is supposedly picking. Cut-off and constrained, defined more by the viewer's activity than her own, the woman in Des Clayes's orchard scene is a direct foil to MacDonald's visual celebrations of active social beings and economic producers.

For Des Clayes, the identification of her subject as female and as femme--through figure, pose, setting, attitude, and nature of activity--is of primary and obvious importance. With MacDonald, the sex of the labourers occupies a subordinate visual standing, and the workings of gender ideology are less straightforward. Sexual identity (biological sex) and gender (the psycho-social attributes of masculine and

feminine) both occupy a position of varying consequence in MacDonald's war canvases. Within the framework of meaning implicit in the content of the work alone, these issues play a surprisingly small role; the sex of the figures is not the subject of eloquent elaboration and the delineation of opposing feminine and masculine roles and characteristics is entirely absent. In terms of the visual language of the works, prominence of place is accorded to the activity, not the gender, of the labourers.

As became apparent in the chapters on the representations of munitions workers, however, the relationship of art and gender is at least as much a function of art's social context as its visual content. In the case of Manly MacDonald's wartime images, consideration of the circumstances surrounding the initial commission and subsequent reception of the works is especially crucial to a thorough assessment of the function of gender in the paintings. Despite the apparent gender-indifference of the works themselves, the images were commissioned to fulfil the stated desire of Eric Brown to include in the CWMF collection "some fine land-scape subjects in connection with girls' work on the land".¹² As was also the case with the commissions extended to May, Stevens, Reid, Loring, and Wyle, MacDonald was specifically requested to document *women's* contributions to the war effort. It may be that MacDonald was able to devote so little attention to the elaboration of gender at the level of visual content precisely because gender was the over-riding contextual concern of the painting. That gender was of significance to MacDonald--that it, in

¹²Eric Brown to Manly MacDonald, 4 September 1918, National Gallery of Canada Archives, File 5.42-M.

fact, structured his own understanding of the works--is indicated by the sex-specific nature of the paintings' titles: *Land Girls Hoeing*, *Women Gathering Carrots*, *Women in the Hayfield*, and *Women Harvesting*.¹³ The public's perception of the works was also framed by gender, as is demonstrated in newspaper reviews which invariably refer to MacDonald's representations of *women's* work on the farm. In short, gender paved the way for MacDonald's images at every step: it formed the basic premise of the works for the man who commissioned them, the man who created them, and the public who viewed them.

Because gender *is* at stake as a founding term in these paintings, MacDonald's departure from accepted conventions for the representation of women is especially noteworthy. For the same reason, however, his gesture was easily assimilated. MacDonald presents a view of women workers in which the subjects' identity as labourers is of first importance, but he does so within a context that has already provided the gendered terms according to which the works are to be understood, i.e., patriotic women who make tremendous sacrifices in order to support their fighting men. Again, newspaper reviews of MacDonald's canvases are instructive, for they reveal that no popular notice was given to the way in which MacDonald portrayed a new type of active, productive, independent woman. The reviews focus instead on the patriotic motivation of the subjects.

It is somewhat ironic, but perhaps not entirely coincidental, that the most

¹³*Women Harvesting* was the artist's original title for the work now known simply as *Harvesters*.

ground-breaking images of women to emerge from the war years, MacDonald's among them, were painted under the diffusive auspices of an institutional structure that presented the works in a well-established framework of feminine patriotism. Certainly the lively and determined attitude of MacDonald's land girls was well suited to the patriotic impulse. The cheerful and forthright atmosphere of the works offered encouragement as well as a tribute to the indefatigable nature of the Canadian people. How different are these pert and animated young volunteers from the grimly chained French peasant women represented in Canadian war posters (plate 26). With their dazzling colour and decisive brushstrokes, Manly MacDonald's paintings functioned both as an affirmation of the hearty courage still present in Canadians generally, and as buoyant memorials to the Government's land-work programme. As a reviewer for the Mail and Empire put it, "MacDonald [sang] in colour the epic of the farmerette."¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that he did so only in its most flattering light.

Seasonal wage-work that, prior to the War, had been so undesirable as to draw primarily itinerant and aboriginal peoples, and others living on the brink of poverty, was rendered a noble endeavour by a shortage of labour. The institution of the National Service Programme in Ontario, with its patriotic recruitment of young middle-class women into positions of menial labour, provided an unsurpassed opportunity to receive seasonal farm labour free from the considerations of class inequality which might otherwise have been intrusive. Indeed, the Ontario land work

¹⁴"More Paintings of War Activities." 10.

programme was one of the few instances in which the much vaunted 'levelling impact of the war' actually took effect, and people from various strata of society could be found working together under similar conditions.

Ethnic backgrounds, too, became irrelevant to artists intent on presenting a nation united in its opposition to a common enemy. In wartime, to stress domestic difference is tantamount to treachery,¹⁵ and so, like distinctions of class and gender, racial differentiation was supplanted by the patriotic requirements of a united home front. Thus, Manly MacDonald's images of land workers depart from a long-established Canadian artistic tradition of identifying agrarian women labourers as 'foreign', either European, Aboriginal, or French-Canadian.¹⁶ For decades the conception of a proper femininity had made it necessary for Canadian artists to distance 'their' women from notions of productive labour by invoking an ideology of ethnicity which, by defining foreign women as less civilized, allowed them to be less circumscribed within femininity. With the advent of the War, the demands of patriotism superseded the claims of other ideological strictures. Femininity showed itself to be flexible enough to accommodate the new representations of women occasioned by the War, and into the space thus opened emerged representations of working Canadian women that no longer needed to derive social legitimacy from

¹⁵Margaret Higonnet and Patrice Higonnet, 39.

¹⁶This point is discussed in Denise Panchysyn's unpublished paper "A Brush Over Reality: George Reid, The Royal Canadian Academy and the Transfigurations of the Nineteenth Century Canadian Rural Woman" (M.A. major paper, York University, 1989).

racially-based inequality.

In his various paintings of women on the land, Manly MacDonald gave to Canadians an image of youth and vitality working together to help win the War, free from the divisive considerations of class, ethnicity and, to a certain extent, gender. He presented a cheerful vision of farm labour that was gratifying to behold, but which was far from complete, for he withheld from his record the gruelling reality of ten- to thirteen-hour workdays, uncertainty of employment, inadequacy of housing, and wages so low that many of the recruits were not even able to cover their own expenses.¹⁷ And yet, for all of its omissions, MacDonald's vision of the land worker was not merely a reflection back to Canadians of what they wanted to see. In his works, the artist captured a feeling of optimistic dedication and steadfastness that Ontario's National Service workers *did* bring with them to their farm postings. There is an authentic resonance between the atmosphere of *Land Girls Hoeing* and the sentiments of student farmer Hilda Boyd Collins, who wrote of the "delightful sense of satisfaction" in seeing every fruit tree stripped and receiving the praises of those very farmers who had initially met her efforts with unconcealed antagonism.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, the sense of pride conveyed in the joyful nature of the works was particularly well-suited to the requirements of a patriotic image of home-front women, but it was also a legitimate representation of a significant aspect of the experience of

¹⁷ Report of the National Service Department of the YWCA, 1916-17, excerpted in Wilson, 139.

¹⁸Hilda R. Boyd Collins, "A Student Farmer's Retrospect," The Canadian Magazine L no. 1 (November 1917): 29.

Ontario's land work recruits.

And if, in the final reception of the works, the active, independent and proud natures of the farming women that MacDonald portrayed were overlooked by a public geared primarily to patriotic sentiment it was not because of anything inherent in the images, but because patriotism was the basis of the farmerette experience, not only as it was popularly perceived but as it was experienced by many of the workers themselves. Unlike the women who worked in munitions factories, those who volunteered for seasonal farm labour did not do so for economic reasons, but because they had their summers free and wanted to help. In short, the patriotic motivations that were inappropriately foisted upon munitions workers were quite befitting of Ontario's land girls. And nowhere is this attitude more clearly expressed than in the closing words of Hilda Boyd Collins's account of her experiences as a National Service Land worker:

And what is our only desire now that our work is done for 1917? Only that in the hearts of our fighters and others engaged in performing the great, overshadowing, spectacular deeds we may be accredited the honour of doing a modest duty thoroughly, whole-heartedly and sincerely in order to help win the war.¹⁹

¹⁹Collins, 34.

CHAPTER 5

VOLUNTEER WORK AND NURSING

Throughout the years of international conflict, Canadian women contributed their labour to the war effort in a variety of ways, both paid and unpaid. Certain aspects of their labour, particularly in the domains of industry and agriculture, have been memorialized in the collection of the CWMF. In these areas, the Fund provided Canadians with a legacy that includes some of the most progressive and empowering representations of women workers produced during the War. But the image of women's war work conveyed by the CWMF is not fully comprehensive. Between the sculpture of the munitions worker and the painting of the 'farmerette' echo the voices of thousands of women who laboured unremittingly as military nurses, as V.A.D.s, and as tireless volunteers for associations such as the Canadian Red Cross Society, the IODE, the YWCA, the Federated Women's Institutes, and the Canadian Women's Club for War Work. For the most part, it was left to artists working independent of CWMF patronage to record the voices of these women; even that record is scanty.

Volunteer Work

Despite the growing opportunities for entrance into the paid labour force occasioned by the War, the majority of Canadian women who contributed their labour to the war effort did so within the parameters of the volunteer beneficent work that had long been women's particular domain. Voluntary organizations, comprised predominantly of middle- and upper-class women, provided goods and care to soldiers, financial relief to their families, aid to devastated communities in France, and money to hospitals. Among their most prominent activities, Canadian women both at home and overseas knitted and sewed, raised funds, assembled care packages, entertained soldiers, planted victory gardens, encouraged food preservation and conservation, and ran canteens in munitions factories. By 1916 journalist Marjorie MacMurchy could claim that one out of every eight women in Canada belonged to a women's society,¹ most of which were involved in some form of war work.

Premier among these organizations was the Canadian Red Cross Society, the primary goal of which was to furnish aid to sick and wounded Canadian soldiers. The Society supplied personnel, equipment and supplies to Canadian and allied military hospitals. Its members visited Canadian prisoners of war, and collected and distributed large shipments of humanitarian aid throughout Europe. During the War the figurehead of the Society was Lady Julia Drummond, head of the Red Cross

¹Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 209.

Information Bureau and later Assistant Commissioner of the Society. In 1918 Florence Carlyle (1864-1923) was commissioned to paint Lady Drummond's portrait for the CWMF, and the resulting canvas is the only work in the collection that commemorates the important role of women's volunteer war labour (plate 27). It is also the only canvas in the collection that depicts a specific, identifiable Canadian woman worker. Of course, to refer to Lady Drummond, the socialite and aristocrat of Florence Carlyle's canvas, as a 'worker' at all seems unbecoming, if not disingenuous. Drummond did, in reality, contribute a great deal of time and effort to the Canadian Red Cross, but this labour is nowhere apparent in Carlyle's portrait, which is a tribute more to a privileged member of the Canadian élite than to the work done by the women of the Red Cross.

More germane to the topic of volunteer labour is George Reid's canvas *1917 (Sewers: Red Cross Workers)*, which was exhibited at the Canadian National Exhibition of 1917 and subsequently purchased for the C.N.E. collection (plate 28). The painting is currently in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario. It was executed two years prior to Reid's CWMF canvases, and it may have been this work that motivated Eric Brown and Edmund Walker to commission other representations of women's labour from Reid. The image shows fourteen women of various ages gathered together in a sunlit room sewing. Two figures are occupied cutting the cloth, two more are working on sewing machines, and the rest stitch by hand. The atmosphere is pleasant and the work itself rather modest in tone, but the painting is actually somewhat of a watershed in the representation of women at work in Canadian

art.

For decades, as store-bought clothes became the norm and women spent less and less time sewing for their families, the reality of women's textile work had been characterized by small groups of women labouring together in shop settings. Despite this fact, Canadian artists continued to represent women engaged in textile work as solitary figures, either ensconced in the home environment or picturesquely located in a pastoral scene.² Such images are participants in a long tradition of representations of textile work that constructs its female subjects as demure, virtuous, and above all, separate from the economic and social spheres of society. George Reid is one of the first Canadian artists to break substantially from this convention. Admittedly, on the questions of virtue and domesticity Reid adheres to custom; the women are located in a comfortable home-like environment that is in no way representative of shop conditions,³ and the patriotic and voluntary nature of their Red Cross work reinforces the association of textile work with feminine virtue. But with respect to the isolation of women's textile work and its relation to society outside the bounds of the family unit, Reid has departed from custom in an important way. *1917* acknowledges that women did work together outside of their own homes, and that their labour did have

²There are numerous examples of this tendency, such as: William Brynner, *Woman Sewing*, c. 1900 (Collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts); Helen McNicoll, *The Chintz Sofa*, 1912 (Private Collection); J.W. Morrice, *On the Shore, Brittany*, 1902 (Private Collection); Emily Carr, *The French Knitter*, 1911 (Private Collection); William Blair Bruce, *Pleasant Memories*, 1887 (Collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton).

³Dennis Reid has identified the setting as one of the room's in George Reid's residence. Conversation with the author, May 1993, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

an important impact on society as a whole, in this case on the nation's soldiers and the destitute of Europe. In this sense it is almost a prelude to the images of munitions workers that Reid was to create two years later.

Red Cross work with bandages and clothing was one of the most widespread aspects of women's war work. Stories of women knitting their way through the War have become almost legendary, and the work was carried out through all sorts of organizations. For example, in one two-month period during 1917 the women of the Canadian War Contingent Association sent 106,000 pairs of hand-knitted socks overseas.¹ Activities such as Red Cross knitting for care packages to soldiers was considered a particularly appropriate way for women to contribute to the war effort; not only did it conform to standard conceptions of 'women's work', but it isolated women from the violence of the War and allied them with the role of care-giver, a position which was considered to be more properly suited to the maternal, life-giving nature of women. Women's organizations such as the Women's Institutes of Canada consciously patterned their support of war work in accordance with this maternal ideology, declaring that their "attitude toward war service [was] one of relieving suffering rather than of providing instruments of destruction."⁵ Considering the facility with which images of this kind of activity could be adapted to conform to established notions of femininity, as well as the popularity of textile work as an

¹Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1917 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Co. Ltd, 1917), 517.

⁵Annie Walker, Edith Collins and M. Hood, Fifty Years of Achievement: Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario (1948), 83; quoted in Dennison, 212.

artistic theme prior to the War, it is somewhat surprising that more images like Reid's did not emerge from the war years. Sewing and knitting did remain a popular theme for artworks during the War,⁶ but few of these images are distinctly identifiable representations of war work. Instead of subtle transformations to the prewar image of women's labour, Canadian representations of women at work during the War are typified by the bold views of munitions and farm workers examined earlier. Henrietta Mabel May's *Knitting* of 1916 (plate 29) does show a group of five women together under a tree engaged in their task, but this is the only indication that the subjects might be volunteers for a war charity. In 1917 George Reid chose to alter a familiar image of women's labour, transmuting its standard connotations in correspondence with a new social situation.

A less typical volunteer role, but one still within the bounds of the maternal-feminine identity as care-giver, was played by Voluntary Aid Detachment helpers, or VADs. In Canada these women worked as volunteer hospital probationers in military hospitals. Overseas they performed a wide range of tasks, from washing dishes and preparing hospital trays to operating switchboards, driving motor ambulances, and carrying the wounded from ambulance trains to hospitals. Due in part to the active discouragement of Canadian militia minister Colonel Sam Hughes, the actual number of Canadian VADs was small--approximately five hundred women served overseas in this capacity--and the limited number of volunteers may explain their ¹⁰ absence from

⁶Annual exhibitions of the Ontario Society of Artists, the Art Association of Montreal and the Canadian National Exhibition contained a number of works on this theme.

Canada's official war memorials. Yet despite their meagre numbers, VADs captured the popular imagination as brave and novel heroines, and they did not go unnoticed by independent artists. The subject seems to have been most popular among amateur or semi-professional artists such as Jeanne de Crèvecoeur and R.I. Holland, both of whom exhibited drawings of VADs at the 1918 *Spring Exhibition* of the Art Association of Montreal.⁷ These minor works have not remained in the public domain and do not figure in the standard histories of Canadian art; yet they are worth noting for they indicate a breadth of interest in women's war work that is not apparent from the official artistic records that Canadians have inherited.

Military Nursing

The other significant aspect of Canadian women's war work that remains to be discussed is military nursing. Proportionally, military nurses formed only a small part of the female labour force, but as trained and uniformed professionals they constituted a clearly defined and highly visible group of women war workers. Furthermore, as the only female members of a rigorously male institution, nurses in Canada's armed forces were a highly scrutinized and much publicized anomaly. Angels of mercy on the one hand, intruders into a masculine domain on the other, the public identity of the

⁷Jeanne de Crèvecoeur's *V.A.D.* (#87) was a pastel drawing and R.I. Holland's *A V.A.D.* (#163) was a pencil or charcoal sketch. Also of interest are oil paintings by Elzear Soucy and Austin Shaw. Soucy's *La croix rouge* (#325) was exhibited at the Association's 1916 *Spring Exhibition* and Shaw's *The Nurse* (#327) followed a year later. The substantial list price of the latter painting (\$250.00) indicates that it was a fairly major work. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate any of these pieces.

military nurse was precariously positioned during the War.

Since 1901, when the Canadian Nursing Service was created in recognition of the fact that nursing sisters "had done work no less creditable than the troops whom they went out to serve,"⁸ nurses had been an official part of Canada's military. They held military rank and were under military control (although they were paid less than men of the same rank). World War I was the first substantial test of the Service, and the nurses proved themselves invaluable to the operation of the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC). During the War 3,141 fully trained nurses served in the CAMC, 2,504 of them eventually going overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Forces.⁹ While overseas, Canadian nurses provided hospital treatment for 5,39,690 cases in England, France, Belgium, Egypt, Greece, and Russia.¹⁰ Forty-six women lost their lives while serving, and three hundred and seventeen were awarded the Royal Red Cross. Nurses were also awarded the Military Medal, the Royal Victoria Medal, the Order of the British Empire, and 328 foreign decorations.¹¹

Given the CWMF's stated objective to commemorate the "Canadian Heroes and Heroines" of the War¹² it is especially surprising that the Fund's administrators

⁸Major-General R.H. O'Grady Haly, commander of the Canadian militia, quoted in G.W.L. Nicholson, Canada's Nursing Sisters (Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert and Co., 1975), 41.

⁹Ibid., 98.

¹⁰John Murray Gibbon, Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1947), 295.

¹¹Ibid., 308.

¹²Tippett, 26.

almost entirely overlooked some of the War's most obvious heroines, military nurses. The only major work of the collection in which they figure is the triptych *No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital at Doullens* by British artist Gerald Moira (1867-1959). No commissions were given to Canadian artists to record the labours of the first women in the Commonwealth to be officially admitted into the armed forces.

Despite this fact, there are two images of nurses by Canadian artists which can be found on the margins of the CWMF collection. The first is Arthur Lismer's (1885-1969) etching *Arrival of Hospital Ship, Pier 2 Halifax* (plate 30). In it, a crowd of people mills about as the ship is unloaded. Among the ambulance attendants, orderlies, and injured men, a lone uniformed nurse is visible; she stands in leisurely conversation with a male officer. As a representation of a nurse it would hardly be worth mentioning if not for the fact that such representations are so rare in the War Memorials collection. The second image is a small pastel drawing by R.G. Mathews (b. 1888), a portrait artist who was commissioned to do fifteen drawings of decorated soldiers. The drawing, which was not expressly commissioned and is not recognized in the official catalogue of the Collection, depicts a uniformed nurse with heavily lidded eyes and an empty expression. She is seen from the bust up and looks off into the distance in movie-star fashion. With her doll-like face and vacant countenance she is prescient of the soft-focus photos of glamour girls that were so popular in the Second World War. It is probable that the sitter, Blanche Lavallée, was a close acquaintance of the artist during his commission as a lieutenant in the Medical Corps, but any traces of her character or history are hidden under a soft veil of

depersonalizing femininity.¹³ As indicated in the anonymous title of the work, *Nursing Sister*, R.G. Mathews has depicted an idealized type, not an individualized woman.

In marked contrast to Mathews's drawing are two canvases by John Russell (1879-1959), *A Canadian Nurse* (c. 1919) and *A Life of Devotion to Hospital and Red Cross Work* (1918), both of which were painted independently of government patronage (plates 31 and 32). Little is known about the sitter for *A Canadian Nurse*. The canvas was exhibited at the 1919 *Canadian National Exhibition*, but its current location is unknown. Although the sitter's name has been lost to posterity, it is clear that the painting depicts a specific individual. Her uniform reveals that she was a twice-decorated officer who had seen overseas action. The portrait is strictly formal, the face of the nurse is somewhat reserved and she appears in full dress uniform with medals displayed. It is the first conventional portrait of a female officer in the Canadian military, and it would have made an ideal addition to the War Memorials Collection. Why similar works were not commissioned for the CWMP is entirely open to speculation. The newness of the Canadian Nursing Service as a division of the military and the reticence to accept women as full-fledged service personnel are

¹³Blanche Lavallée (1891-1969) enlisted in March 1915 and served primarily at the Canadian military hospital at Saint-Cloud, outside Paris. The Canadian War Museum has identified her as the wife of Group Captain Henri Trudeau. That Mathews and Lavallée were close acquaintances is suggested by the fact that he drew more than one portrait of her. A second sketch, done on 26 June 1916, in Saint-Cloud, is now in the collection of the National Archives of Canada. Canadian War Museum Acquisitions Files and *Facing History: Portraits from the National Archives of Canada* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1993), 104.

possible reasons.¹⁴ In all likelihood, however, the idea simply never occurred to the administrators of the Fund. Portraits of military heroes partake in such a lengthy heritage of exclusively masculine subjects that such a lacuna is entirely plausible.

More can be said about the second portrait. This canvas, which was exhibited at the *Canadian National Exhibition* and prominently illustrated in the Canadian Magazine,¹⁵ was considered to be of enough importance to posterity for the CNE. to purchase it. The portrayal is of the artist's sister, Matron Elizabeth Russell, R.R.C., and its title, which seems excessively effusive at first, is actually an accurate representation of Elizabeth Russell's involvement with the Medical Corps. A graduate of the Presbyterian Hospital of New York, Russell was first exposed to combat nursing during the Spanish-American War. During the Boer War she was one of the first four Canadian military nurses to serve as auxiliaries of the British Medical Staff Corps, and when the Canadian Nursing Service was created in 1901 Russell was among the ten nurses who constituted its nucleus. In World War I she served at Moore Barracks English Military Hospital in Shorncliffe, at the No. 5 Canadian General Hospital in Salonika,¹⁶ and later as Matron of the No. 15 Canadian General Hospital in Taplow,

¹⁴In his history of the Canadian Nursing Service, G.W.L. Nicholson remarks that there were times "when the rank badges which the Canadian girls wore on their uniforms gave offence to those who were inclined to make illogical comparisons." Nicholson, 52.

¹⁵Canadian Magazine vol. LII no. 3 (January 1919): 52.

¹⁶Salonika, on the Iberian peninsula is now the city of Thessaloniki. During the War allied forces were strategically based in an "entrenched camp" there. Scornfully referred to by the Germans as their "largest internment camp", Salonika was the site of heavy fighting. In 1916 the hospital treated 19,060 patients. Nicholson, 64-65.

Buckinghamshire. She was one of only four nurses who were awarded the additional honour of a bar to accompany her Royal Red Cross, first class.

John Russell's portrait of his sister is a highly finished and carefully executed painting. The large canvas presents a three-quarter view of Elizabeth Russell in her work uniform (without the duty apron), seated at a table set for tea and decorated with a vase of flowers. She holds a china cup, as if ready to raise it to her lips. The atmosphere of the work is an intriguing blend of professionalism and domesticity. In its magnitude and general format the painting has the air of a formal portrait. It depicts a highly trained military officer and decorated war hero who has saved numerous lives and seen terrible suffering. Russell's persona as war hero is tempered, however, by a second current within the work. The pleasant table setting, fragile china, and tender roses explicitly situate Russell within a domestic environment characterized by a refinement and delicacy that are distinctly feminine in tone. At one level, this combination of elements--public and private, heroic and commonplace, military and domestic--may be understood in terms of the fraternal relationship between artist and sitter. Certainly it is reasonable to assume that John Russell's impression of his sister encompassed both a sincere respect for her professional status and accomplishments and a more intimate attachment that was rooted in the domestic, familial environment. The brother-sister relationship is only one aspect of the painting, however, and there is evidence to suggest that it was not the most important one. The work was not conceived as a private testament from one sibling to another; Russell's decision to publicly exhibit and sell the work makes that apparent.

Furthermore, the painting was exhibited under a title that makes no reference to the relationship between artist and sitter. Unless they were personally acquainted with the Russell family, it is highly unlikely that viewers at the C.N.E. would have interpreted the painting in light of the artist's personal relationship with the sitter. Rather, the construction of meaning around the painting would have been influenced primarily by the other public representations of military nurses that circulated during the War.

Since the institution of a formalized medical establishment nurses have struggled to be recognized as full professionals, and the largest obstacle to achieving that goal has been the association of nursing with domesticity and femininity.¹⁷ The history of nursing in Canada reveals a dominant public construction of nursing as a natural extension of the feminine identity as care-giver. Providing succour to the ill was viewed as a familial labour of love, a public service that differed little from unpaid work in the home.¹⁸ As late as 1929 nurses' training actively reinforced the association of nursing and domestic tasks, and fully 37% of a student nurse's time was spent doing housemaid's work.¹⁹ The Report of the Ontario Commission on Unemployment (1916) revealed the extent of this association when it expressed the opinion that one of the main benefits of nurses' training was that the instruction in health care, diet, and cleanliness prepared young women to be better wives and

¹⁷Judi Coburn, "I See and am Silent": A Short History of Nursing in Ontario," in Women at Work: Ontario, 1950-1930, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974) 127-163.

¹⁸Ibid., 155.

¹⁹Ibid., 143.

mothers.²⁰ Furthermore, nurses were required to maintain standards of moral purity and rectitude that bordered on the conventual, as well as a flawlessly submissive attitude to their male superiors. Thus, nurses were perceived as virtuous wives in training, and their labour was easily absorbed into the ideology of femininity characterized by purity, devotion, and domesticity.

Considered in this context, the blend of professional and domestic qualities apparent in Russell's *A Life of Devotion to Hospital and Red Cross Work* takes on a different connotation. Whatever his private motivations may have been, Russell's portrait participates in the public identification of working nurses with the domestic realm. In the case of the military nurse who left her family, joined the army, travelled the world, earned her own salary, and faced the dangers and horrors of the War directly, the domestic association seems more than slightly incongruous. Yet it is precisely because of that incongruity that the image would have been reassuring. During World War II the femininity of female military recruits was reaffirmed through a concentrated focus on the physical beauty and sexual attractiveness of women in (and out of) uniform. In World War I the only female members of the military were nurses, and their femininity was already firmly entrenched through the associations of domesticity attached to their profession.

Aside from this procedure of domestic encoding, John Russell's *Life of Devotion...* is of interest as one of very few early twentieth century images of a woman worker who is also an identifiable historical subject. The artist has conveyed a

²⁰Ibid., 155.

rare sense of specific character in the nurse he portrays. In marked contrast to R.G. Mathews's *Nursing Sister*, Russell has impressed aspects of the sitter's personality upon the canvas, particularly in his treatment of her face and head. He emphasizes his sister's eyes and directs her gaze directly outwards, as if to facilitate her ability to communicate emotions and experiences to the viewer. She wears an expression of compassion tinged with sadness. The tilt of her head hints at fatigue but also at a willingness to listen and an effort to understand. In his portrait, Russell succeeds where Mathews does not; he has allowed his sitter to assume the multi-dimensional aspects of personhood where Mathews offers only a mute parody of whoever Blanche Lavallée may have been. It is in this recognition of individualized personality that John Russell's portrait stands out from other representations of women workers during the War. With the exception of Florence Carlyle's portrait of Lady Drummond, every image examined up to this point has presented the women who worked during the War as anonymous symbols. Just as much as the idealized "types" of Loring and Wyle, the workers depicted by Reid, May, Stevens, and MacDonald have been nameless and generic, symbolic representations of women's work. In this, they are not unrelated to the images of anonymous soldiers rushing into battle which also proliferated during the War, although their precise signification is necessarily different. *A Canadian Nurse* and *A Life of Devotion to Hospital and Red Cross Work* break this trend, but it is worth noting that the two images that finally make this leap are portraits of nurses sitting quietly in their chairs, not actually involved in their work. Despite all the rhetoric of pride and honour involved in the production of munitions or harvesting of

the crops, when specific women *were* singled out for their achievements they were not shell fillers or lorry drivers or agricultural hands, but nurses--women whose labour had been co-opted into the feminine mystique long before the War.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The impact of the First World War on gender systems in Canada was a complex process that took place on many levels. For working women the impact was felt both in the arena of workplace opportunities--increased job openings, new fields of employment, higher wages--and at the level of women's public image. These changes are apparent in Canadian artists' representations of women's war work. It was during the War that--for the first time--the involvement of working women in the social and economic fabric of the nation was widely recognized and roundly celebrated. The active and often strenuous nature of the labour undertaken by women was portrayed in a new and vigorous way.

The shift in the public image of women workers which is so apparent in the artworks of the CWMP does not necessarily indicate a transformation in the wartime construction of gender identities. The two concepts are not identical. Gender identities (masculinity and femininity) are based on deeply rooted beliefs about the natures of men and women, and they change extremely slowly. Public images, on the other hand, are susceptible to rapid and temporary changes imposed by economic

necessity, such as the wartime need to mobilize the reserve army of women's labour.¹ During the War the public image of women was forced to adjust to the needs of a wartime economy, but the fundamental concepts of feminine identity remained remarkably unchanged; hence the emphasis on women workers' devotion to their fighting men and the needs of the nation. Women workers were seen to be temporarily assuming masculine roles. This was not necessarily perceived as a negative thing; for example, during wartime it is often an expression of highest praise to say of a woman that she has "behaved like a man."² Nevertheless, the phrase "like a man" clearly indicates that rigid differentiations between the masculine and the feminine are still in force. Female defense workers were repeatedly reminded that they were "not themselves - that is, not 'natural' - but behaving temporarily *like men*. Industrial employment would not permanently endanger their femininity - and neither could such employment be expected to last."³

Indeed, women's advances into non-traditional areas of industrial employment in Canada did not outlast the War. The strong post-war desire to return to the 'normality' of peacetime, which took its toll most tellingly in increased female unemployment, may also be seen in public reaction to the artworks that portrayed

¹Leila J.Rupp, Mobilizing Women For War: German and American Propaganda, 1939-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 4-5; and Maureen Honey Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 211.

²Jenny Gould, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain," in Higonnet et al, 121.

³ Higonnet et al, 7.

working women's wartime contributions. Critical response to Loring's and Wyle's sculptures offers a case in point. By 1919, when the 'Home Work Section' of the CWMF collection was first exhibited in Toronto, the popular backlash against women's employment was already a social force. A letter to the Evening Telegram, published during the Toronto exhibition of the war memorials, reveals this hostility quite clearly:

Sir - It is a well known fact that in this city of Toronto alone there are over 3,000 registered returned men unemployed, and probably double that number not registered. Can you wonder at this when so many working women are doing jobs some of our crippled boys could do, and I might add that there are a number of married women, with their husbands in good, steady jobs at good salaries, who are working and doing some other person out of a job just for their own selfish ends.... A woman taking a man's job during the war was all right, but now that the war is over, and the men are back, make these women give up their jobs and tend to their home affairs, and give men a chance to get to work again.... -- [signed] Fair Play¹

At first, such reactionary sentiments do not seem to have influenced the journalists who reviewed the War Memorials exhibitions. When in 1919 and 1920 Loring's and Wyle's munition-worker sculptures were displayed at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the Canadian National Exhibition, and the Art Association of Montreal, the works were invariably given high praise and lengthy mentions by newspaper critics. The Toronto Globe declared Loring and Wyle to be "brilliant" artists who had "excelled their own past achievements." Their statues were lauded as "wonderful," "epic," "excellent,"

¹ Evening Telegram, 20 October 1919, 7.

"Art and Artists," Toronto Globe, 21 October 1919, 10.

"finely executed," and "a joy to behold."⁶ In Toronto they were said to "compel warmest admiration," in Montréal they attracted a "great deal of attention," and it was generally agreed that "no one could have done it better than Miss Wyle and Miss Loring."⁷ Similarly, George Reid and Mabel May's canvases of female munitions workers were consistently mentioned as worthy tributes to the role of Canadian women during the War. Four years later, however, in 1923 and 1924, when the 'Home Work Section' was displayed twice at the National Gallery, the response to the works was very different. By this time, when the last vestiges of remembered glory had worn off the concept of women's industrial employment, Ottawa papers virtually ignored Loring's and Wyle's sculptures. When they were mentioned at all it was in the nature of an afterthought, as part of a list of artists.⁸ Mabel May's *Women Making Shells* received no attention in the local press, and George Reid's *Women Operators* was not even shown. In short, by 1923-24 representations of women workers appear to have suffered the same drop in popularity that met the women themselves some years earlier. It is impossible to prove a direct correlation between the two circumstances, but the change does appear more than coincidental. As the years passed, the values of wartime and the grateful nation's debt to its patriotic

⁶"Canadian War Art Exhibition," Montreal Herald, 25 September 1920, 3, "Art and Artists," 10; "Women Artists' Work Exhibited," Montreal Daily Star, 2 October 1920, 30; Hector Charlesworth, "Reflections," Saturday Night 18 September 1920, 2, Fairley, 125.

⁷ "Art and Artists," 10; "Memorial Exhibit Includes Works Of Women Artists," Montreal Herald, 2 October 1920, 3; "More Paintings of War Activities," 10.

⁸"Hon. H.S. Beland Officially Opens Exhibit War Memorials," Ottawa Citizen, 6 January 1923, 5.

women workers slipped ever further into the background. They were replaced by more recent memories of the 1921 depression and renewed concerns about competition posed by women in the workforce. Like the 'patriotic' women who were forced out of their jobs after the War, representations of female munitions workers were removed from the spotlight once their patriotic justification was overshadowed by the social realities of gender relations in the 1920s economy.

And yet women's experience of war work, while it might not have materially advanced their position in the workforce in any permanent way, did have a lasting impact on many women at a personal level. Munitions workers knew, often for the first time, the dignity of earning a decent wage. Some even experienced the power of being a family's primary wage-earner. National Service land workers, many of whom had their first experiences away from the security of home and family during the War, also knew the satisfaction of being independent and of overcoming male prejudices about their ability to succeed in a previously masculine domain. Nurses had the opportunity to participate fully and directly in the most important public event of the beginning of the century, and they tasted the glory of being recognized as heroes. Even women's unpaid volunteer work, that historically most important and least appreciated aspect of women's labour, came into the welcome spotlight of public recognition during the war years. Volunteers knew the pride of seeing their labours esteemed as an important aspect of the war effort.

Perhaps it is this change that is captured in the representations of women's war work created by Canadian artists. Certainly there was a change in the image of

women workers captured by the visual arts during the War. MacDonald, Reid, Loring, Wyle, May, Stevens, Jefferys, and Russell--all of these artists contributed to a new depiction of women workers as active, strong, productive, and important contributors to the economic and political life of the nation. We have seen how the radical potential of this vision was publicly diffused and co-opted by the patriotic discourse of art critics and social commentators, but what we have not seen--and what I have been unable to reconstruct--is how these works were received and interpreted by the women whom they represented. What meaning did these canvases and sculptures have for the women who worked in the factories, railway yards, hospitals, and fields? We do know that working women did see these artworks, for they were not only shown in the corridors reserved for high art and the middle and upper classes; they were also exhibited at the C.N.E., which in 1920 had a record-breaking attendance of 1,152,500 visitors. Even in traditional gallery settings, such as the Art Association of Montreal, the second exhibition of Canadian War Memorials attracted a great deal of popular attention. In the four weeks that the exhibition was displayed in Montreal in 1920, 12,257 visitors saw the show, accounting for fully 35% of the Association's annual attendance.⁹ The Montreal Herald describes a "throng of people coming and going through the wide portals of the Art Gallery every day and every night."¹⁰ The reviewer further reports that members of all classes attended the exhibition, and that it

⁹Art Association of Montreal, Annual Report, 1920, 27-19.

¹⁰"Memorial Exhibit Includes Work of Women Artists," Montreal Herald, 2 October 1920, 3.

was found to hold a special appeal to the "women who remained at home and did their bit on the land, in the munition factories, in the shipbuilding yards or aeroplane construction."¹¹

What did these women see when they looked at these new images of women wearing overalls and sweating in factories? While I do not wish to propose a reality of women's identity that lies entirely outside of their public construction as paragons of patriotic sacrifice, surely that image is not all that a working woman would have seen as she stood in front of George Reid's canvas or Frances Loring's sculptures. And if, as she looked at these works, she saw beyond the *war* worker to the working *woman*--if she saw in the strength and vigour and economic significance of the women something of her own identity--then these artworks took a step forward that all of the patriotic contextualization of the day cannot undo. And if today a woman who works stands in front of these same pieces and sees a portion of her history that she can reclaim with pride, and with a feeling that the contributions of her foremothers were not betrayed, then these artworks continue even now to occupy a valuable place in the public construction of women's identities.

¹¹Ibid.

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PLATES



Plate 1

Archibald Standish Hartrick
Woman's Work, ca. 1918.



Plate 2 Charles William Jefferys
Stretching Linen on Aeroplane Wings, Leaside,
ca. 1918-19.



Plate 3

Dorothy Stevens
Munitions - Heavy Shells, 1918-19.

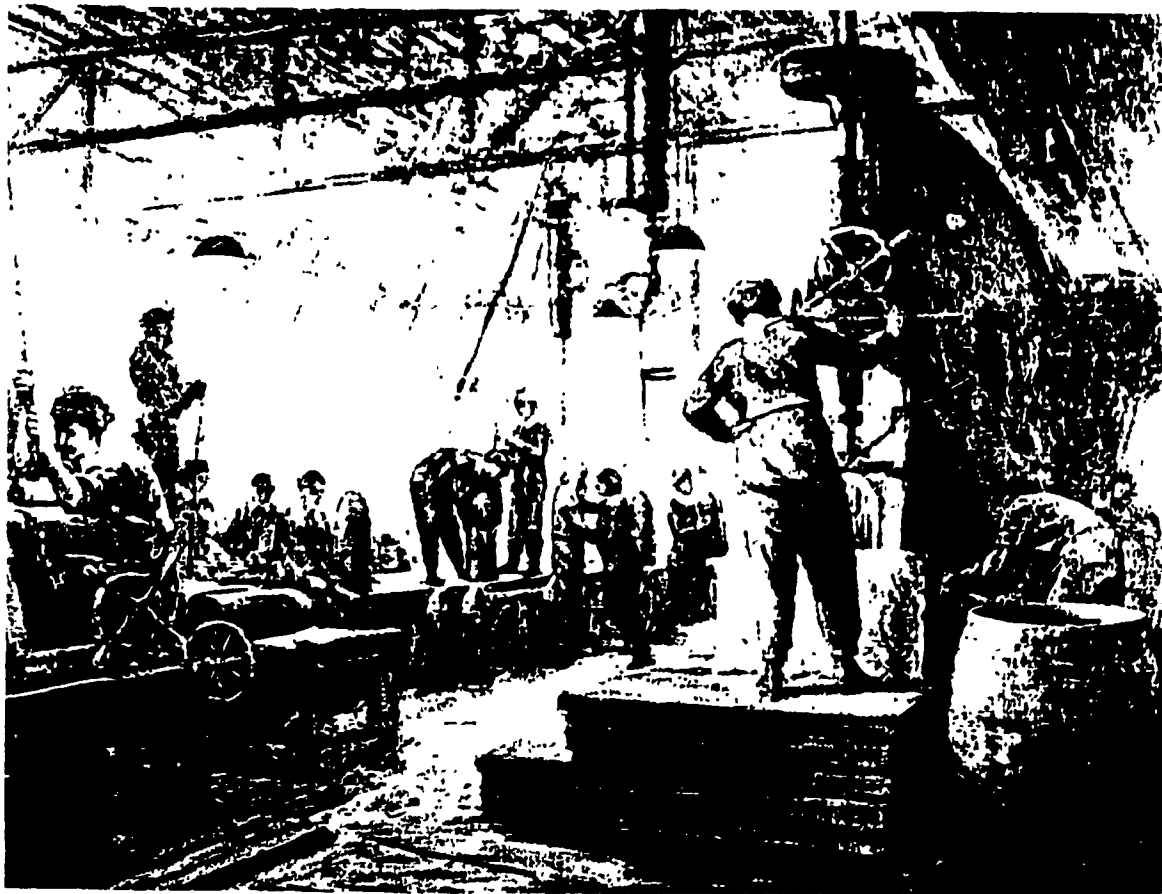


Plate 4

George Agnew Reid
Women Operators, 1918-19.



Plate 5 Dorothy Stevens
Munitions - Fuse Factory, 1918-19.



Plate 6

Henrietta Mabel May
Women Making Shells, 1918-19.



Plate 7

Frances Loring
Girls with a Rail, 1918-19.



Plate 8

Frances Loring
The Rod Turner, 1918-19.



Plate 9

Frances Loring
The Shell Finisher, 1918-19.



Plate 10

Frances Loring
The Furnace Girl, 1918-19.



Plate 11 Frances Loring
Noon Hour in a Munitions Plant, 1918-19.



Plate 12 Florence Wyle
Woman with Adapter, 1918-19.



Plate 13

Florence Wyle
Munitions Worker, 1918-19.



Plate 14

Florence Wyle
Noon Hour, 1918-19.



Plate 15

Florence Wyle
The Harvester, 1938.



Plate 16

Florence Wyle
On the Land, 1918-19.



Plate 17 Florence Wyle
Farm Girl, 1918-19.



Plate 18 Manly MacDonald
Land Girls Hoeing, 1918-19.



Plate 19

Manly MacDonald
Apple Picking, 1918-19.



Plate 20

Manly MacDonald
Harvesters, 1918-19.



Plate 21

Wyatt Eaton
The Harvest, 1884.



Plate 22

Paul Peel

Adoration, Brittany, 1885



Plate 23 William Cruikshank
Ploughing, Lower St. Lawrence, n.d.



Plate 24

Manly MacDonald
Study (XIV), 1918.



Plate 25

Bertha des Clayes
Acadia, n.d.



Plate 26

Anonymous

They Serve France, ca. 1914-18.



Plate 27

Florence Carlyle
Portrait of Lady Drummond, 1918.



Plate 28 George Reid
1917 (Sewers: Red Cross Workers), 1917.



Plate 29

Henrietta Mabel May
Knitting, 1916.



Plate 30

Arthur Lismer
Arrival of Hospital Ship, Pier #2, Halifax,
ca. 1918-19.



Plate 31 John Russell
A Canadian Nurse, 1919.



Plate 32

John Russell

A Life of Devotion to Hospital and Red Cross Work,
1918.