

“Why I haven’t written/and why I write”: Class, Tory Progressivism,  
and Feminist Activism in Rural Ontario Literature

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**ABSTRACT**

“Why I haven’t written/and why I write”: Class, Tory Progressivism, and Feminist Activism in Rural

Ontario Literature

Jennifer Baker

Canadian Modernism and modernity have had profound effects on how Canadian literary scholars approach rural Ontario literature, rural class systems and rural Ontario feminist practices. In fact few rural Ontario writers are widely studied in a regional context. Instead, the focus for writers like Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson remains rooted in explorations of their achievements for suffrage in the West, while study of Ontario’s Christian Social Activist writers like Ralph Connor and Marian Keith have largely fallen out of favour because their religious convictions seem antiquated in a modern context. However, these authors are still important in terms of establishing cultural continuity with more contemporary rural Ontario writers like Alice Munro, Al Purdy, Phil Hall, and the undeservingly neglected George Elliott. These more contemporary works are concerned with the tangible effects of modernist thought and modernity on rural Ontarians’ understanding of their own subjectivities. Instead of evolving a culture that is coherent with their transatlantic and settler histories, they have been forced to deal with the cultural void left by the emergence of Canadian modernism by adopting symbolic stereotypes of rural culture imposed by urban instruments of marketing and mass cultural production. These products of the “symbolic rural” lift the cultural implications of the rural from its specific ties to place and history, constructing false generalizations about class and gender identities that can fit cleanly into the predominantly urban context of modernist ideologies.

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## Introduction

Emily Ferguson begins *Open Trails* with a passage from Book I of Horace's *Epistle* that reads, "When you get an audience tell people who I was, what I became, how I looked, and how old I am today" (Ferguson 1). In Horace's words, Ferguson asks us to discern from the following pages the nature of her identity, and what kind of cultural milieu created her unique sense of character and self. Horace's words ask us to consider the text hermeneutically through changing ideological and historical periods while being aware of the impact of those changes on our interpretations. Unfortunately, few recent Canadian literary scholars have explored rural Ontario literature using the hermeneutic methodology encouraged in this passage and by Canadian historians such as George Grant and Gerald Friesen. Instead, the focus for writers like Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson remains rooted in explorations of their achievements in the West, and in their national campaigns for suffrage, while study of Ontario's Christian Social Activist writers like Ralph Connor and Marian Keith have largely fallen out of favour because their religious convictions seem antiquated in a modern (or postmodern) context. However, these authors are still important in terms of establishing cultural continuity with more contemporary rural Ontario writers like Alice Munro, Al Purdy, Phil Hall, and the undeservingly neglected George Elliott. The lack of scholarly attention regarding rural Ontario authors has had tangible effects on rural Ontarians' understanding of their own subjectivities. Instead of evolving a culture that is coherent with their transatlantic and settler histories, they have been forced to deal with the cultural void left by the emergence of Canadian modernism by adopting symbolic stereotypes of rural culture imposed by urban

instruments of marketing and mass cultural production and consumption. These products of the “symbolic rural” lift the cultural implications of the rural from its specific ties to place and history, constructing false generalizations about class and gender identities that can fit cleanly into the predominantly urban context of modernist ideologies. In *Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity*, Kathleen M. Kirby writes, “As subjects, we vary widely depending on the actual *places* we occupy... Physical space also makes a difference on a smaller scale. There are the (psychologically, culturally, and physically) separate worlds of ‘country’ and ‘city,’ with suburbia sometimes acting as a transition zone between the two or sometimes as a third separate world” (Kirby 11). Our positions as subjects are distinctly tied to place. The phenomenon that Jeffrey Hopkins refers to as the “symbolic countryside” separates the parameters of place—the cultural and psychological signifiers of the rural—from its grounding in physical space, removing the reference that ties it to a specific space in time and physicality so it becomes a floating signifier rather than a tool of cultural identification (Hopkins 66). Most importantly, Kirby argues that the shift to modernism has effected transformations of physical space that have disconnected the subject from its sense of place. She writes,

The reformation of environmental spaces and the reconfiguration of the space of the subject are two intimately linked facets of the general cultural upheaval we call modernism. The change in concrete space could be summed up as a shift from ‘center’ to ‘margin.’ It has to do with the relocation of emphasis outward from the heart of unified but barely conscious geographic entities to the now highly conscious distinctions between geographic territories in contest (Kirby 68).

These cultural and spatial transformations are also taken up by Gerald Friesen in *Citizens and Nation*, as the settler communities of rural Canada are taken into contested urban spaces, which essentially severs the cultural and economic systems that rural areas in general, and rural Ontario in particular, have struggled and ultimately failed to keep in place. The cultural shift we call modernism and subsequent alteration of physical space signalled the development of an intellectual and ideological paradigm that privileges an urban perspective and marginalizes rural communities. We can trace this shift through twentieth century rural Ontario literature. Using the methodology of Gerald Friesen in *Citizens and Nation*, and the theoretical framework proposed by Kathleen M. Kirby in *Indifferent Boundaries*, this paper proposes a close reading of Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These*, Emily Murphy's *Open Trails*, Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, and Marian Keith's *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada* against more contemporary works such as Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, Al Purdy's *To Paris Never Again*, Phil Hall's *Why I Haven't Written*, and George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* in order to show that the cultural implications of modernism after WWII have marginalized and damaged the cultural continuity of rural Ontario history, altering the context of identity constructions, including those of class and gender, and in turn, changing the possibilities and nature of feminist and social activism as portrayed through rural Ontario literature.

## **Chapter One: Background**

Scholars of Canadian literature have largely ignored questions of Canadian rural identity in a regional context, aside from a few recent studies by Gerald Lynch, Suzanne Stuart, and Deborah K. Styles. While a great deal of scholarship regarding rural Canadian

identities focuses on provinces with a predominantly rural population, such as the agricultural development of the Western prairies and the agricultural development of the Maritime provinces, scholars tend to overlook Ontario as a site of rural literary creation because, according to Canadian economic scholars such as Mary Quayle Innis and her husband, Harold Adams Innis, it has consisted of a predominantly urban population since the mid 1800s (Quayle Innis 99). However, Ontario's rapid urbanization has created a unique situation regarding the class struggle between shrinking rural and growing urban populations that merits careful consideration--a struggle that has been a growing concern for contemporary social historians like Gerald Friesen and Monda Halpern, and which can be understood and contextualized through the work of rural Ontario authors. Gerald Friesen writes in *Citizens and Nation* that the popularity of transcontinental views of history like the frontier thesis (which has been adopted from American history and placed in a Canadian context) and Harold Innis' staple thesis legitimate the idea that sustained political activism was both unnecessary and impossible in rural areas: "It seems entirely reasonable to us today, too, because the popularity of survival, frontier, and staple interpretations channels and limits our thinking" (Friesen 95). Furthermore, the prevalence of Frye and Atwood's theoretical approach to the history of Canadian literature through the Garrison Mentality tends to overshadow the achievements of rural settlers who were writing after the first settler narratives of Catherine Parr-Traill and Susanna Moodie. Friesen's research on Canadian rural history and economy is important because it situates the farm household as parallel to, but not part of urban wage-earning households, thus making room for a rural contribution to Canada's economic and social history—and acknowledging rural Ontario's stake in building the nation.

The economic and social histories of Ontario are useful tools to use in a hermeneutical exploration of rural identities within a province that became one of the more urban populations in the country. However, a problem arises when attempting to define the rural class in Ontario against a dominant urban class structure. In traditional Marxist economic thought, scholars commonly define class as the relationship between workers and their labour and the commodity. This relationship necessitates a distinction between the economic and domestic activities of a family. In agrarian life, however, this distinction is nullified by the necessity of unpaid rural labour, as the farm is both the site of both economic and domestic duties. Rural Ontario's development illustrates the growth of an identifiable rural culture in contrast to both the rapid urbanization of the province and the development of other rural cultures in Canada, but recent history proves that attempting to define that culture in terms of urban class structure is fundamentally damaging to rural Ontario, and to the historically based identities of rural Ontarians. While scholars are generally tempted to define farm owners as working class citizens, sociologists such as Gordon Durroch and Arno Mayer challenge the modernist scholars' tendency to define rural workers as working class because of their relationship to the commodity<sup>1</sup>. This challenge is the first step in defining and understanding a rural class within the predominantly urban society of Ontario. The economic and social history of rural Ontario necessitates a separate economic and social class structure from Ontario's rural centres, and the dynamics of this rural class have paved the way for the emergence of agrarian and social feminism: the types of feminist political practices that dominated the early twentieth century. However, the increasing trends toward urban living (including the drastic decrease in Ontario's rural population post-1970) also influenced an increasing trend

toward urban-centered political activism for Ontario farm women, and although the new farm women's movement is certainly influenced by its social feminist roots, the business of agriculture has become commodity-oriented while the politics of gender in rural Ontario have become oriented by equity feminism.

### **Ontario Settlement and Economic Relationships**

The rural classes of Canada are difficult to define according to traditional ideas of class structure because they represent neither the vested interests of the bourgeoisie nor the alienation from the products of labour suffered by the proletariat in accepted Marxist theory. According to Gordon Durroch, the prevailing view of the agrarian class in Canadian economic theory is that of marginalization, because the prevailing myth of agrarianism is that small property owners like those who own family farms are constantly in opposition to growing industrialization, and are therefore in constant crisis and danger of demise. Durroch writes that "Sociological convention largely accepts the inevitability of a marginal condition for small property owners and the absorption of their sons and daughters into the ranks of the white-collared middle of advanced, industrial society" (Darroch 50). This misconception reflects the paradigm that assumes a progression from rural to urban in civilizing a society, and is further informed by sociological scholarship that focuses on agrarian political movements in Canada (particularly those of the early twentieth century in the West—including the women's suffrage movement), because it positions these political activities by the agrarian classes as unique and exceptional, as opposed to the more frequent urban political movements (Darroch 50).

Sociologist Arno Mayer suggested in 1975 that, instead of theoretically positioning farmers within an urban class structure and thinking of them only in terms of other classes, it was time to accept a new class distinction that positioned farmers and small land owners within a legitimate economic and cultural category. Mayer writes, “Instead of ignoring, disparaging, or dismissing the world of the petite bourgeoisie as transient, insipid, and counterfeit, intellectuals should examine and understand that enigmatic universe for what it has been, for what it is, and for what it is constantly becoming” (qtd. in Durroch 50). Mayer’s admonition is a worthwhile one that prompts those studying regional economics to broaden Marxist notions of class structure that rely heavily on the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletarian workers. The petite bourgeoisie, as both Darroch and Mayer call them, are in fact citizens who fit both categories: their production of labour benefits them as well as becomes a saleable commodity. Indeed, Monda Halpern distinctly outlines the way in which rural communities have developed their own class system apart from an urban methodology:

Although agrarians of the past often referred to those living on the land as a ‘farming class,’ and various scholars contend that there existed a ‘shared identification with a single mode of production which overrode class distinctions,’ there were, in fact, numerous socio-economic strata within farming itself. The success of a farmer (who was most often both capitalist and labourer) could be measured by how many acres he owned, how many farmhands he employed, the quality of his house and barn, his prospects for expansion, the yield of his crop, the number of his livestock, his yearly income, and the extent to which his farm was mechanized (Halpern 25).

Therefore, the problem of fitting the rural population within an urban-centered class structure is one of over-generalization regarding the categories of class that exist in an urban economic paradigm, as the complexity of rural communities seems at odds with the simple labels of “working class” or “farming class,” necessitating an entirely separate structure within to situate the various socio-economic strata of a rural community. A similar proposition has been set out by the New Historians in regard to Canadian agricultural class distinctions. Gerald Friesen, in particular, makes a similar claim in *Citizens and Nation* that traditional historians have overlooked the complex relationships between Canadian farmers and Canadian economic and cultural history because of the common misconception that agriculture, especially in Ontario, entered crisis and decline after the beginning of the industrial revolution. Friesen writes that, instead, “new social historians acknowledge ... rural vitality but tell a different story: the farm family did not differ substantially from the wage-earning household in its lack of power and relative poverty” (Friesen 129). Friesen here acknowledges both the differences between the farm household and the wage earning household, but that there were similarities economically between rural inhabitants and those working class inhabitants of the Canadian city that have encouraged easy generalizations about constructions of class. Essentially, rural households were not in crisis and decline, but have been mislabelled as working class and marginalized by ideological shifts toward modernism in Canadian academic circles. Friesen’s distinction is also an important one because it makes room for the farming household in Canadian economic history by reducing the tendency of historians to marginalize them based on their ambiguous relationship to Canadian class structure as it is commonly defined. This distinction makes room for the petite bourgeoisie’s contribution

to the construction of the nation among those more widely acknowledged urban working-class narratives. Indeed, Canadian economic history, according to Mary Quayle Innis, acknowledges vast contributions to Canadian economic growth by Ontario in general, and by Ontario's rural population in particular.

Although Upper Canada was settled rapidly compared to Lower Canada (according to Mary Quayle Innis in *An Economic History of Canada*, the population of the colony was 130,000 in 1798, with one third of the population living below the mouth of the Ottawa River), the towns of Upper Canada were still very small, and acted as markets for a growing population of rural settlers (97). In 1812, "Kingston had 2,336 inhabitants, York, 1,240, Cobourg less than a hundred" (97). Therefore, although Upper Canada boasted a larger population than the rest of the colonies before Confederation, and the potential for larger markets (though manufacturing under the colonial system was still prohibited), the country merchant was still the only business venture outside Upper Canada's three major towns, and dominated rural markets. According to Quayle Innis, "Outside the three towns, the country merchant was king. He received their produce from the inhabitants and sold them imported goods in comfortable excess of the value of their credits. He controlled the whole commercial life of the countryside with an eye single to his own gain" (99). The country merchant then, is a forebear to the more modern rural economies represented in Marian Keith's *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada*, Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These*, Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, and Emily Ferguson (Murphy's) *Open Trails*. Although Early Ontario farmers sold commodities and developed an interdependent relationship with developing towns through the country merchant, they also used their own produce in order to maintain the farm. According to Gerald Friesen in

*Citizens and Nation*, the Upper Canada farm was essential to the growth of the nation because “Upper Canada (later Canada West and eventually Ontario), farm households in those jurisdictions too generated surpluses. Such profits, according to economic theory, eventually could be invested in infrastructure such as railways and manufacturing plants and thereby underwrite the launching of a modern economy” (77). So, despite the advantages taken on farmers through the commerce of the country merchant in the early settlement of Upper Canada, the rural economy of Upper Canada became a modern economy.

Upper Canada’s proximity to the United States, its choice agricultural land, and its rapid industrialization allowed its economy to flourish in tandem with Canada’s industrial revolution. While Maritime provinces were struggling to change from wood and water to iron and steam, which meant important changes for the lumbering, ship building and fishing industries there, Upper Canada’s economy could “take refuge from the effects of the change from wood and water to iron and steam in the development of wheat, livestock and other agricultural products” (Quayle Innis 179). As a result, Upper Canada also benefitted from an improved infrastructure because of the need to export surplus goods elsewhere in Canada. Quayle Innis states that by 1874, “firms in Ontario and Quebec were sending to the Maritimes stoves, agricultural implements, portable steam engines, knitted goods and clothing” (179). However, Upper Canada was indebted to the United States for some of this industrial advancement, as manufacturers of agricultural implements from the United States began to establish Canadian manufacturing across the border, while both countries’ experience during the American Civil War bought more diversified agriculture to Upper Canada despite the economy’s disappointment in a potential new American

market for wheat during the war years (Quayle Innis 208). American industry continued, however, to bolster Upper Canadian agricultural and industrial development through the latter half of the nineteenth century. For example, Quayle Innis writes, “A flour miller of New York State came to Guelph in 1860 and built a mill with a capacity of 150 barrels a day, which in 1878 had doubled in size” (208). The growing Upper Canadian agricultural economy, then, formed the foundation for Ontario’s modern economy in the beginning of the twentieth century. One cannot underestimate the contributions of Canada’s farming communities to that modern economy. According to Gerald Friesen, farming families made up a substantial part of the Canadian population at that time: “In the first half of the nineteenth century, the proportion of the total population of English-speaking northern North America embraced by the category of farm family was very large, including over half of Ontarians” (Friesen 77-78).

The emerging modern economy of the early twentieth century brought important changes to Upper Canada’s agricultural industry. According to community historian John Ewing Marshall, these changes marked the shift from pioneer days to the advent of a new agriculture (qtd. in Halpern 19). According to Monda Halpern in her history of Ontario agrarian feminism, *And on that Farm he had a wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970*, this “new agriculture was characterized by dramatic social, economic, and technological shifts which included the move from family-owned and –operated, labour intensive, mixed-crop farms to highly mechanized and specialized businesses aimed at maximizing farm size, production, and capital” (19). Gerald Friesen also emphasises the shift in the focus of farming during the early twentieth century:

Increasingly, members talked not of an eternal stake in the land but of annual profit and loss. They compared the farm's return to that available in other employment; they estimated the contributions of animals and tools, not for a lifetime, but in a seasonal cost-benefit equation that set horse against truck and tractor; even home preserves were put to the test of the marketplace; and the new language of rural sociology spoke of investments—of putting dollars in the rink or donating time to the youth group—as the price of a viable community (Friesen 130).

Thus, at the turn of the century, the rural economy became increasingly colonized by an urban language of profit and loss, one that was further indebted to uses of growing technological innovation and, most importantly, the shifting values and cultural attitudes of modernist thought. Friesen's observations also show a growing need for agricultural families to build communities: a symbiotic relationship between the small rural town and its outlying farming operations that moves through and past Frye's Garrison Mentality. However, this growing symbiotic relationship should not be seen merely as a tendency toward urbanization; small towns replaced the country merchant by slow degrees, and offered places of consolidation for outlying farm families. Instead of becoming urban centres, then, rural communities allow scholars to envision the rural as a symbiotic relationship between small towns and the farming operations that feed their economies. In Ontario, especially, the profits gained through agriculture found their way back into these communities, and eventually helped construct the nation.

### **Rural Class and Women's Labour**

Within that symbiotic relationship, farm women have seemingly had little power. While the farm was modernizing with new technologies—from horse and plough to tractor and truck—the unpaid labour provided by farmwives had notoriously little recognition within the economy and within the context of the farm itself because class is most often identified by family income and ignores the unpaid labour essential to farm life. Until recently, the lack of power allocated to women was obscured in scholarly material by the use of the frontier thesis to describe the settlement of Canadian land, which was borrowed from American historians and rose to popularity between the two World Wars. According to Friesen, the frontier thesis promotes easy generalizations about farm labour, which are “implicitly male-centered, and thereby [underestimate] the work of women as new settlers” (Friesen 74). Indeed, there are several reasons for the neglect of Ontario as a specific contributor to Canadian development through agricultural exports, as well as women’s roles within that development. According to Monda Halpern, part of the scholarly neglect of rural Ontario was the fault of several Canadian historians, such as D.A. Lawr, whose focus on economic staple thesis was centered on grain and agricultural production in the Western provinces, and contrasted them with exports from the Maritimes, totally overlooking central Canada as an agricultural contributor. Furthermore, the staple thesis positioned men as signifiers of a family’s social class through a traditionally Marxist and urban-centred methodology<sup>ii</sup>. She writes, “Farm wives and adult farm daughters who performed unpaid domestic and agricultural labour on behalf of the enterprise were not represented by the census as farmers, farm partners, or even as farm workers” (Halpern 24). Therefore, there is an important connection between the neglect of

rural communities within the economic framework of the country and the erasure of women's labour from Canadian history.

The staple thesis allows for easy generalizations about the distribution of labour that distort the facts of rural life with a sense of equality that belies the gendered distribution of labour. Halpern argues that by the turn of the century,

the indispensable domestic and non-domestic labour of farm women (in addition to their dwindling numbers in rural Ontario), should have empowered women within the system of house-hold commodity production—certainly, they should have enjoyed more influence than urban, middle-class wives who were relatively detached from their husbands' workplace and livelihood—but the farm woman was too readily vulnerable to issues of law and rural social convention, which ensured that men claimed most indisputable rights to the family farm (Halpern 15).

Halpern addresses the sociological barriers to the equality which, logically, should come from a woman's stake in the labour of the farm household. However, most of these conventions served to render valueless the unpaid agricultural labour women performed. The extent to which law and social convention have undervalued women's unpaid domestic and non-domestic farm labour is best represented by the case of an Alberta farm woman, Irene Murdoch, who, after working as an unpaid domestic farm labourer after 56 years, divorced her abusive husband of 25 years and demanded an equal share of the farm property as settlement. Halpern notes that "five years later in 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada rejected Murdoch's claim, a ruling premised on the Married Women's Property Act, which specified that only direct contributions by the wife to the purchase and

maintenance of property entitled her to a legal share of it” (Halpern 135). It is important to note that the ruling imposed an urban notion of property settlement on the rural home’s economy; while urban property does not function simultaneously as a place of residence and of domestic livelihood, the paid and unpaid labour of the family farm is both domestic and non-domestic—and inseparable from the functioning of the farm as a business.

Clearly, there is a theoretical problem surrounding the socio-economic functioning of rural communities within a system that privileges urban existence as the site of intellectual economic and cultural discourses. While scholars have commonly explored rural cultural and economic practices through an urban lens, the imposition of that lens on rural life has magnified the inability of urban discourses to make sense of a rural economy, and has served to further marginalize rural citizens—especially rural women. To fully understand the social, economic, and political functioning of rural Ontario requires a redefinition of the parameters of rural discourses, both socio-economically and in terms of political activism.

Women’s work was not only undervalued within the legal system, but also at home. Several farm women’s accounts collected by Monda Halpern suggest farm women’s overall dissatisfaction with the rate at which domestic farm labour was becoming modernized as compared to non-domestic farm labour. She writes that farm women “knew that their acquisition of labour-saving devices was dependent upon both the tenuous goodwill and earned capital of men, and upon men’s presumed knowledge of domestic machinery about which they likely knew little” (Halpern 33). Indeed, women’s labour on the farm was contingent on and supervised by their male partners. During the early twentieth century in Canada, especially, the explosion of new technologies produced for

farm labour was not distributed equally throughout the farm's function. In a 1912 letter to *Farm and Dairy*, Mrs. Hopkins of Russel County observed that, "in no other occupation are we offered so great a contrast between the superior advantages of the male and the acquiescent humility of the female... so poorly paid, so complacently considered as only a chattel, a mere machine, a possession valuable only according to her work and childbearing capacity" (qtd. in Halpern 30). Another contemporary advocate for farm women's rights, Ethel Chapman, wrote in 1918 that,

machinery for women has not kept pace with labor-saving equipment so rapidly coming to farms...More and more we find running water in the barn for cattle, while the water for the house is still pumped and carried from the well...All over the country barns are well equipped with litter-carriers and feed chutes, but women carry things up and down cellar without anyone ever suggesting that the farm could afford a ten-dollar dumb waiter, or a dinner-waggon (qtd in Halpern 33).

Despite clear avenues of resistance and a general acknowledgement of farm women's oppression, however, feminist practice in rural Ontario did not develop in terms of large, organized outcries against the patriarchal system. As Friesen notes, "The story of politics in a settler society is the story of movements and outbursts, not of formal political parties. It is also a tale of slow, deliberate adaptation to circumstances that were less than predictable" (Friesen 100). Although Friesen refers here to settler societies in Canada as a whole, the same pattern of political resistance can be applied specifically to feminist practices of rural Ontario.

## **Social and Equity Feminism**

Naomi Black offers a starting point toward a redefinition of rural feminism by highlighting the lack of proper labels to define the many aims of different types of feminist thought, which aim to attain different goals. In *Social Feminism*, Black explores the history of feminist thought and concludes that there are two separate main streams of feminism: equity feminism and social feminism. According to Black, the history of feminist practice reflects a symbiotic relationship between these two types of feminism, where various incarnations of Marxist and socialist feminism are all equity feminist practices, while earlier maternal feminism and current radical feminism are all considered social feminist practices. Social feminism seeks to consolidate several different types of feminist practice under the one goal that Black claims all feminist theory expresses: autonomy for women.

While what Black calls equity feminism finds its theoretical basis for equality in the similarities between men and women, social feminism finds its roots in the assertion that women's experience must necessarily differ from that of men. According to Black, "[i]t must also imply that women should not be judged inferior by male standards; the policy implication is, at a minimum, that women should not be disadvantaged in comparison with men" (Black 1). It finds its roots in the biological differences between the sexes, most importantly in maternalism: the ability of women to give birth and to nurse their young. What is most important about social feminism is that it seeks to address the value of women based on difference and expresses a refusal to adhere to any aspect of a patriarchal system. Black asserts that "Such a definition encompasses all women identified as feminists by themselves or by others, as well as those with beliefs sufficiently similar as

to include them,” which is especially important to rural women because many, to keep the peace of the family (and therefore allow for the survival of the farm as a business) do not directly engage in feminist activism or openly label themselves as feminist (Black 18). Black’s definition hinges mostly on her research involving several disparate women’s groups in France, Great Britain, and the United States, and includes experiential accounts of her own involvement with women’s groups in Canada.

Black’s distinction is important to Ontario rural feminism because it describes the changing nature of feminist practices on the farm, and also usefully distinguishes the history of Ontario farm feminism from that of Ontario urban feminists and rural feminists from elsewhere in Canada—specifically, from the Western provinces. The rapid and expansive urbanization of Ontario since the mid-nineteenth century has resulted in pockets of rural communities, and the distribution of these communities between major urban centers distinguishes the population distribution of Ontario from that of the Prairies. Halpern argues that the dispersal of rural populations across Ontario has resulted in a different history of feminist activism among Ontario farm women, noting that “Prairie farm women, unlike Ontario farm women, had vocal suffrage leaders, including Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Violet McNaughton, and E. Cora Hind, and were represented by women’s groups that were part of a highly organized, highly political, pro-suffrage farm movement” (Halpern 6). Therefore, although it should be noted that Nellie McClung was originally an Ontarian, women’s political activism in the prairies benefitted from a more expansive, much more organized community, while women’s groups in Ontario remained less vocal and more unevenly represented because of the dispersal of rural areas within their own province<sup>iii</sup>. The differences in population dispersal and avenues for political

organization naturally led to a different kind of political involvement for Ontario women, which has been, until recently, overlooked by Canadian feminist theorists.

### **Ontario Women's Institutes and Social Feminism**

Until recently, scholars have been tempted either to overlook Ontario rural feminists or to dismiss them as highly conservative. According to Halpern, this scholarly neglect has been the result of a tendency to “look to turn-of-the-century suffrage organizations—which were characterized by urban, not rural, participation” (Halpern 6). But recent historical scholarship by Monda Halpern, Margaret Kechnie and Linda M. Ambrose suggest that in Ontario, feminists were simply more closely associated with social feminism than the equity feminism favoured by the suffrage movement. In “Social Control or Social Feminism?: Two Views of the Ontario Women's Institutes,” Linda M. Ambrose and Margaret Kechnie suggest that the Ontario branches of the Women's Institutes actually functioned as sites of radical feminist resistance. Although this section of the Women's Institutes was initially founded by elite small-town women, the wives of well-to-do farmers, many of the members of the WI were wives of farmers who ran traditional, unspecialized, and modest family farms. Ambrose asserts that “This ‘bottom-up’ approach suggests that women actively sought to improve their own quality of life, but they did not passively comply with directives from either the government or elite WI organizers” (Ambrose and Kechnie 223). This burgeoning resistance is not only a gendered resistance to patriarchal exploitation, but also a class resistance to urban, privileged political influence.

The official tenets underlying the operation of the WI seem, from an equity feminist perspective, to be conservative. For example, the WI supported the notion of “separate spheres,” although through Farmer’s institutes, both women and men were taught “scientific” methods of performing work on the farm and within the home. For women, these scientific methods included the novel idea of home economics, which “sought ‘to integrate the ethics of the home with the economics of the market,’ and thus claimed a more theoretical and systematic approach to domestic labour” (Halpern 53). The language of home economics borrowed the language of emerging urban consumer culture in an attempt to raise the status of women’s domestic labour to the level of men’s labour in the public sphere. Such a move is telling of the WI’s underlying feminist practice, as it indicates a separate, but equal mentality and a refusal to achieve equality by acquiescing to the general tendency to undervalue the private sphere in favour of the public, political realm. It is also telling of an ideological shift that privileges the values of urban centres over established rural culture.

However, the most important aspect of the WI, is the tendency of the lower class farmer’s wives to resist the urban-centered mandates given to the WI by the government and its elite organizers. Ambrose and Kechnie argue that while “women Creelman chose to found the WI groups were married to men considered ‘progressive’ farmers, those who operated huge fruit farms or were internationally recognized as stock breeders and managers of hired labour,” many lower class rural women refused at first to join the organization, and their “absence from the membership rolls in parts of the province were a concern” (Ambrose and Kechnie 228). The WI began as an organization founded on urban principles of women’s reform, which attempted to “impose an ideal of domesticity—

embodying both physical and financial dependency—on what were essentially working women” (Ambrose and Kechnie 228). However, the resistance of those working farm women to joining the WI at the outset signals the strong resistance of Ontario farm women to be reformed to meet the contemporary standards of urban-centred gender conservatism. When the WI did become popular, it was the farm women who seemed to have reformed the WI. Across the province, members of the WI began to use the WI as a tool for political organization, despite the Institute’s non-political mandate. Ambrose and Kechnie argue that “Women in more remote parts of the province did not have the option of using their organization for only one purpose, and so they converted the WI into a makeshift suffrage league,” adding that other WI groups were involved in similar feminist activism, and that by “1926 the WI handbook boasted an impressive list of accomplishments, including medical inspection in rural schools, local relief efforts, and preparing young women for ‘the responsibilities of womanhood’” (Ambrose and Kechnie 233-234). By the 1920s, the WI across Ontario was focusing more on enlarging the influence of rural women, even though “the intent of the provincial government in setting up the Women’s Institutes was to control rural women, not to empower them” (Ambrose and Kechnie 234). The WI in Ontario started as a movement intended to reform rural women according to urban, patriarchal ideologies, but as rural women voiced their concerns, it became a vehicle for social change that reflected rural culture and feminist activism.

What the varied interests among different factions of the Ontario Women’s Institutes addresses is that during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social and equity feminism were not necessarily seen to be in conflict with one another respective to their political goals. Halpern notes that as social feminists, farm women in

Ontario “sought to improve their lives through women-centred education and organization, and by exerting their female influence over the male “public sphere.” Indeed, farm women seemed more “progressive” than “constrained” in their expression of social feminism” (Halpern 17). In other words, both types of feminism hold common goals for broadening the influence of farm women; however, social feminism is, in fact, more radical in its total refusal of adhering to patriarchal institutions—including the initial mandate of the WI to reform farm women according to urban and male-centered standards of behaviour. Ontario rural feminists were not conservative, but deeply radical in their goal for women-centered education and reform.

### **Rural Feminism post-World War II**

During the Second World War, Ontario farm women were sharing much of the same farm work that had been traditionally allocated to men in order to support the war effort. Ontario farm women saw their roles within the community as both stable and valuable, supported by the WI’s assertion that while Ontario farm women were “not wearing the uniform of the Navy, the Army or the Air Force,” they were still “truly ‘Soldiers of the King’” (Duke qtd. in Halpern 106). However, during the period following the War, Ontario farm women faced a sudden and dramatic ideological shift with the arrival of the Second Wave feminist movement.

According to Monda Halpern, the period during and after the Second Wave feminist movement brought changes to the ideological discourses of Ontario farm women from the 1950s through the end of the century. Halpern notes that the

urban-centered second-wave women's movement presented a challenge to the role and priorities of farm women. In Canada, this movement dates back to 1960 with the creation of the national peace organization, Voice of Women, and culminated in these formative years with the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which submitted in 1970 its 167 recommendations for the betterment of Canadian women's lives (Halpern 113).

Among the major contributors to the Second Wave movement was American feminist Betty Friedan, whose book, *The Feminine Mystique*. *The Feminine Mystique* was also a work of equity feminist theory, and, among other things, recognized the boredom and depression that had come to affect urban housewives, encouraging women to improve their quality of life by escaping "the domestic drudgery and isolation of the home in favour of careers in the public realm where men had historically garnered their status, respect and success" (Halpern 114). Of course, this prescriptive advice was ultimately alienating to Canadian social feminist principles traditionally upheld by Ontario farm women and the WI, and even to suffragists such as Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson, who firmly believed in female domesticity, specificity and community service, and for whom social and equity feminism were not necessarily opposing viewpoints. As a result, during the 1960s, Ontario farm women were made to feel inferior to women living in urban spaces who were able to adopt the tenets of Second-wave equity feminists, as the ideas in *The Feminine Mystique* served to further marginalize rural women because abandoning their unpaid farm and domestic labour threatened the success of both their families and their livelihood. According to Halpern, accusations of outmoded conservatism were blunt: "rural sociologist Dr. Helen Abell blatantly told a meeting of farm wives in 1961...that

their ‘traditional ways of doing things will not be adequate for the future’” (Halpern 109). Values in feminism began to correspond to urban lifestyles, with equity feminism necessarily privileging urban women because for many lower class and rural women, the possibility of adopting work outside the farm and home was impossible. In fact, it would only exploit rural women further through their labour, rather than empower them. Rural women would side, for the most part, with a social feminist ideology.

The ideological shift in Canadian feminist discussion corresponded with an overwhelming and significant shift in the population of Ontario. As the total population of Ontario increased in the period between 1951 and 1971, the total rural population of Ontario decreased. The total number of family farms decreased as a result, and although they remained the foundation of Ontario agricultural production, they were joined by several large, specialized farming operations. Gerald Friesen also makes note of this significant change in *Citizens and Nation*: “The proportion of Canadians living on farms fell below 5 percent...At best, life on the land for most Canadians became a part of urban rhythms, fitted into metropolitan calendars in the form of holidays, school outings, and work-related schools and seminars. Even farming and fishing became part-time occupations, supplementary to other sources of income” (Friesen 175). The population shift also brought a massive technological shift on the farm, as a significantly higher proportion of Ontario farms were fitted with hydro-electricity. Women supposedly benefitted from the labour-saving devices associated with electric power, and although many expressed relief, many farm women also realized that new technologies were not necessarily technologies designed for women’s empowerment. In fact, many historians argue that the larger and more mechanized the farm, the more likely it was that women

were barred from participating in the actual farming. Many of the tasks farm women had previously performed for profit (in fact, the only tasks farm women had had recourse to for profit), such as the collection and sale of dairy foods and eggs, became mechanized and were thrust back into the control of their male relatives. Instead, it was commonly acknowledged that any time saved in household chores that had become mechanized was to be spent on child rearing and housecleaning, the standards of both having been raised since the end of the War. Halpern argues that even those women who sought paid work outside the farm “did so not because consumer goods such as farm machinery, household appliances, prepared foods, and ready-made clothing afforded them extra time to pursue work away from home, but in order to supplement their husbands’ incomes, in part so that they could afford to help purchase these goods” (Halpern 112). Clearly, a singularly equity feminist interpretation of gender equality served only to further disenfranchise Ontario farm women.

### **Ontario Rural Feminism Post-1970**

The insecurity of the post-war era resulted in an ideological shift within rural Ontario feminist activism after 1970. After decades of dramatic economic changes within the Ontario agricultural sector that included the loss of several family farms to bankruptcy and foreclosure, a new Ontario women’s movement was born which boasted a new, equity feminist direction appealing to the sensibilities of young Ontario farm women. Although equity feminism during the post-war, second-wave period seemed to disenfranchise the majority of farm women in Ontario, women seemed to be able to reconcile the two types of feminist practice during the 1970s and 1980s. The equity feminist direction of the new

women's movement focused on the Married Women's Property act, which devalued women's unpaid labour on the farm and privileged men as sole owners and operators of a business in which a woman does her fair share of the labour without profit. However, many political scientists refer to the WI's social feminism as the "grandmother of today's farm women's movement" (Halpern 135). Yet, despite its social feminist heritage, the new women's movement was characterised by some of the more significant tenets of equity feminism, including gender integration. The best example of the shift can be characterized by the attitudes new rural feminists had towards traditionally male forms of labour on the farm: "For farm women in the first half of the twentieth century, evading 'exploitive' male farm labour (field and livestock work) was an expression of female specificity, and of resistance to women's excessive work. For farm women in the 1970s and 80s, however, 'male' farm labour spoke to female 'autonomy and self-assertion, expressed in terms that they understood as feminists'" (Halpern 137). The difference between the way rural women pre-World War I and rural women Post-1970 relate to traditionally male areas of farm labour is indicative of the privileging of equity feminist thought over social feminist tradition in rural Ontario. But the biggest shift in ideology was signalled by WI's loss of privileged status under the government of Ontario. Like all farm women's organizations, the WI was reduced to applying for grants from the government.

The history of attempts to define rural class structure and how it relates to rural gender constructions is a complicated one. Both sides of the urban/rural debate have a stake in marketing farming communities as the quaint and marginalized counterpart to an urban center of civilization. Rural Ontario authors are perhaps more aware of this historical perspective than the New historicists themselves. The following chapter will

trace the history of class conflict and gender construction in rural Ontario through a variety of Pre-World War I works by rural Ontario authors: Marian Keith's *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada* and Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days* offer a social feminist (and Christian Social activist) perspective of women's roles through fiction, while Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These* and Emily Ferguson's *Open Trails* offer a perspective of rural Ontario that highlights the ways in which equity and social feminisms operated in tandem prior to the imposition of modernist ideologies on rural women and culture.

## **Chapter Two: Pre-World War I Rural Ontario Literature**

Modernist scholarship in Canada that privileges the urban narrative has resulted in the marginalization of several of Canada's most popular writers. After World War II, the ideological shift toward modernist thought and scholarship caused Canadian scholars to reject authors they had formerly espoused as important political figures, including Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor, and Mary Esther MacGregor (under the pseudonym Marian Keith). Although Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson were widely considered the most important feminists in Canadian history, their controversial views on Imperialism, eugenics, and race have prompted scholars since the 1970s to disqualify them from any further discussion of their feminist practices. Similarly, the protestant-influenced socialism of Ralph Connor and Marian Keith seem anachronistic in light of the increasing secular nature of Canadian society. In fact, Veronica Strong-Boag's assertion in her introduction to Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These* that

If McClung was naïve in her reactions to drink, the city, and industrialism, and in her expectations for Canada and its women, it was a naïveté born of the liberal's

belief in human perfectibility and a social Christian's confidence in the force of good. In all these assumptions she was a creature of her time and place

could essentially apply to all of the authors listed above (Strong-Boag xx). Although right to place McClung's assumptions within her own time period, Strong-Boag's assumption is also a denial of the validity of McClung and company's feminist and socialist arguments, many of which remain relevant today (equality in employment, violence against women and children, militarist constructions of masculinity, drug trafficking), and many of which were powerful enough to make lasting changes to Canadian politics and law. In fact, Randi R. Warne argues that critics with feminist leanings, including Strong-Boag, have been misreading McClung. She writes that the easy assumptions about McClung made by scholars like Strong-Boag, Carol Bacchi, and Ramsay Cook lead to an evaluation of McClung's writing that "rests upon current assumptions about what constitutes normative feminism, and upon the failure to consider the context of *In Times Like These* and its location within the larger body of McClung's work" (Warne 138). In fact, despite their anachronisms, the works of Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor, and Marian Keith reflect constructions of gender that were both progressive for their times and socialist—works of Canadian identity politics that should not be left from the Canadian canon, because their contributions to Canadian history, society, politics and literature in their representations (and the local reception of those representations) of rural Ontario culture were far-reaching and long-lasting. This chapter will explore four of such works: Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These*, Emily Ferguson's *Open Trails*, Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, and Marian Keith's *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada*. Each text provides a different view on the social feminist practices outlined by Naomi

Black in *Social Feminism* and Monda Halpern in *And On That Farm He Had a Wife*, and supports the need rural class systems that are separate from the understanding of their urban counterparts.

### **Constructions of Class in Pre-World War II Rural Ontario Literature**

Although Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson are commonly regarded as prairie suffragists, they both started their careers in rural Ontario: Murphy in Cookstown, , and McClung in Chatsworth Township, while Ralph Connor (Reverend Charles Gordon) and Marian Keith (Mary Esther MacGregor) began their careers in Glengarry County and Simcoe County, respectively. In *In Times Like These*, Nellie McClung firmly roots her argument in rural life, from using the imagery of the natural world, to arguing against the corruption of cities, and for the moral grounding country life provides its citizens. Although McClung's depictions of the rural landscape are often pastoral, she also demonstrates a deep awareness of the economic realities facing farm women, and uses these realities to boost her argument for women's rights and equality, without resorting to the language of marginalization. Instead, she uses the same language of economic relationships common to social and agrarian feminists of her time:

A farmer will allow his daughter to work many weary unpaid years, and when she gets married he will give her 'a feather bed and a cow' and feel that her claim from him has been handsomely met. The gift of a feather bed is rather interesting, too, when you consider that it is the daughter who raised the geese, plucked them, and made the bed-tick. But 'father' gives it to her just the same. The son, for a corresponding term of service, gets a farm (McClung 91).

McClung's observation about the treatment of farm daughters as unpaid labour is consistent with her arguments for equal pay, but it also addresses an issue that was widely debated at the time throughout farming magazines. Because farm children were included in the team of unpaid labour that was essential to the functioning of the farm, farm daughters took on much the same work as their mothers, and with much less reward, since the common conception was that women's farm labour was less taxing than that of men. These concerns with the economic hardships of rural people, and rural women in particular, discount any easy "maternalist" assumptions about McClung's feminism levelled by contemporary literary criticism, since her arguments are not focussed on women's ability to give birth (her concern for unmarried and childless women is equal to her concern for wives and mothers), but on their collective disenfranchisement in a modern economy. In fact, her arguments come as a direct response to the context of her time period, where writers like Stephen Leacock were advocating the superiority of male labour (and male competence to perform such labour). Leacock writes, for example, in "The Woman Question," that "Women get low wages because low wages are all that they are worth" (qtd. in Warne 110). Much of McClung's argument in fact answers contemporaries with views similar to that of Leacock.

McClung also acknowledges women's supposed lack of physical strength, but presents the admission as an acknowledgement of the differing experiences of men and women, and uses this argument to call for equal industrialization in women's farm labour to match the industrialization currently making men's farm labour far less taxing. The technological innovations and growing economic prosperity of farms in Ontario in the early twentieth century answered Leacock's obstacles on women's rights, and prompted

debate on family wages in farm magazines—including the published complaints of farm daughters who were commonly disregarded as farm labourers<sup>iv</sup>. McCutcheon writes in “The Single Woman in the Country” that, “the girls who stay at home should be paid for their services. Why not? When the son comes of age, if he stays at home, he enters into a businesslike agreement with his father as to the wages he shall receive, and is not regarded as mercenary in the least. Why should the daughter be regarded as a minor child, a ward of her father or some male relative, till legally delivered over into the care and keeping of her husband...Have changes in economic conditions made a place for this woman on the Canadian farm?” (McCutcheon qtd in Halpern 41). Importantly, the comments made by both McClung and McCutcheon are indicative of the complex relationship between equity and social feminism in rural communities. On one hand, neither woman is devaluing the domestic labour of farm women, nor demanding that they engage in the same labour as men; however, they are demanding that farm daughters receive equal acknowledgement as labourers on the farm—an indication that the relationship between farm families and the economic realities of farm life is changing. Unpaid labour done by farm daughters is no longer being regarded as a duty owed to her parents for food, clothing and shelter, but an economic relationship within the family that conflates the family relationship with that of employee and employer. McClung also acknowledges the special plight of the farm wife, who had been largely left behind by the improvement of technological and economical changes to the farming industry. She writes that although women in the city have the advantage of hiring housekeepers or working outside the home for extra income, “It has not been so with the farmer’s wife. More than any other woman she has needed help, and less than any other woman has she got it. She has been left alone, to live or die, sink or

swim,” while “The outside farm work has progressed wonderfully, but the indoor farm work is done in exactly the same way as it was twenty-five years ago, with the possible exception of the cream-separator” (McClung 113-114). To McClung, the economic development of Ontario’s rural community was inseparable from the constructions of gender that left women disadvantaged despite technological and economic improvements.

Emily Ferguson’s feminism in *Open Trails*, on the other hand, requires that constructions of class are separate from her gender politics. Upon revisiting Ontario, she writes, “It is good, after the lapse of years, to drift back to the place where you were born. It rinses your soul. Truth to tell, it turns your soul inside out and hangs it on the line” (Ferguson 254). As a contemporary (and later, a political ally) of McClung, Ferguson’s analogies upon returning to her place of birth are clearly domestic and nostalgic, reflecting not only the agrarian tie to family and home, as well as women’s domestic labour, but also her upper class position and privileges. However, Ferguson is also aware of the disparity between the Prairie Provinces and Ontario in terms of economic prosperity. Because of Ontario’s rapid settlement, and the relative population distribution, Ferguson notes that the farmer’s wives of Ontario are noticeably more urban than those of the Western provinces. She laments to her husband, “Fine lookers, these farmer’s wives at the station—might have stepped off a magazine-cover—tailor-made; fine mink stoles. See their curls! Every one pinned on. Lots of money, nowadays, for the farmer’s missus!” (Ferguson 204). To Ferguson, the disparity between Ontario’s more prosperous farmers and the Western provinces’ farm wives is a complicated economic factor in her feminist politics. In fact, economics are inseparable from her feminist practice because her own upbringing was economically profitable due to her family connections. In her introduction to *Emily*

*Murphy: Crusader*, McClung quotes Helen Weir's assessment that much of Ferguson's social activism resulted from her position of privilege: "All her life she fought for the finer things of life, not for herself for she already had them, but for the other people" (Sanders xvii). While McClung laments the lack of labour-saving technologies within the home to match those developments for outdoor work, Ferguson reflects on how the economic prosperity of farmers' wives in Ontario is misleading to their feminist activism regarding the rest of the country:

I cannot find it in my heart to tell her that Northerners need leather portmanteaux and trunks rather than flannel petticoats and cast-off coats, for these good women, out of the fullness of their hearts, take a pleasure in packing bales for us. Besides, it gives them a chance to meet fortnightly and drink tea. For this reason, the sewing society is a greater benefit to the province of Ontario than to the province of Alberta (Ferguson 238).

Economic prosperity on one hand, and poverty on the other, makes feminist consolidation across provinces impossible for Ferguson. Her refusal to explain the situation to the Ontario women, while acknowledging the group's ability to forge connections that are beneficial to their own feminist practice, shows that Ferguson is aware not only of the possibility of feminist organization among groups of women in like circumstances, but also of the difference between the two provinces in their possibility of feminist cooperation. Perhaps the most telling of Ferguson's anecdotes in *Open Trails*, though, is her account of Toronto's vaudeville scene, and its treatment of rural life, and is worth quoting at length. She writes,

Personally, I have more sympathy with the country "Rube" than any other character on the vaudeville stage. I never weary of his long whiskers, his high-water "pants," and his carpet bag. Variety is not the spice of life so much as sameness. I wish he would always go on telling about "our cows," and "Mariar," and "the widder-lady what was friendly-like on the train." But the new Rube who goes to the city to have a 'bust' on \$1.73 has rust-red hair and a clean-shaven face. He wears white trousers, aggressively turned up, and yellow shoes with flaring bows. He still hitches his trousers and counts his money, but he has grown worldly-wise, and tells the city girls, with a guileless air, about a country jay called Rockefeller, "what went up to the city and got took in." The policeman no longer gathers him in, nor does the gold-brick man clean him out. According to the latest mode, he disappears off the stage doing marvellously high kicks, hand in hand with a lithesome lady whose stockings look very long and very black silhouetted against her billows of white lingerie (Ferguson 228).

What this passage from *Open Trails* shows, more than anything, is how Ferguson perceives the impingement of a modern urban society on country life. To her, the country 'rube,' though naive, had a certain moral dignity that has been lost in the new, more modern iteration of the character. He has become accustomed and wizened to urban life, and instead of falling victim to the tricksters and temptations of the city, he successfully manipulates the city in his favour, and essentially assimilates. To Ferguson, this is not a triumph for the rural person, but a failure to remain morally elevated (even if that means being perceived as backward). Ferguson's understanding of rural life is, for the most part, a pastoral one: the country is a place of innocence and despite its relative poverty and

hardships, a rural closeness to nature instils in one a dignity that cannot be found in the urban citizen. The relationship between rural life and rural feminism is more complicated for Ferguson than it is for McClung. Ferguson's strong dislike of modernisation is perhaps the reason for the note of disappointment in her assessment of the cream separator: "Years ago, when a little girl, I visited this farm, and helped skim the milk from the tiers of tins in which it was 'set'. Times have changed, and the cream separator now does the work. It is more effectual, but less diverting" (Ferguson 235). Because of her position of relative privilege, Murphy does not perceive technology in the same vein as does McClung in thinking about the impact of technology on the lives of overworked farmers' wives and daughters. Although technology within the domestic space is more efficient, Ferguson still laments the loss of the pastoral quality of women's domestic farm labour in her nostalgic juxtaposition of her rural Ontario childhood with her visit to the farm as an adult.

According to Bryne Hope Sanders in *Emily Murphy: Crusader*, Ferguson was raised in a family that had been blessed with a "rich and noble life...her childhood was spend in comfort and hilarity of family life in a small village. There was plenty of room; plenty of money; plenty of love" (Sanders 5). She came from a long succession of powerful male patriarchs: her grandfather was the founder of the Orange Order in Canada, while her father was privileged as a reasonably wealthy landowner (Sanders 5). In other words, Ferguson's upbringing was idyllic, encompassing the pastoral ideal of rural life free from economic strain, and these idyllic scenes are what Ferguson sought to capture and preserve in her depictions of rural Ontario life in *Open Trails*. Although Ferguson differs from McClung in her perceptions of technology in the domestic space, however, Ferguson and McClung do not differ significantly in their concerns overall. Ferguson's reluctant

acceptance of technology is less a condemnation of technology as it applies specifically to women's domestic farm labour as it is a reflection of her anxieties about a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing Ontario rural way of life, echoing the anxieties of McClung and other Christian Social Activist writers like Ralph Connor and Marian Keith.

Although upon a superficial reading, Ralph Connor (Reverend Charles Gordon) seems to be very different from both Nellie McClung and Emily Ferguson, his political and social beliefs strongly align him with their concerns. One of the best-selling authors in early twentieth century Canada, Ralph Connor's many novels "popularized social issues in a series of best-selling novels, and who also became one of the nation's most successful mediators in industrial disputes" (Allen qtd in MacDonald 218). In terms of rural politics in *Glengarry School Days* (first published in 1902), Connor aligns himself with the same Red Tory traditions as a forerunner to McClung and Ferguson, with the same nostalgic memorializing of the rural moral education of his childhood that periodically graces *Open Trails*. Ralph Connor's vision of rural Ontario is one that espouses the moral dignity of the country's inhabitants, with emphasis on the idea that their spiritual wealth and their gentility overrides any material poverty felt by the families themselves. Connor is especially concerned with the necessity of socialism in settler communities. In his autobiography, *Postscript to Adventure*, Connor writes of the citizens of Glengarry that, "They learned from experience the need and the worth of cooperative work" (Gordon 12). Indeed, much of the narrative of *Glengarry School Days* reflects Connor's appreciation of the settlers' cooperative society. When writing about the banquet following the Twentieth school's spelling tournament, Connor writes that "Not only was there no snatching of food or exhibition of greediness, but there was a severe repression of any apparent eagerness for

the tempting dainties, lest it should be suspected that such were unusual at home” (Connor 37). The scene is one of intense discipline, with children and adults actively repressing the excitement associated with the variety of pies and cakes available at the feast. The last sentence is a particularly telling example of a society that not only values sharing—both food and resources—but also gentility. Ralph Connor’s description illustrates that rural Ontarians were not working class in the urban sense, with all of its connotations. Rural Ontarians are rural, with their own class structures that provide room for a cultural understanding of gentility rather than an economic one, and this is a class structure heavily influenced by socially progressive politics. The conflict between Hughie and Foxy serves to further highlight Connor’s socially progressive leanings, as Foxy represents the commercial interests associated with an urban understanding of economic prosperity that lures Hughie into a moral quagmire. At the beginning of “Chapter Eight,” Connor writes that, “It was an evil day for Hughie when he made friends with Foxy and became his partner in the store business, for Hughie’s hoardings were never large, and after buying a Christmas present for his mother, according to his unflinching custom, they were reduced to a very few pennies indeed” (Connor 99). According to Connor, Foxy’s undue influence over the Twentieth school came mainly from the fact that his father owned the Twentieth’s only store. His presence, then, in the microcosmic world of the Twentieth school, is like that of the country merchant in both Mary Quayle Innis and Emily Ferguson’s rural districts—the huckster, the shrewd dealer of farmers’ necessities. Foxy’s difference in the school is a commercial one: it represents a break from the traditional agrarian ties between commodity and farm worker, to a mercantile system of trade and commerce. For Hughie, this difference represents a moral dilemma. Foxy introduces him to a world of

consumption, ruled by a system of payment and debt that requires him to steal money for the first time, and introduces him to a deeply felt guilt and distance from his family he had never before experienced. The conflict for Hughie cannot be resolved until he returns to the labour of the Finch's farm:

The sweet, sunny air, and the kindly, wholesome earth, and honest hard work were life and health to mind and heart and body. It is wonderful how the touch of the kindly mother earth cleanses the soul from its unwholesome humors. The hours that Hughie spent in working with the clean, red earth seemed to breathe virtue into him. He remembered the past months like a bad dream. They seemed to him a hideous unreality, and he could not think of Foxy and his schemes, nor of his own weakness in yielding to temptation, without a horrible self-loathing (Connor 129).

Hughie's return to the labour of the farm signifies a reconnection between the labourer and his or her product, because Hughie's partnership with Foxy at the store had left him isolated from the products of his own labour—he had to buy as a consumer the products of his work.

Another important stream of comparison between the urban and rural modes of living in Canada comes from Jack Craven's letters to his friend Ned Maitland, once he moves to the Murray's farm and begins to teach at the Twentieth school. Craven's movement through the novel is one from an urban, modernist perspective, to one of a Victorian rural perspective common to people in rural Ontario. Importantly, it is not in Connor's world a step backward in cultural development, but forward. Craven's first observation is of the pervasiveness of religion in the county. He writes that "Religion is all

over the place. You are liable to come upon a boy anywhere perched on a fence corner with a New Testament in his hand, and on Sundays the ‘tremenjousness’ of their Religion is overwhelming” (Connor 158-159). Craven’s observations present an urban perspective of rural life that immediately focuses on the main rejected element of an Edwardian paradigm: religion (specifically, Protestantism). This observation immediately places Craven outside the accepted perspective of Glengarry County and labels him as an urban, privileged outsider. However, despite Craven’s implied criticism, his letters are also meant to provide an outsider’s idealization of rural life. He writes that although the people of Glengarry are astonishingly religious, they have, “in everything but religion, liberal views” and jokes that he does not know whether he will “become prematurely aged, or shall ... become a saint” (Connor 159-160). He closes his first letter to Ned by writing, “Expect anything from your most devoted, but most sorely bored and perplexed, ‘J.C.’”, which suggests the level of culture shock Craven faces while adjusting to life in Glengarry (Connor 160). Connor uses Craven in two ways: First, the level of perplexity Craven experiences upon first moving to Glengarry suggest a vast difference in culture between urban and rural life; second, Craven’s character grows into the life surrounding him, and illustrates the movement, not only from urban to rural, but from sin to grace through his lessons learned while teaching at the Twentieth School and living with the Murray family. Connor clearly views rural life in Glengarry County with deep affection, but also with nostalgia and idealism, as “viewed from a contemporary perspective, [the conventions specified by Craven in his letters] and the world Connor described are marks of an era which even by 1902 was distant by one or two generations” (Lennox 208). Connor’s nostalgia is therefore also in a sense a lament—the movement toward a technologically

and economically advanced era for rural life implies the same anxiety for Connor as it does for Murphy.

Like Connor, in *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada* (1906), Marian Keith (Mary Esther MacGregor) looks back on the beginnings of rural life in an emerging Canada with nostalgia through the eyes of children. However, unlike Connor, Murphy and McClung, Keith focuses her interpretation of Oro Township's class structure on specific clan affiliations, nationalities, occupations within the community, education, and religious beliefs. In this way, Keith's depiction of an emerging rural class structure at the turn of the century is perhaps the most honest and complex of the four Edwardian authors in her depictions of clan violence, notions of racial purity, and religious discrimination, in which her characters often enthusiastically take part. Keith writes of Oro Township's Number Nine schoolhouse that it was "a school eminently calculated to keep alive all the small race animosities that characterized the times; for English, Irish and Scotch, both Highland and Lowland, had settled in small communities with the schoolhouse as a central point" (Keith 45). As with Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, Keith positions the rural schoolhouse as the centre of the rural community and the site of clashing cultures. The protagonist of the story is Scotty MacDonald (also known as Ralph Everett Shadwell), the son of an English father and a Scottish mother who were killed by a fever in his infancy. Scotty's hyphenated heritage is not known to him until his first day of school, when he discovers through his school master that his real name is Ralph Everett Shadwell. For Scotty, having been raised in a Highland Scottish family, the English name is a source of shame: "'I'll not be English!' he shouted. 'It's jist them louts from the Tenth is English! An' I'll be Heilan'!" (37). When the story of his birth and his parents' death is explained to him by

his grandmother, he mistakes her grief for tears of shame: “He scarcely understood her grief; was Granny crying because he was only an Englishman after all?” (37). In Oro, the structure of rural class distinctions is partly predicated on race and nationality, but those distinctions are also mediated by clan affiliations within those national identities as the Highland Scottish remain at odds with the Lowland Scottish. Keith writes that the Lowlanders were “Scotch to a man; what was more, they proclaimed the fact upon the fence-tops and make themselves obnoxious even to the MacDonalDs, for after all they were only Lowlanders, and how could the Celt be expected to treat them as equals?” (Keith 46). All clans seem to have equal disgust and prejudice against one another. However, Scotty’s hyphenated transnational identity (which is rejected and accepted by him many times throughout the novel) allows him to navigate the complicated racial class distinctions of Oro Township, and is his first step to Keith’s vision of an enlightened adulthood.

The small rural communities of which Oro Township is composed nevertheless obeys the more tangible symbiotic relationships between commerce and agriculture. Class is solidified in the occupations of Oro’s inhabitants, and the characters are named by these occupations as markers of their place within the complicated rural class system: Store Thompson, Weaver Jimmy and Praying Donald are but a few examples of this occupational labelling. Each of these labels also has its own affiliations, as Store Thompson earns greater respect for supplying the surrounding farmers with necessities. However, unlike Connor, Keith’s country store owner carries the signification of a higher class status, but one that is not at odds with a rural paradigm. Store Thompson represents another hyphenated identity in the novel, as both a self-educated man (which

circumscribes the implications of an urban formal education), and a friend of Big Malcolm MacDonald, a steadfastly rural homesteader and the upholder of a staunch clan rivalry between the Oa (the Highland Scotch) and the Flats (the Irish). Store Thompson, as this hyphenated identity, has earned a reverential position within the Oro Township community, which relates specifically to his being a self-educated genius who has been proven to outmatch the intelligence of a university-educated man. Keith writes, “He was often identified by this illustrious deed, and was pointed out to strangers as, ‘Store Thompson, him that downed the Captain’s college man’” (Keith 67). Education within the rural community is a marker of class, but specifically of upper class individuals who are commonly labelled as “stuck-up.” Like Glengarry, Oro Township is a community that values self-sufficiency far more than financial and social privilege, and class distinctions are drawn along those lines.

By far, the most prominent markers of social class are gentility, wealth, and social privilege. Scotty’s identity is further complicated in this aspect. Although his grandmother makes clear to him that his father was a gentleman, Scotty remains innocent of his claims to social status until his early adulthood, when he falls in love with Isabel, the wealthy niece of Captain Herbert. When Scotty learns of his lineage, Keith writes that, “now there was no denying the humiliating truth; his father has been an Englishman, he himself was English, and that disgraceful name, at which Peter Lauchie had sneered, was his very own. Henceforth he must be an outcast among the MacDonalds, and be classed with the English crew that lived over on the Tenth, and whom, everyone knew, the MacDonalds despised. Yes, and he belonged to the same class as that stuck-up Captain Herbert, who lived in that grand house on the north shore of Lake Oro, and whom his grandfather hated!” (Keith 40).

Scotty, with his hybrid identity, learns to occupy the liminal space created by his hidden, English, upper class lineage with the help of a new school master, Mr. Monteith. His mentorship not only allows Scotty to come to terms with his English parentage, but also allows him to transcend the class tension caused by the historical distributions of land in Oro Township. Within the narrative, Monteith is also the character who, like Jack Craven in *Glengarry School Days*, offers an outsider perspective, which helps to clarify the situation between the classes of Oro Township. Monteith observes that “He had been long enough in the settlement to understand that the ordinary pioneer had no love for the more privileged class that had settled along the water-fronts. Socially the latter belonged to a different sphere from the farmers; and having often been able, in the early days, to secure from the Government concessions not granted to all, they were regarded by the common folk with some resentment” (Keith 261). Scotty’s resolution of his identity hinges on his ability to accept his status as one of these privileged classes, by solving the mystery of his inheritance and marrying Captain Herbert’s niece, Isabel. At this point, the novel seems to take a turn towards the conventional Victorian marriage narrative, with the barriers of class barring the way to true love. The narrative must resolve those class barriers in order to allow the story to end satisfactorily.

Marian Keith resolves the class conflicts in *The Silver Maple* without offering a challenge to them socially. The reader is informed from the beginning of the novel that Scotty’s social status is not that of the MacDonald’s; his father was an English gentleman. Instead, Keith plays out an elaborate plot involving a mistaken identity, in which Captain Herbert has unknowingly taken over Scotty’s inheritance, thinking he died of fever with his parents in Ontario. In this resolution, Scotty’s marriage to Isabel is legitimized while

upholding the status quo of class distinctions. Although Keith writes that “the difference between the two classes, like all other differences, was fast dying out,” the resolutions of the class conflicts in *The Silver Maple* seem to contend otherwise (Keith 261). Although Scotty’s social status is ambivalent because of his birth, the blending of class distinctions is not present in the legitimization of his marriage to Isabel, but in the construction of the characters of he and Isabel themselves. Both characters blend the free-spirited Scottish culture of their rural roots with their noble social status. Isabel grows into “a lady who looked as if she had just stepped out of a book of romance; a high-born princess, very remote and unapproachable”, but still “Would much rather tear around the house with the dog, her hair flying in the wind, than sit in the parlour with her crocheting, as a young lady should” (Keith 232, 254). Meanwhile, Scotty struggles to find peace between his upper class identity and the spiritual upbringing of his rural childhood. The resolution of the novel is not what the reader expects of a Victorian marriage novel; instead, Keith adds a new dimension of spirituality to the conflict, in which Scotty must face his identity in a painful spiritual journey away from home and those he loves in order to resolve the problem of his inheritance and resolve his identity through prayer and, like Hughie in *Glengarry School Days*, a renewed connection with nature.

There are no easy ways to make clean generalizations about the works of Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor or Marian Keith regarding the ways they express and navigate the class distinctions between rural and urban Ontario, and the several complicated class constructions within rural Ontario itself. However, while for Nellie McClung in *In Times Like These*, class is inseparable from gender, Emily Ferguson and Ralph Connor remain similar in their nostalgic and romanticised views of the past that

place class and gender constructions in different ontological categories due to their staunchly Presbyterian, upper class backgrounds. Similarly, Marian Keith's interpretations of class structure are a varied and complicated bridge between the ontological discourses of McClung, Murphy, and Connor. Her attempts to position *The Silver Maple* within a liberal paradigm is greatly undercut by her paradoxical commitment to class and gender constructions that reflect an English, Victorian class structure, despite her commitment to her Scottish heritage.

**Gender Constructions and Feminist Activism in *In Times Like These*, *Open Trails*, *Glengarry School Days*, and *The Silver Maple***

Central to the feminism of all four authors is the notion that women's capacity for motherhood makes significant their contributions to the public sphere of a community. In this Christian social progressivist tradition, women are imbued with a higher standard of morality because of their ability to give birth and raise children. In this sense, all four authors fit Naomi Black's social feminist framework, and reflect Monda Halpern's assertion that the feminism that characterised the women's rights movements of the early twentieth century in rural Ontario were social feminist. But what Naomi Black fails to acknowledge in her attempts to define social feminism, and what Monda Halpern only alludes to in *And on that Farm He Had a Wife*, is the way in which McClung, Murphy, and Keith sought to share their vision for women's equality with men, and the way in which, as nostalgic Connor's writing is, men engaged with social feminist ideas as well. Naomi Black, in fact, asserts in *Social Feminism* that,

The shared goal of autonomy or self-definition is what makes "male feminism" a logical impossibility. Feminism amounts to a demand for freedom from gender-

based control. It is not parallel to anything men have had to achieve or could want, and it is not a demand that can be posed by men on women's behalf (Black 23).

Although Black has a point in asserting that men cannot make the assertion of autonomy for women on behalf of women (and that it is a logical impossibility), her assertion that men cannot take part in feminist discourse is an impractical one for all four authors. Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor and Marian Keith all demonstrate the practical implications of social feminist practice within the domestic space, and within a relationship with men that is cooperative and built on mutual respect and equality, rather than along the lines of strict gender autonomy and gendered segregation of private and public spaces.

In the forward to Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These*, Veronica Strong-Boag writes that, "The mothering ideal was central to McClung's feminism. As traditionally as any of her opponents she regarded motherhood as the highest achievement of her sex...McClung's demand for women's rights is presented as a logical extension of traditional views of female superiority and maternal responsibility. Women must at last emerge from the home and use their special talents to serve and save the race" (Strong-Boag viii). Strong-Boag perceives McClung's assertion of female autonomy, then, as a sexual one, rather than one that is socially constructed. But although McClung's feminism, like Black's social feminism, is rooted mainly in the social-feminist discourse concerning the moral superiority of motherhood, unlike many social feminists, McClung uses the foundation of the value of women's experience to support suffrage and equality for all women in the patriarchal public sphere. She iterates the arguments of many social

feminists, writing, “Another aspect of the case is that women can do more with their indirect influence than by ballot, though just why they cannot do better still with both does not appear to be very plain” (McClung 52). McClung’s implied argument here is that social and equity feminism are not necessarily opposing viewpoints. Instead, McClung contends for an uncomplicated feminist identity, and in the process, also assumes an uncomplicated Canadian identity. For McClung and other early twentieth century feminists, their main failings are their lack of support for minority women. However, McClung’s commitment to gender equality and her inability to separate gender identities from assumptions of class identity, allow the main force of her argument to be received more universally than Murphy’s. Although McClung’s vision of an uncomplicated feminine identity is problematic—not only for women belonging to ethnic minorities in Canada, but also because of its assertion that feminine identity hinges on the social importance of women’s assumed maternal instincts—the universal nature of her arguments allowed her particular brand of feminism to be mobilized and spread to the Canadian West, where it blossomed into a highly organized, obviously successful suffragist movement. Strong-Boag writes that, “With encouragement from Ontario, campaigns were organized in the West beginning about 1912. By then suffragists had the powerful support of the major farm groups in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba: prairie feminism developed in the most sympathetic Canadian communities” (Strong-Boag ix). For McClung, female autonomy was not enough of a feminist goal in a community that denied the value of women’s unpaid domestic farm labour and also denied women the status of personhood. In order for women to introduce their experiences fully into the public sphere

as acts of political activism, women needed the title and voting privilege as citizens in order to make those changes occur:

The women of the churches and many other organizations for many long, weary years have been bailing out the troughs of human misery with their little pails; their children's shelters, day nurseries, homes for friendless girls, relief boards, and innumerable public and private charities; but the big taps of intemperance and ignorance and greed are running night and day. It is weary, discouraging, heart breaking work. Let us have a chance at the taps (McClung 79).

Although McClung values the labour of groups such as the Women's Institutes and the several churches in Ontario, she essentially believes that women cannot make a viable contribution to society by having total autonomy from men. However, her argument is not, as Monda Halpern assumes of equity feminism, that women need merely to adhere to a patriarchal political system; for McClung, suffrage means that women have the opportunity to expand their experiences into the political realm to change that system, and also to communicate directly with that patriarchal system in order to create change. For her, the innate differences between men and women are opportunities to create positive changes toward equal rights (as is the case with technology on the farm, for example). McClung concentrates her argument on rural women because of her belief that a rural existence leads to the kind of self-mastery assumed by contemporaries like Stephen Leacock to be outside women's competence. This autonomy is an important characteristic for all four authors in defining the difference between rural and urban cultures. For McClung, rural women have been forced through necessity to obtain the self mastery that allows them to undertake challenges within a patriarchal political structure because farm

women have, for years, already taken part in what is traditionally upheld to be male labour. She writes, “When the city woman wants a shelf put up she ‘phones to the City Relief and gets a man to do it for her; the farmer’s wife hunts up the hammer and a soap box and puts up her own shelf, and gains the independence of character which only comes from achievement” (McClung 109). McClung’s focus on rural women in particular answers the charge of popular male writers like Stephen Leacock that women would not be able to handle political responsibility because they are the physically weaker sex. He says in “The Woman Question” that women do not have equal opportunities only because they cannot perform the same labour as men:

The world’s work is open to her, but she cannot do it. She lacks the physical strength for laying bricks and digging coal. If put to work on a steel beam a hundred feet above the ground, she would fall off. For the pursuit of figures her head is all wrong. Figures confuse her (qtd in Warne 109).

McClung builds her argument on the idea that women are morally superior to men, but also that rural women are perhaps the most morally superior because only they have learned the art of self-mastery so important to creating change in a male-controlled political sphere, answering Leacock’s argument directly. Rural women, to McClung, are the epitome of the Canadian female citizen: self-efficient, hardy, hard-working, and compassionate.

As in McClung, one of the main streams of Emily Ferguson’s arguments deals with the mutual respect and equality between the sexes that starts in the domestic sphere and expands to change the nature of political discourse in Canada. In *Open Trails*, Murphy

uses her conversational approach to illustrate her idea of a marriage based on equality with her husband, a Presbyterian minister. She writes of her husband that “everything considered, wayward men have their use. They are a discipline to their wives; besides, we two understand each other well enough to differ on nearly everything. Differing with the Padre is like playing cricket. I set up things for him to knock down, and we both think it good sport” (Ferguson 3). Implicit in Murphy’s mental sparring with her husband is the argument that for women to exist without male counterparts is impractical. Murphy, unlike the social feminists cited by Halpern, finds her power as a woman not in the presence of other women, but in her ability to match her husband as an intellectual equal. For example, marriage is an equal partnership that allows women to make their influences felt in the public sphere by first making them felt in their personal relationships with men. On the other hand, Murphy may use her privileged social position to separate gender from class in a way that Nellie McClung cannot. Murphy sympathises with Ontario farmers, and tends to focus on the lecherous activity of country merchants, but does little to acknowledge the plight of farm wives in Ontario because, unlike McClung, she sees Ontario and prairie farm wives as being in an entirely separate position, with separate political needs.

Because of the disparity between gender and economics in Ferguson’s politics, she makes a better fit for Halpern’s conception of an equity feminist. At the core of Ferguson’s feminist politics is a wry understanding of a male conception of women’s role within the community. During a discussion with an outspoken and obviously racist local about native Canadians, Ferguson writes that “It is merely out of politeness that he turns from the men to ask my opinion about these worth-nothing folk, for no man places value on a woman’s opinion unless it coincides with his own. That is why I am non-committal, and say that

nothing black or red on the surface goes; it must be concealed” (Ferguson 45). Murphy acknowledges the massively paradoxical obstacles that face equity feminists—access to the public sphere is only permitted on the basis that feminine discourse and political activism matches that of a male paradigm. To gain access to the political sphere is merely to be further entrapped in patriarchal structures, and is a denial of the female experience.

Although according to Black, as a man, Ralph Connor is logically removed from the possibility of feminist activism, he nevertheless represents a world in which women act as the spiritual centre of wisdom, and in which their experiences provide the foundation for the functioning of the entire Glengarry community. In *Glengarry School Days*, Connor’s constructions of masculinity are obviously within the muscular Christian strain; however, according to John Lennox in his afterword, the overwhelming presence of a masculine world of action only serves as a foil for Connor’s feminine world of wisdom and spirituality. Lennox writes that Connor’s gendered mixture of the masculine world of action and conflict with the feminine world of formal spiritual and moral instruction made Connor one of the bestselling authors of the period preceding World War I (Lennox 203). Connor’s world is one of idealised feminine figures, and his representations of women, like McClung, centre on their moral superiority and maternal gifts. This, of course, is not the only requirement for a social feminist perspective; after all, McClung’s opposition upheld the same Victorian beliefs about women’s place in society. However, Connor also represents a community in which the guiding force for social change comes from the women within the community. And, like McClung, Connor focuses especially on the ability of these rural women to achieve self-mastery in a way that men within the community cannot. In *Postscript to Adventure*, Connor writes that women, in particular,

should be written into history as active heroes and nation-builders alongside men. Since it so clearly aligns Connor with sympathy to social feminist practice, it is worth quoting at length:

It is one of the tragedies of literature that historians fill their pages with the doings of men and leave unsung the lives of the heroines of the race. Less colourful doubtless are the lives of mothers, wives, sisters, but more truly heroic and more fruitful in the upbuilding of human character and in the shaping of a nation's history...Splendid and hazardous as are the deeds of men in the battle of life, nothing they endure in the way of suffering can compare with what the mothers of a pioneer colony, remote from civilization, are called upon to suffer in the bearing and rearing of children. The loneliness, the dangers, the hardships of fathers and sons in the remote lumber camps or in the rafts down the river are as nothing to the appalling loneliness, the dangers, the hardships that mothers and daughters have to meet and endure in the little log houses in the clearing...

(Connor 14).

Although his autobiography was written 35 years after *Glengarry School Days*, the seeds of Connor's feelings about settler women are present in the narrative, and are well articulated here. In light of Connor's respect for the hardships of rural and settler women, and his belief that they are underrepresented in Canadian history, it comes as little surprise that even Connor's idealised muscular Christian male figures, writes Lennox, fall short of the feminine ideal while "the influence of fathers is seriously compromised by their unthinking insistence on patriarchal authority, the mothers command through love and are benevolent and powerful presences" (Lennox 206). Women in *Glengarry School Days* are

powerful forces of conversion, and their influence is most present in the feminising of both Hughie and Thomas Finch by the end of the novel. Connor describes Hughie in the beginning of the novel as being, “like the girls, delighted in new clothes,” while during his mother’s illness, Thomas Finch “seemed to have found his fingers, for no woman could have arranged more deftly and with a gentler touch the cushions at his mother’s back” (Connor 28; 123-124). Lennox writes that “the mature feminine influence...is always efficacious and constructive...In his turn, the young and cynical schoolmaster, Jack Craven, is won to virtue by Mrs. Murray” (Lennox 206). Indeed, Connor’s treatment of women, especially the mother figure in *Glengarry School Days*, is deeply spiritual, and the women hold their power over the communities through spirituality and through the example of self-mastery. During the shinny game that composes the climax of masculine action in the novel, Mrs. Murray says calmly in the midst of the action that, “That’s what the game is for, to teach the boys to command their tempers” (Connor 176). Women are the guiding forces of education outside the Twentieth school, overseeing the moral and spiritual development of the children, and of the community as a whole. The combined effect of Connor’s idealised mother figures and the compromised patriarchal authority in *Glengarry School Days* reflects a concept of female power that is social feminist: that supports the autonomy of women and that their experiences (particularly their maternal experiences), are valuable to the development of the community’s public sphere.

Despite Connor’s sympathy, however, one should note that his response to the feminist movement as it began in England remained somewhat complicated. In *Postscript to Adventure*, he makes special note of his experience of the women’s movement in Britain--indeed, dedicating an entire chapter (“Embattled Ladies”) to the subject. Although

he clearly revels in the heroism and sense of adventure surrounding the hunger strikes, elaborate protests, and jail terms of Sylvia Pankhurst, a leader in the British movement, he seems uncomfortable at the prospect of transgressing the law. In fact, Connor seems to have been caught in a situation in which his belief in law and order, his love of adventure, and his belief that women should be treated equally and better represented, came in direct conflict during the protest. Connor is clearly impressed by her arrival with her followers at Trafalgar Square, but conflicted about the methods of protest that had landed her in jail. He writes, “I grip Robertson’s arm. ‘Where else under God’s shining stars could you behold such a scene as this, Robertson? Policemen protecting a lawbreaker on her way to preach lawbreaking to a crowd only too ready to break the law’” (Gordon 181). However, after hearing Pankhurst’s “note of scorn of ‘the big thirteen-stone men who rather pulled [her] about,’” he also recognizes the validity of her right to free speech and dignity as a human being (Gordon 182). When police finally disperse the crowd of supporters and onlookers after a disappointing attempt to deliver a petition to the Prime Minister, Connor spots a large police officer roughly handing a passionately protesting elderly woman: “He would have been priceless on a London stage, but somehow the whole thing shamed me. But the big man feels no shame or at least shows none...The lady is deposited in a cab and driven off and the policeman turns away to the next item of duty” (Gordon 184). Connor’s confrontation with the real suppression of free speech forces him to question his appeals to the law. Connor’s conflict between legal and political matters of women’s rights and their right to be recognised for their contributions to the building of communities and their unpaid labour is common for a social feminist. As Black has noted of many social feminists, “it seems clear that the majority of women prefer to say ‘I am not a feminist

but...’ and then support...any of the wide range of issues that have concerned women activists” (Black 10). This attitude is one that seems to resonate with Ralph Connor.

Marian Keith troubles Connor’s spiritual mother figure in *The Silver Maple*. There is a conspicuous lack of mother figures in the novel. The matriarch of Scotty’s story is his grandmother, whom Keith imbues with Connor’s elements of female wisdom, kindness, and spirituality. She writes that “hers was the face of a woman who had suffered much, but had conquered, and always would conquer, through faith and love” (Keith 22). In this description of Grandmother MacDonald, Keith hints at the kind of muscular spiritual maternalism that Connor privileges in *Glengarry School Days*. She also seems to challenge this convention with the young women in the novel, who seem to embody both the attributes of Connor’s men of action and of his female spiritual leaders. Both Nancy and Kirsty John embody male and female attributes, challenging both conventional Victorian ideas of the Angel in the House, and the urban constructions of inaction and weakness in femininity. Keith describes Nancy as “the biggest girl in the school and the only person in the township of Oro whom old McAllister [the school master] feared” (Keith 53). Throughout most of her adolescence and childhood, Nancy behaves like a man. She fights with the men, works with the men, and celebrates like the men, and “many tales were told in the Oa of her wild outlandish doings; how she would dress up in her brother’s clothes and drive madly all over the country; how she could ride an unbroken colt bareback, and shoot like a man, things which everyone in the Oa knew no right-minded young woman could ever learn” (Keith 149-150). Likewise, Kirsty John spends the greater part of *The Silver Maple* caring for her own farm, refusing marriage, and playing the traditional roles of both sexes. In fact, Keith writes that Kirsty’s home and farm “all

showed signs of a woman's tasteful hand. But Kirsty could do the man's part as well" (Keith 116). Many of the women of Oro Township exhibit this kind of androgynous behaviour, and are distinct this way from the English, upper class women living along the lakeshore, who show more Victorian restraint. In this case, Isabel acts within a liminal social space, as she provides direct comparisons between upper class and rural femininity: "I want a red petticoat like Kirsty wears, and I want to go in my bare feet all the time and live in the bush...[Aunt Eleanor] says 'tisn't lady-like [to jump around], an' she's going to send me to a school in Toronto when I get big, where it's all girls, and not one of them ever, ever jumps once!" (Keith 133-134). Keith's comparisons between Isabel's aunt, the frail Eleanor Herbert, and Kirsty John suggest that Keith sees the difference between constructions of femininity in upper class Ontario and rural Ontario in the same vein as McClung—that farm women learn an unmatched independence and dignity from their contributions to farm labour. Keith's constructions of femininity for rural Ontarians suggest a feminism much like McClung's, with a negotiation of the domestic space that resembles Murphy's. Although Kirsty John eventually concedes to marrying the Jimmy the Weaver and Isabel is eventually engaged to Scotty, the impending marriages are considered victories because there is no loss of identity for either women in the process, and both are won through spiritual conversion. Kirsty John's mother's death allows Kirsty to finally accept Jimmy's proposals because it is her mother's dying wish, but after the wedding, Jimmy the Weaver sat with her at the dinner, "his arm around her in proper bridegroom fashion, but loosely, for Kirsty was not to be trifled with, even on her wedding day" (Keith 230). The marriage, however, is presented as a happy one, with both Jimmy being content to be with Kirsty because of, not in spite of, her strong femininity.

Meanwhile, at the end of the novel when Scotty and Isabel part before Scotty's trip to college, and Isabel's parting words are, "Thou hast beset me behind and before and hast laid Thine Hand upon me", Scotty replies, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain to it" (Keith 357). Thus, for Keith, the key to ending domestic conflict between the sexes is merely a mutual spiritual understanding.

All four novels contain elements of a world in which social feminism allows women to make a tangible impact on their communities, and are sources of wisdom and spiritual guidance. Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor and Marian Keith all depict communities in which women play a central role and make an indirect political impact that is both real and powerful, beginning within the domestic space. However, Nellie McClung makes clear that social feminism's indirect impact on communities is not enough to allow women to make an impact in the wider worlds of provincial and federal Politics. Although social feminism has survived in many rural Ontario communities because its impact is both pervasive and radical, Nellie McClung's suffragist and universalist rural feminist theory allowed political mobilization across borders, enlisting the help of a powerful and easily organisable Western farm community suffrage movement that allowed women to become actors, not only within their domestic spaces and communities, but also within the political sphere. In this way, rural Ontario feminists were the centre of political activism for rural Canadian women, enacting both social and equity feminist theory in pursuit (and acquisition) of real political change.

### **Chapter Three: Post-World War II Rural Ontario Literature**

After the end of World War II, the rural perspectives of Nellie McClung, Emily Ferguson, Ralph Connor and Marian Keith began to seem archaic in the face of a new modernist paradigm that ultimately privileged urban centres as the seats of civilization. Rural Ontario, especially, became marginalized under this new scholarly influence, and few rural Ontario authors have been studied or canonized as a result. The 1950s and 1960s saw an important shift in the balance of Ontario's population, as the majority of rural inhabitants migrated to towns and cities, and farms became specialized business ventures rather than family livelihoods. While large, industrial farms maintained reasonable profit margins, family farms failed to compete in the changing agricultural market, and many farm owners sought wage labour to supplement the family income. According to Friesen, the shift to modernist paradigms brought with it a shift in Canada to print-capitalist societies: "In this third Canadian construction of the dimensions of space and time, factories and farms and offices provided the economic settings in which ordinary families made their living...the space within which they lived—once a backwater of small, scattered, poor colonies—had become a transcontinental nation" (Friesen 162-163). Friesen also asserts that although these changes required enormous adaptations on part of ordinary Canadians, these citizens did adapt. In fact, rural Ontario writers such as Alice Munro, Al Purdy, Phil Hall, and George Elliott show both resistance and adaptation to the changing nature of time and space, by returning to the traditions of earlier rural Ontario writers to preserve a history that threatened to be severed by the paradigm shift.

In the wake of modernist scholarship that sought to trouble, and ultimately effaced the culture of rural Ontarians pre-World War II, many rural Ontarians were easy targets for mass American cultural products, causing a loss of cultural continuity between Pre-World

War II rural Ontario and post-1950 rural Ontario cultures. Contemporary authors such as Alice Munro, Al Purdy, Phil Hall, and George Elliott, recognized this loss of cultural continuity and sought to recover, represent, and evolve a new rural Ontario culture based on surviving threads of loyalist tradition. In the wake of modernist critical theory, however, many recognized that the only way to recover a rural Ontario cultural history that was legitimate to modernist Canadian interests was to part from it, destroy it, and reference it as cultural artefact. Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women* is perhaps the most widely known of the works discussed in this chapter, but has, oddly, rarely been studied within the context of rural Ontario history; rather, it has been broadly discussed in terms of universal feminist politics, rural Ontario's resemblance to the rest of Canada and the world, and transnational associations between Munro and William Faulkner or Flannery O'Connor. Al Purdy, likewise, has been widely heralded as one of Canada's greatest poets, but rarely has been discussed in terms of his rural Ontario roots, or references to rural Ontario's history and impact on the rest of Canada; rather, emphasis has been placed on his technical skill as a poet and his travel writing and relationship to American working-class writer, Charles Bukowski<sup>v</sup>. Phil Hall, on the other hand, is rarely studied outside his relationship with Al Purdy, and his autobiographical work, *Why I Haven't Written*, in which he deals with his complicated relationship to the history and current state of rural Ontario, has rarely seen scholarly criticism at all. Finally, George Elliott of Strathroy has received little scholarly attention for *The Kissing Man*, aside from a few brief articles by Gerald Lynch, Thomas Clara and Dennis Duffy. Although authors such as Alice Munro and Al Purdy have been ensconced in the Canadian literary canon, little has been explored concerning their treatment of specifically rural Ontario identities.

In order to construct an identity true to rural Ontario history, rural Ontario authors need to first subvert the legacy of modernist paradigms over the representation of rural culture. In “Signs of the Post-Rural: Marketing Myths of a Symbolic Countryside,” Jeffrey Hopkins argues that urban, upper-class interests have colonized rural paradigms as “ a symbolic cultural landscape, an idealized, immaterial, representational space constructed through texts, both organic (e.g. art, books, films, personal accounts, television) and induced (e.g. promotional advertisements)” (Hopkins 65). As rural Ontario becomes marginalized both ideologically and economically, and Ontario’s population becomes predominantly urban, rural Ontario has become symbolically distanced as an imaginary space outside the established everyday experience, and subject to a modernist myth of place. Although Hopkins uses the term “symbolic rural” within the discourse of human geography, it may also be a useful literary term for the construction of place myths through literary texts, and echoes Kirby’s assertion that modernism has significantly altered constructions of identity through place, dislodging the cultural signifiers from their physical environment. Modernism has colonized and discounted many of the ideas of Nellie McClung, Ralph Connor, Emily Ferguson and Marian Keith, turning their descriptions of rural Ontario life into myths of place and continuing to use them as archaic descriptions of a rural existence that has evolved and become highly mechanized in the latter half of the twentieth century. Hopkins argues that many of these myths are being reiterated, not as truthful descriptions of the lifestyles of the area’s inhabitants (as they were in McClung et al.,) but as marketing tools used to encourage consumption of the rural for the leisure of the urban upper classes. Hopkins writes that “It would appear that the demands, desires and fantasies of an urban-based leisure class hold particularly strong

sway in the production of the symbolic countryside, and ultimately the material one,” and notes that these particular rural place myths “are not...tied to any particular locality; they are ‘free-floating signifiers’ of a symbolic countryside used to give meaning and character to any place in need of a ‘rural’ identity” (Hopkins 79). The descriptions of rural Ontario life created by McClung, Ferguson, Connor, and Keith have been stripped of their Christian Social Activist foundations, and taken out of the context in which they were created. These free floating significations are useful from a modernist perspective because not only do they deny rural Ontario a particular place in the history of nation-building, but also they symbolically erase the physical effects of a predominantly urban paradigm on the rural Ontario landscape. For example, Hopkins notes that although many small rural Ontario communities market themselves as natural landscapes boasting small, tightly knit communities, “The natural environment along the shores of Lake Huron is hardly ‘natural’; in fact it is a well-developed, highly utilized and commercialized tourist attraction set on a polluted lake” (Hopkins 77).

In light of the changing nature of rural representation, then, the work of rural authors in the latter half of the twentieth century is to subvert these myths, in order to resist consumption of the rural by urban leisure classes and also to reconnect the rural to Ontario’s specific historical moment.

### **Re-Establishing Rural Heritage Post-WWII**

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Alice Munro uses family relationships to explore complicated myths of place in the small town of Jubilee, Wawanash County (commonly believed to be a pseudonym for Wingham, Huron County, Ontario). In “Alice Munro, Writing ‘Home’: ‘Seeing this Trickle in Time,’” Robert Thacker argues that Alice Munro

writes her short stories using the primary text of Huron County, Ontario, where she spent her childhood and where she currently resides. According to Thacker, Munro's body of work suggests a movement toward mystifying the seemingly ordinary places of her childhood in Huron County, therefore defamiliarizing place myths that discredit rural paradigms of knowledge (and in Del's case in *Lives of Girls and Women*, self-knowledge) by re-engaging with the rural from a new point of view. Thacker writes that "in writing 'Home' Munro has been writing home—that her life has been her text, that Huron County, Ontario, has been her imaginative nexus, and ultimately that her career has demonstrated that this 'ordinary place' has been 'sufficient' for her needs" (Thacker 9). In fact, in *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro echoes the methodology of Gerald Friesen when she writes that the history of the county was that it

had been opened up, settled, and had grown, and entered its present slow decline, with only modest disasters—the fire at Tupperton, regular flooding of the Wawanash river, some terrible winters, a few unmysterious murders; and had produced only three notable people—a Supreme Court Judge, an archaeologist who had excavated Indian villages around Georgian Bay and written a book about them, and a woman whose poems used to be published in newspapers throughout Canada and the United States. These were not what mattered; it was daily life that mattered (Munro 31).

Daily life is what matters to the residents of Wawanash County over historical record. Indeed, Munro's fixation in the novel is directly on everyday events, and this is how she frames the histories of the county's characters. For example, Uncle Benny's house acts as a museum of his parents' lives and the possessions of people from the Flats' Road, with its

accumulation of “fifty years of married life” and “other people’s throwaways, things [he] would ask for and bring home, or even lug from the Jubilee dump” (Munro 6). For Munro, the history of rural Ontario is not in official historical records, but actually located in the changes that face the county after the war. Her depictions of Jubilee in the 1940s are, as W.R. Martin and Warren U. Ober rightly observe, “Janus-faced: fascinating, in that the movement and process involved in it transfix us; dreaded, in that it placed at risk ‘cherished’ beliefs and values. Munro’s sensitivity to this ambivalence takes many forms: often in the study of a family through three generations” (Martin and Ober 129). The historical moment Munro chooses for *Lives of Girls and Women* is significant not only for its autobiographical implications (Munro would be roughly Del’s age in 1940), but also for its historical complexities as modernity begins to have its affects on rural Ontario’s economy and on its inhabitants’ daily functions and beliefs. 1940, for rural Ontario, is a Janus-faced moment between the world of Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Ralph Connor and Marian Keith (which is quickly being subverted by a modernist—and predominantly urban—Canadian identity), and the world post-World War II, which begins to discredit rural ideologies and even livelihoods as anachronistic and marginal in a national context. Munro stages these changes in her references to the economic situation of Wawanash County following the war, and also in the relationship between Del and her mother, and Del’s mother and the rest of Jubilee.

In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Del is the daughter of two unconventional parents: her father, a farmer who raises silver foxes for fur coats, and her mother, an intellectual who feels isolated in Jubilee’s rural, small-town atmosphere. But the unconventional nature of Del’s family does not protect it from the economic crisis that hits Wawanash

County shortly after the end of World War II. Munro's descriptions of Jubilee are hints of the embattled ideological history plaguing Huron County. Del's Uncle Craig decorates the front of his house with both a Red Ensign and a Union Jack, and is interested in how the war "effected elections, in what the conscription issue would do to the Liberal Party ...Though he was patriotic; he hung out the flag, the old Victory Bonds" (Munro 28,30). However, the war is also a brief respite for the farmers of Wawanash County—the rural economy profited from the war as agriculture became important for the war effort. Despite the brief interval of prosperity Del also experiences the downturn of the rural economy as the war ends: her father loses his business, and the distinction between the larger town of Jubilee and the rural inhabitants beyond the Flats Road becomes more pronounced. As Del walks from town to her home on Flats Road during her early childhood, Munro writes that, already, "this rickety wooden store...was always a sign to me that town had ended. Sidewalks, street lights, lined-up shade trees, milkmen's and icemen's carts, birdbaths, flower-borders, verandahs with wicker chairs—from which ladies watched the street—all these civilized, desirable things had come to an end" (Munro 7). Already, Del is influenced by the striking class differences emerging from a world that privileges urban economies, and the differences in class between the rural Flats Road, with its unsuccessful farming operations, and the rest of Jubilee. These influences, however, come from Del's mother, and although Del eventually feels out-of-place enough on the Flats Road to join her mother in town when she decides to move, there are fundamental differences between Del's construction of an identity that is in harmony with the remains of a rural culture in Jubilee and her mother's self-identified urban worldview. While Del develops a curiosity about the towns' different competing religions, history, and social structure, Del's mother

has developed ways to shut out the rural culture of Jubilee by asserting a modernist belief system that privileges atheism, urbanism, and intellectualism. Del shows awareness of her mother's ideological distance from the rest of the town when she comments that as her parents sat on the front porch, her "mother was in her own sling-back canvas chair, to remind her of urban lawns and leisure, and [her] father sat in a straight-backed kitchen chair" (Munro 23). But despite her mother's influence, Del does not adopt all of the tenets of modernist ideology; although she reasserts her atheism after Garnet French attempts to baptise her against her will in the Wawanash River, and leaves Wawanash County to look for work elsewhere, she does not disavow the history that has shaped her as an artist. In the epilogue, Del mentions that during her adolescence, "It did not occur to me then that one day I would be so greedy for Jubilee. Voracious and misguided as Uncle Craig out at Jenkin's Bend, writing his History, I would want to write things down" (Munro 236). Del's final realization is that of an artist, that "no list could show what [she] wanted", that she needed to rely on a less empirical approach to the world that she had learned to accept during her rural childhood where she explored the lives and habits of the residents of Jubilee, the churches and the poverty of the Flats Road (Munro 236). In this way, *Lives of Girls and Women* is a *Kunstlerroman* about Del's development as an artist; but it is also a novel about the development of rural identity despite the major ideological and cultural upheavals of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Similarly, Al Purdy's *To Paris Never Again* is a map of the destruction and reconstruction of rural Ontario identities. In "Materials for a Biography of Al Purdy," Sam Solecki cites a letter that Purdy once wrote to Margaret Laurence, detailing his feelings about his hometown, Trenton, Ontario:

The dreary little town of Trenton...Trenton amounts to the dingy reality of my misspent youth. The house here amounts to a huge snail that I can't seem to get rid of, marine creatures, some of them, can leave their shells but must scuttle back at signs of danger and so do I it seems. Goddam umbilical cord to the past.

Neurosis no doubt, and there are many happy wholesome loving people living in the miserable place, rearing cooing happy babies that will grow up to be mongoloids and cretins as a result of environment. I will dust the place with DDT at a later date (qtd in Solecki 20-21).

As Solecki notes, Purdy must first destroy Trenton and the type of culture that it stands for before he can represent rural Ontario, and himself, as an artist: "Trenton's Al Purdy Day on 12 November 1990, was possible only because the poet destroyed or simply derealized Trenton by turning it into words, thus simultaneously judging it, possessing it, and transcending it...Trenton had to be destroyed verbally if Alfred Wellington Purdy was to be reborn as Al" (Solecki 21).. For Purdy, the complicated relationship between his art and his place of birth reflects both the lack of historical cultural continuity of rural Ontario, and the necessity of fitting into the modernist paradigm of "high art" by destroying his connection to rural practices and belief systems. But Al Purdy also constructs his identity purposefully around a working-class marginalization that resembles the modernist perspective of rural Ontario during the latter half of the twentieth century, and celebrates that marginalization by connecting his working-class writing to a wider tradition in twentieth century literature—notably, the American tradition of Bukowski. In *To Paris Never Again*, the first poem in the book is called "Lament for Bukowski", in which he writes, "It isn't only the Great Bards/ who 'pyrne in a gyre'/ believe in 'the dark gods'/'...

It's also a guy/ in his undershirt scoffing/ a hot dog and 6 pack" (Purdy 9). In aligning himself with Bukowski and a transnational tradition of American working-class literature, Purdy effectively aligns himself with the modernist perspective of rural Ontario, which carries inherently the tendency to deal with a complicated rural Ontario class system by labelling it as part of the urban working class, thereby turning it into Hopkins' symbolic rural, which can be applied to any identity, regardless of place. To find similarities between Purdy and Bukowski, one needs to use this symbolic rural in order to simplify rural Ontario identity to a working-class aesthetic that can be transferred between countries. Interestingly, Solecki makes note of the surprising lack of documentation left from Al Purdy's childhood, which suggest the physical destruction of his identity as that of a rural Ontarian. He writes that, "There are no significant letters to his mother, few family papers, no surviving school friends, no diaries, and no notebooks or memorabilia from school except some poems published in the school magazine. All that's left of the period is a paper trail of several hundred pages of unpublished poems highly derivative of, among others, Bliss Carman, W.J. Turner, and A.E. Housman" (Solecki 21). Although Purdy has actively distanced himself from his beginnings in Trenton, Ontario, like Alice Munro, he keeps being pulled back to the history of his place of birth. Despite his close epistolary relationship to Bukowski, Purdy links his entire persona as a poet to a broader transatlantic Canadian history of which Yeats, Housman, and Carman, and D.H. Lawrence are all members.

Also like Munro, Purdy constructs a complex relationship with his rural heritage, and a tension between the urban ruling class and his rural upbringing. In "134 Front St., Trenton," Purdy writes of the red barn that used to stand behind the house in which he

grew up: “—that red barn/somebody on the town council/must have decided the world/was just as well off without a red barn” (Purdy 45). Here, there is a tension between those making decisions and those affected by them. The removal of the barn is both a historical act, and an act of erasure decided by the urban ruling class. Likewise, in “The Names The Names,” Purdy mentions the lack of real power farmers have in regard to the construction of their own identities when he writes, “I think of the old farmer/who fondled his land/who loved what he thought it was/then both thought and reality/were taken from him” (Purdy 51). Like Munro, Purdy balances themes of marginalization with ghosts of rural Ontario history in his poetry, linking the current ideological challenges to a rural identity with the rural constructions of his grandfather’s generation. In “My Grandfather’s Country—Upper Hastings County, Ontario”, Purdy writes, “if I must commit myself to love/for any one thing/it will be here in this marginal country/where failed farms sink back to earth/ the clearings join and fences no longer divide” (Purdy 88). Ontario filters through Al Purdy’s poetry, and its continuity of culture is an important theme in his writing. At the end of *To Paris Never Again*, Purdy includes a short, autobiographical essay called “Home Country,” in which he explains his affinity for historical, including genealogical, threads throughout his poems. He writes, “It’s one of the pleasures of life that you can skip back in time through another person older than yourself and through that other, and then via his or her other, reach back through the centuries” (Purdy 126). Purdy’s awareness of this power of literature to reach back through human beings aligns him to Alice Munro’s--and Del’s--urges to write and catalogue the human experiences of rural Ontario. Undeniably, the specific places of rural Ontario are common features of Purdy’s work.

As one of Purdy's protégés, Phil Hall perhaps states best the effect of the loss of cultural continuity in rural Ontario following WWII. In *Why I Haven't Written*, Hall's poem of the same name asserts a concise argument for his complex relationship with his rural Ontario heritage:

You failed me[...]

The record player you bought in '63 [...]

is a piece of junk now—testament

to the shrivelled spirit you bought into[...]

and because my gods grew dead

in the slack air of your *serious* decades

Elvis Presley John Lennon

Now every Christmas

I think of sending you a new needle

taped to a manger on a card

and some new Bob Dylan records [...]

That is why I haven't written

And why I write (Hall 54).

Here, Hall blames the failure of rural Ontario people to adequately define themselves through history and literature because of the importation of American popular culture. In

those last two lines, Hall disavows the current trend of adopting American populism, even transnational identities, in place of a historically consistent rural identity construction in Ontario, and vows himself to create one through his writing. In Hall's poetry, though, instead of a unifying historical thread, there appears an emphasis on emptiness (like the "shrivelled spirit" of American popular media) and illiteracy. In a prose-poem titled "Mould," Hall emphasises the failure of the Ontario education system to provide for rural Ontario children, insisting, "The poor children who read these books now, who take them home broken from the Salvation Army, are receiving, as I did, slammed-shut concessions to a working-class hope" (Hall 48). For Hall, the working-class label applied to rural Ontarians is a lack of freedom and a lack of choice, and in "Mould," the lack of choice appears through hand-me-down literature, which more than likely results in the consumption of used versions of popular, rather than classical, literature and a level of literacy inadequate to compete with urban education and educational resources. The problem for Hall is also not an easy reconnection to the rural Ontario identifications of earlier generations. Adopting these identities in a modern world results instead in that same working-class identification, as he writes in "John Van Waggoner": "If you didn't know/how to read or write/ you ended up/ shoving fields/ down chutes/ for so much a can" (Hall 34). The rural worker is deprived of a connection to the product; rather, he or she is forced to interact with rural life in an industrial setting—a cannery. As a result, Hall is forced to deny the inheritance of that rural identity, as he does in refusing his father in "Legacy", at the beginning of the collection:

What does my father want me to do  
with the wheels he stands in the wet grass

and rolls with greasy hands down the path  
 from our old house to my way of thinking?

[...]

He begins to cry and grow old.

He opens his hands. They are full of tiny circles,  
 nuts and washers he wants me to work with.

What can I say, besides “oh,” besides “God?”

Maybe “gone.” Maybe “sorry.” Or “no” (Hall 11).

In this poem, Hall’s legacy is the imagery of male farm labour passed down through male inheritance. Significantly, though, nuts and washers, those tiny circles his father wants him to work with, are also symbolic of working class labour. Therefore, the imagery of the poem conflates farm and working class labour without distinction, and this is what Hall refuses at the end of the poem. His responses (“oh, “God”), in the second last line of the poem allude to the religious foundations of Protestant labour in rural Ontario, while the last line, (“gone,” “sorry,” “no”) shows Hall’s swift progression from the realization that it is impossible in a modernist paradigm to revert to those belief systems after two World Wars, to an apology, and finally to a refusal.

Unlike Munro and Purdy, Hall seems to be unable to offer a negotiation with the ideological boundaries set on rural Ontario identities by modernist paradigms that privilege urban over rural existence. As he writes in “Assessing the Damage,” the options available to people who were raised according to the principles of Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy seem to be limited once they have recognised that they are ideologically disenfranchised: “I could try to go home,/Or I could try to change./Not both” (Hall 22). As

shown in “Legacy,” and “Why I Haven’t Written,” however, Hall is not willing to try to go home, because “going home” implies that he gives consent and will try to negotiate the disavowal of his way of life in the process. In the first poem in *Why I Haven’t Written*, titled “Unchosen,” Hall writes, “The child listens to himself breathe/ He will never come back here,/ no matter what” (Hall 9). These instances of distancing oneself from rural Ontario life are interesting in Phil Hall’s work because they suggest that there has been damage in the disenfranchisement of rural Ontario’s cultural heritage that has caused alienation between the people and the place they inhabit. Where modernist scholarship would argue that there is an inherent progression in moving from rural to urban life, it does not always take into account the real-world effects of these ideological assumptions. Hall’s poetry is littered with domestic violence, economic devastation, and frustrated relationships as rural Ontarians adopt a foreign, philosophically empty, and historically inconsistent culture in place of one that has been rejected in favour of urban economic progress.

George Elliott’s *The Kissing Man* suggests possibilities for the negotiation of a world that privileges the urban as progressive that Phil Hall cannot. Elliott’s seemingly avant-garde (and strikingly modernist) short story cycle about an unnamed Depression-era town in rural Ontario has received little scholarly attention aside from Dennis Duffy and Gerald Lynch, despite Lynch’s attempts to garner critical attention for the cycle in his essay, “‘To Keep What was Good and Pass it on’: George Elliott’s Small-Town Memorial, *The Kissing Man*.” In this article, Lynch describes short story cycle as a magic realist narrative of place (as opposed to that of character). He writes that, as such, “It anatomizes a small town, looking at the characters, institutions, traditions, mores and rituals that give a

place coherence over time. In effect, it analyzes what makes a physical place a human community, for good and ill, and signals what threatens the continuance of small town life and communal values” (Lynch 69). In other words, while *Lives of Girls and Women* is a *bildungsroman* in which the reader becomes aware of rural Ontario through the realization of Del’s identity, and while the poetry of both Al Purdy and Phil Hall explore place self-reflexively, Elliott’s novel is more about place—specifically the small town in rural Ontario and the rural areas surrounding it—than character development. Significantly, as avant-garde as a magic-realist short-story cycle about rural Ontario may seem, the style in which Elliott writes *The Kissing Man* ties it ever more closely to the traditions and cultural heritage of rural Ontario folklore. Lynch acknowledges Elliott’s strategy when he writes that,

Elliott's vision of small-town community life is still essentially conservative, and no more radically Tory than was Leacock's (which was radical only in the sense that it criticized a crassly materialistic view of human affairs). That Tory vision is clearly signalled early in *The Kissing Man*, in its epigraph taken from arch-conservative T.S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*: ‘But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces . . . a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote’ (Lynch 73).

Elliott’s succession of stories works similarly to Munro, Hall, and Purdy in that it creates a sense of cultural continuity through an understanding of culture that is intrinsically tied to the family and community. These cultural ties are ever-present in the Salkald family, when, in “An Act of Piety,” Tessie and Mayhew Salkald die, and according to Lynch,

leave the “pioneer and patriarchal Salkald farm in a kind of temporal suspension” (Lynch 75). Meanwhile, Honey wants to commit Mayhew and Tessie to memory, and at the end of the first story, Elliott writes that “The past was in him, never to be forgotten nor ignored. But he didn’t know whether he was to forgive. He wanted only to keep what was good and pass it on” (Elliott 12).

In its dedication to a construction of culture that is communal, as Lynch notes, “*The Kissing Man* variously figures, in a manner that parallels the argument of [T.S.] Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” a kind of community and the individual life” (Lynch 76). This vision of a communally defined culture parallels the cultural beliefs of Elliott’s predecessors, McClung, Murphy, Connor and Keith, because it represents an identity that is not individualist and republican, but Tory, in that it is conservative and communal (Lynch 71). In *The Kissing Man*, communal culture is created through several different acts of myth making and ritual, but the best example of these activities is in the assimilation of Big Audie when he buys property on the edge of town and begins to farm. Elliott writes, “That first year was a funny one. He wasn’t exactly a farmer, so he couldn’t come in and stand around talking Saturday nights with the others, and he wasn’t exactly a town man, so he couldn’t get along so well with the regulars in Weaver’s barber shop during the week” (Elliott 34). Audie could not readily assimilate into the town because he had yet to establish his identity, one way or another. Conversely, because Elliott writes a cycle that is focused on place, and in this instance the unnamed rural community in Ontario, there are also clear instances in which the practice of mythmaking and collective cultural identity constructions are challenged. In “A Room, A Light for Love,” Gerry and Allie throw a party when Gerry arrives home from World War I, and everyone in town

comes to the drawing room of the Queen's Hotel. The narrator writes, "We were all there promptly. We had heard about the room and there'd never been a party in the hotel before. When we were all there, the doors were closed. We were isolated from the town so that any ideas of who we thought we were didn't mean anything any more" (Elliott 56). The party, like the Salkald farm, enters a kind of temporal stasis when the doors are closed, and becomes intimately connected with the new chandelier Allie buys to fix up the drawing room. At the end of the story, upon Allie's death, the chandelier must be destroyed. Elliott writes that Allie had asked that it not be given to an antique dealer at any cost, and Elliott writes, "The chandelier was destroyed, so the thread of memory had been established and the two men took turns remembering" (Elliott 62). As the story cycles into "The Kissing Man," Mrs. Lalling, a widow, remembers the parties and the chandelier as symbols of urban luxury and wealth: "The height of the ceiling was an aching reminder that she was poor and shouldn't be in such luxury" (Elliott 72). In "The Way Back," the grinder man is a significant symbol of community tradition that ties the living to the unborn. When a child is born without the familiar figure outside the house because the father rejects the symbol as "a bogeyman women are scared of," the son becomes ostracised from the rest of the community and the rejection of myth becomes part of his identity (Elliott 128). Dan, the narrator of the story, writes,

I'm the only man in this town born without the grinder man standing outside the day I was born. It was no oversight. My old man could have afforded it, all right. He just decided it didn't mean anything and he was bound he'd try it once. It broke my mother's heart. Didn't do me any good either. Thing like that, if you don't have a feeling for it, it'll separate you from the kids in school. It doesn't

matter if your family's one of the oldest in town. You just don't live it down  
(Elliott 129).

At the close of the book, "The Way Back" is a cyclical return to mythmaking and ritual practice that has defined the community and how one lives within it. For George Elliott, cultural continuity is, as it is for Purdy, Hall, and Munro, a process of destruction and return, but through ritual practice and the creation of identity through culturally continuous myths, or "threads of memory." As Dan says in "The Way Back," even though "times were changing...When I was a kid I was kind of proud of him...Now I'm old enough and I'm ashamed of him...It wasn't a question of fashion or times changing" (Elliott 130). Instead, it is a question of communal identity, and cultural continuity, from the dead, to the living, to the unborn, and these threads of memory are what Munro, Purdy, Hall and Elliott use to undercut the impulse to create a symbolic rural identity for the purposes of urban consumption, and instead create a rural Ontario identity for purpose of cultural preservation.

**Gender Constructions and Feminist Activism in *Lives of Girls and Women*, *To Paris Never Again*, *Why I Haven't Written*, and *The Kissing Man***

As the dimensions of time and space in rural Ontario changed with the modernist cultural shift after WWII, feminist activism in rural Ontario was forced to adapt with it. As rural communities struggled with a modern paradigm that privileged the urban and viewed the rural as archaic, feminist practices became increasingly aligned with equity, rather than social feminism. However, as Monda Halpern argues, this shift is often dangerously overstated, implying that the type of feminist practice that exists in late twentieth century

rural Ontario communities is vastly different than the social feminism that dominated before World War II. She suggests that

Even leaders of the new farm women's movement offered rhetoric consistent with social feminism, and which resembled that of older farm women's groups. Indeed, many members of the new farm women's organizations were already members of the WI. Certainly, then, the divide between the 'old' farm women's movement, as embodied by the traditional WI, and the new farm women's groups, can be overstated (Halpern 135).

The assumption that after WWII, the shift to modernism meant that feminist practices became urbanized and therefore centered on equity feminist rhetoric in rural Ontario, is a symptom of urban consumption. Late twentieth century rural Ontario authors resist this tendency by negotiating rhetoric of both feminisms to engage with feminist practices tailored to suit the needs of rural Ontario women's movements.

While in *Lives of Girls and Women* the relationship between Del and her mother represents the difference between ideological viewpoints competing in rural Ontario, it also represents the split between social and equity feminism in rural Ontario after World War II. While Del's aunts represent a social feminist history in Huron County, Del's mother represents a more urban equity feminist perspective that stands in conflict to those social feminist values. Del observes that her aunts

respected men's work beyond anything; they also laughed at it. This was strange; they could believe absolutely in its importance and at the same time convey judgement that it was, from one point of view, frivolous, nonessential. And they

would never meddle with it; between men's work and women's work was the dearest line drawn, and any stepping over this line, any suggestion of stepping over it, they would meet with such light, amazed, regretfully superior, laughter (Munro 32).

Del's description of her two aunts reflects the ideals of separate spheres that many social feminists assert in order to assert women's autonomy. Their attitudes suggest the type of radical feminist autonomy proposed by Naomi Black in *Social Feminism*:

What I call social feminism would fit into the category of role extension if such a term existed. Its arguments extrapolate from the accepted domestic role of women. Of course, because these arguments were made by organized groups of women, initially at a time when organized public activity by women was not accepted, in practical terms they represent role change, an adoption of activities not usually accepted as appropriate for women. But they can be presented and perceived as simply a maintenance of the status quo, since they rely on arguments (about male/female differences) that are anything but novel. The women making these arguments can be untroubled by accusations they are advocating anything as radical as role change (Black 28).

The paradoxical relationship that Del observes between her aunts and "men's work" points to a social feminist perspective in which the gender lines are, paradoxically, drawn and maintained for the sake of autonomy. Men's work is both separate and worthy, but the aunts more highly value what they perceive as women's domestic labour—keeping house, entertaining neighbours, caring for children, and maintaining community standards of

morality and social behaviour. On the other hand, Del's mother represents an equity feminist perspective that is incompatible with that of her aunts. For her, an autonomous female identity is one that is equal, but only equal in a phallogentric context. It is not so much Del's mother's equity feminist practices and beliefs that put her in direct conflict with Del's aunts and the rest of the town, but her unwillingness to see feminist goals as anything but equity feminist, or to recognize the feminist milieu that surrounds her in a rural community. Del observes that her mother, while presenting an award at her school, "wore a terrible mannish navy blue suit, with a single button at the waist, and a maroon-coloured felt hat, her best, on which I agonizingly believed I could see a fine dust" (Munro 76). Furthermore, Del's mother is someone who was "writing letters to newspapers. Her letters about local problems, or those in which she promoted education and the rights of women and opposed compulsory religious education in school, would be published in the Jubilee Herald-Advance over her own name...They were full of decorative descriptions of the countryside from which she had fled (This morning a marvellous silver frost enraptures the eye on every twig and telephone wire and makes the world a veritable fairy-land--)" (Munro 77). Del is aware that her mother approaches the rural community and feminism from an urban perspective that causes her to misread the community in which she lives, and reduce it to symbolic representations of the pastoral, but also is unaware of "what dangers there were" inherent in the adoption of that ideological perspective (Munro 77).

Part of what Del must do to construct her identity as a woman between these two warring feminist ideologies is to find a way to reconcile her mother's equity feminist beliefs with the predominantly social feminist system of Jubilee. According to Black, the social and equity feminist perspectives are not inherently at odds; in fact,

there are some continuities within each general sort of feminism, and there have been important agreements. The issues related to pay, to reproductive control, and to political activism have drawn support across a broad spectrum of feminists, in spite of a considerable range in justifications. At a certain point most feminists agreed on the desirability of woman suffrage. Today, most tend to agree on the importance of a higher level of political participation by women (Black 70).

Del learns to negotiate the changing feminist perspectives of Jubilee through her powers of observation, and, as Honey observes in *The Kissing Man*, by keeping what is good, and passing it on. Del observes the many misogynistic signals surrounding her in her childhood, both in those citizens of Jubilee, and in the popular media. Also, she experiments with the basic tenets of the social feminism of her predecessors, Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy, by exploring the validity of maternal instinct. When she hears a rumour that her mother's boarder, Fern Dougherty, has had a child, she "took to noticing pictures of babies in the paper, or in magazines when Fern was around...and then watching for a flicker of remorse, maternal longing", and rejects maternalism as a notion when she decides that she does not want to be a mother (Munro 137). Then, she decides that magazines do not adequately represent her experience as a young woman, and that although her experience differs from a boy's, she feels as capable of intellectual thought. Nor does she accept her mother's belief that relationships between men and women are unimportant to a woman's personal progress. She realizes, "I wanted men to love me, *and* I wanted to think of the universe when I looked at the moon" (Munro 168). Del also answers the problems facing equity feminist practice in her confrontation with the quiz intended for teens titled, "Is Your Problem that You're Trying to be a Boy?", as she

realizes also that “it had never occurred to [her] to want to be a boy” (Munro 169). But Del’s final confrontation with the tenets of early social feminism in Wawanash County occurs in her encounters with religion; most importantly, it occurs in her confrontation with Garnet French and his attempts to baptise her against her will. Del’s resulting feminism is a hybrid of both equity and social feminism that allows her to move forward, “without fantasies or self-deception, cut-off from the mistakes and confusion of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase, getting on a bus, like girls in movies leaving home, convents, lovers, [she] supposed [she] would get started on [her] real life” (216). Although Del must leave Jubilee to finish constructing her identity as a woman and an artist, the Epilogue returns, suggesting that although Del physically leaves the countryside, she returns with every piece of art she creates, and every detail she collects.

Although Al Purdy makes noticeably few references to women in his work (and to that end, mostly unsympathetic ones), constructions of femininity are closely tied to maternalism, and stem from Biblical representations of mothers, and offer a provocation to social feminists in his use of this imagery, often to parody feminine autonomy. In *To Paris Never Again*, Purdy often associates women with the Bible, and specifically with iconic images of the pregnant Virgin Mary. In “House Party—1000 BC,” Purdy writes, “—the child—ah yes—the child/who cannot yet exist/Glancing back at her husband /and then at the god’s changing face/which calls her to him/--so beautiful a face it is/ that speaks of generations/in the far future” (Purdy 62). “Minor Incident in Asia Minor” offers Joseph’s side of the story: “my young wife a virgin/but pregnant yes pregnant/ by some other ‘person’/ and not by her husband?/--by a god then/by a goddamned god” (Purdy 39). He writes later, “maybe she does not know the truth/a young girl still and innocent/ and

what does that mean?/--that she dreams reality/and cannot tell the difference” (Purdy 39). Although Purdy fuses the high (religion), with low culture (house parties and infidelity), Purdy’s connection between the feminine and religion hints at an unknowability, to a limit of his knowledge of femininity as a man, but his depictions of women often coincide with a frustration in that unknowability. In “Minor Incident in Asia Minor,” the last lines could also be hinting at hidden trauma, but the mind of Mary is as unknowable to the speaker as God. The femininity Purdy envisions is not passive; rather, it breaks in on his life in ways that are often startling and unexpected. In a CBC presentation and subsequent record release, *Al Purdy’s Ontario*, Purdy describes his life and transformation into a poet at Roblin Lake. In one instance, the feminine blindsides him, and while at first he unflatteringly (chauvinistically) decides that cows best represent the feminine, he soon loses control over femininity in his attempt to understand it. He says,

I get logical, think if there ever was a feminine principle, cows were it, and why not? What would so many females want? I address them like Brigham Young, hastily: ‘No, that’s out. I won’t do it. Absolutely not.’ Contentment steals back among all this femininity, thinking cows are together so much they must be nearly all lesbians, fondling each other’s dugs by moonlight, while Sappho’s own star-reaching soul fires inward and outward from the soft Aegean Islands in these eyes. I am dissolved like a salt-lick instantly. Oh, sodium chloride, prophylactic acid, Gamma particles in suspension, aftershave lotion, rubbing alcohol: Suddenly, I become the whole damn feminine principle, so happily noticing little tendons of affection steal out from each to each, un-shy, honest, encompassing golden calves in Israel and slum babies in Canada, and the

millionaire's brat left squalling on the toilet seat in Rockefeller Centre. Oh my sisters, I give purple milk (Purdy, Side Two 2:18-3:23).

Even in his supposed revelation among the cows about femininity, Purdy reverts to maternalism to describe the collective bonds of women, and this maternalism is considerably different to the strong, intelligent and culturally powerful maternalism envisioned by McClung. His conception of the “feminine principle” is also one that excludes men (the cows are suddenly all lesbians), parodying social feminists bid for autonomy. Purdy’s “feminine principle” has all the characteristics of a parody of social feminism—female autonomy, maternalism, social progressivism—instinctively tied to the rural and farm life in Purdy’s imagery of the cows, consistent with Purdy’s exceedingly complicated relationship with rural Ontario in general.

For Phil Hall, constructions of gender in rural Ontario are just as dependent on constructions of masculinity as they are on femininity. Like Purdy, Hall also connects his portraits of women to maternalism, but his focus is most often on the injustices imposed on women by working-class attitudes and poverty. In “Lorna,” Hall builds a portrait of a woman who is “solid as a granite wall,/She has rebuilt her home and her family from scratch/.../At one time she had hair she could sit on,/Trees and animals covered her dresses/.../and her baby girl died as she breast fed it,/gave a tiny cough that echoes now,/and died” (Hall 14). This portrait suggests that the maternal figure—the rural woman, synonymous with nature and child-rearing—is inadequate; instead, Hall represents Lorna as a woman who is still the chief authority over family and community, but not the idyllic country woman of past representations, like many of those in Emily Murphy’s *Open Trails*. Hall often represents rural women as the strength of their

communities, while men are adopting flawed constructions of a masculinity that are impotent rather than powerful or authoritative. In “The Irwin Picnic,” Hall uses the familiar scene of a family picnic to highlight the masculine rejection of family, while “the women are holding up half-eaten things/and screaming into the water./Their husbands have gone off to hide in the pines,/untie their necks, and drink/.../The night snaps shut on all features/Will not pretend” (Hall 23). The beginning of the poem addresses Hall’s father’s refusal to “pretend he had money,” but as Hall interprets this refusal as a refusal, in a sense, to adhere to mannerisms that were once definitive of rural Ontario culture, and are now considered stuck up—the domain of the urban middle or upper classes. Instead, the men adopt and act out the common urban interpretations of working class and rural culture in behaviour that is wild, boorish, and uneducated. The assumption that society progresses from rural to urban, and therefore that urban culture is more civilized, promotes the behaviours in rural and working class cultures that reflect the same ideology. Women, who in Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy’s time would have been seen as the bulwarks of civilization and community, are left holding “half-eaten things” in futile attempts to protect rural values (Hall 23).

In *Social Feminism*, Naomi Black suggests that although men cannot be feminist, they can and must support social feminism by advocating women’s autonomy. Perhaps more effectively, one could suggest that men take a more active role in supporting women’s rights through critical thinking about constructions of masculinity, and how these pressures create gender conflict. Phil Hall does this by reflecting on moments in his childhood that were defining for his development as a man, and then thinking about the

relationships involved in those moments. For example, in “Two Cents,” Hall reflects on his first sexual encounters with young women, and then writes,

Don got married  
 to a nice short fat girl  
 he knocked up, and now  
 has two or three kids like we were  
 to smack around  
 [...]  
 Drinking, I try  
 to kiss the clear lips  
 we shattered  
 I kiss  
 the useless green stars (Hall 29).

The final stanza of “Two Cents” is an admission of regret and guilt, and a realization that to a certain extent, the development of masculinity in rural areas often depends on the exploitation of developing young women, and often leads to domestic and gendered violence. The final poem in *Why I Haven't Written*, titled “Reading Women,” explicitly expresses Hall’s critical conceptions of gender constructions, and the political implications that follow. He writes,

Reading women, I see myself from outside  
 [...]  
 no less implicated,

seeking a turncoat manhood.

It's filled with holes,

The holes of words.

Two of my pockets bear new words

[...]

The others are holsters for standards (Hall 60).

Hall admits that having critically considered the implications of rural Ontario gender constructions (especially under a paradigm that considers rural people less civilized members of the working-class) does not free him from the responsibility of choosing and considering the cultural effects of these identity constructions for gendered violence. By critically considering the implications of these gender constructions, he is adopting a construction of masculinity that opposes mainstream misogynist constructions of maleness, and the “holes of words” indicate the semiotic slipperiness of his position: one way feminists can argue for autonomy is to create new, women-centered language in order to combat the socially constructed phallogentric nature of language. Hall, on one hand, must support female autonomy, including efforts to alter language’s masculine bias, but on the other, his maleness positions him as the oppressor—hence the “holsters for standards” (Hall 60). Hall’s position is one at the center of a gender conflict. As a male, he cannot, according to Black, be feminist. But as a supporter of women’s rights, he also cannot revert to the culture that supports masculine misogyny and insensitivity to women’s issues.

In *The Kissing Man*, George Elliott links stories show women using myth and ritual practice to build their own communities, while assuring the continuity of their small-town culture despite the damaging effects of linear time. He keeps the pre-World War I

tradition of linking women with community, but, unlike his predecessors, shows women's struggle to cope with their often lonely and forlorn situations through communal ritual. According to Gerald Lynch in "'To Keep What was Good and Pass It on'," communal ritual and myth offers one of the few solid grounds of interpretation in the incredibly murky, irresolvable collection of stories, and it holds together the solid human community of the small town, to allow it to endure despite the threatening nature of linear time. Much of Elliott's magic realism revolves around building and maintaining communities. According to Lynch, the title story, "The Kissing Man" does so when Froody fails to connect with the women in her community while working at Geddes dry goods store. He writes,

In "The kissing man," the concretely realized, staid, and suffocating environment of Geddes's dry-goods store is disrupted by the spontaneous appearances of the compassionate Kissing Man. But the empathy experienced by the women who contact the Kissing Man is suggestively contingent on their awareness of the need for such communally necessary virtues as sympathy, empathy, and compassion (Lynch 77).

Elliott describes Froody as "proper beauty and proper beauty was becoming rare in town these days," but also hints at her loveless relationship with Dougie Framingham: "Dougie Framingham showed up that night, as usual, and Froody told her mother to tell him to go away, that she wasn't able to see him" (Elliott 69,71). When the Kissing Man arrives in Gedde's store where Froody works, she comes to the slow realization that she is alienated from the painful world of the farm women who frequent the store. This realization dawns on her as she begins to become curious about what The Kissing Man is saying to the other

women, and as she becomes troubled by the slow encroachment of a “barren orderliness” to the atmosphere of the store, which indicates her growing empathy with the lives of the women she encounters (Elliott 71). Lynch reflects that, “The arrival of the Kissing Man corresponds, then, to Froody’s refusal to identify her life with the painful lot of the women she encounters daily. The subsequent movement within Froody from apathy to empathy is not explained. Presumably, she changes because she must” (Lynch 78). Froody must make the change from apathy to empathy, and into maturity, in order to preserve the cohesion of the women’s community. This is one instance in which Elliott uses assumed or innate spiritual knowledge and ritual in order to show the reader the underlying systems that hold the small-town community together through time. In this sense, the eerie warning The Kissing Man offers Froody at the end of the story, ““You haven’t needed me yet,”” is a double-sided prediction (Elliott 73). On one hand, in her impending boredom, dissatisfaction and disappointment in love, Froody will be welcomed to a community of farm women who have needed the compassion of The Kissing Man, and who have dealt with the knowledge that their lives are unsatisfactory. In this sense, she is guaranteed knowledge, compassion and community. On the other hand, The Kissing Man offers innate knowledge of Froody’s situation. The word, “yet” implies that her loneliness will result from her marriage to Dougie Framingham is inevitable, and that it is a rite of passage that will allow her to connect to a broader community of women.

In “A Room, A Light for Love,” and “The Listeners,” women use ritual practice to overcome that same impending “symbolically violent orderliness” in marriage that Froody comes to knowledge of in “The Kissing Man” (Lynch 78). In “A Room, A Light for Love,” Allison Kennedy reflects on her marriage to Gerald Kennedy on the night he

returns from the war, emphasising at several points that there will be “a fresh start—the way he wants it” and implying that prior to the war, her happiness with him had been fading (Elliott 49). According to Lynch, what saves Alison from the fate of so many other women in the community, is her chandelier. Alison “takes decisive action. She remodels the Queen's Hotel into a place where her friends can meet; she buys a new chandelier and transforms it into a symbol of her heart and her community's submerged longings” (Lynch 82). In turn, Lynch argues that Alison finds the self confidence to unite the community using the hotel and chandelier as extensions of her, becoming, in a sense, a matriarchal authority in the community. As the chandelier becomes Alison's symbol for the desires and often unspoken hopes of the people in the small town, it also becomes a way of reconnecting with her husband emotionally. As each person represented by one of the crystals of the chandelier dies, Gerald Kennedy must smash the corresponding crystal:

“I was sitting right here behind the desk when I told her about Jeth dying. She reached over, picked up the little bead and handed it to me. ‘Take this down cellar and smash it before you come to dinner,’ she said. I had an idea it had to be done and after I smashed the bead I wondered what the end would be” (Elliott 65).

The shattering of the beads—and consequently, the destruction of the chandelier—after Alison's death allows the secret desires of the deceased to be released, and allows Dougie Framingham and Gerald Kennedy to connect to the community through memory: “Each memory began with the chandelier. Each loving, remembering voice flowed into the other” (Elliott 64). Gerald has an idea “it had to be done,” which is yet another example of the community's innate knowledge of history, tradition, and ritual practice (Elliott 64). Elliott constantly hints at otherworldly processes that control the lives of the community's

rural inhabitants. The process of ritualistic emotional release and community building works differently for young Audie's mother, Mrs. Seaton. In "The Listeners," she Elliott describes Mrs. Seaton in her youth as a young woman with special philosophical and emotional insight: "Walking down the hill from the school to home one day, she told her girl friends that this old town, with all its oak trees shrouding down and the people in it, was the world. The whole world...There are people waiting in this town, she said. Waiting to die, waiting to be loved, waiting to love, waiting for the loneliness" (Elliott 32). But her marriage to big Audie Seaton eventually leaves her unfulfilled as a grown woman, and as she distances herself from her husband, the eggs being laid in the henhouse become repositories for her disappointment. In a collective family ritual, Mrs. Seaton has her boys blow the eggs out: "In the kitchen, she told young Audie everything...She told him everything from the time she was in high school to that day. Young Audie smiled and paid close attention when she talked about Daddy. Then she told him to blow the egg out. He did it nervously. It was done quickly. She sealed the egg with wax and put it in a box" (Elliott 38). The ritual practice fails because as an adult, Young Audie Seaton's memory of the event is flawed. So, instead of the hens becoming "the listeners" of the story, Audie becomes the repository for his parents' bad marriage, and the memory of blowing the egg becomes distorted in his adulthood: "The last time Audie told about himself blowing the egg, he remembered being troubled for his father while he was doing it.. Audie remembered crying, gasping for air and hiccupping in limp despair" (Elliott 30). The way Audie remembers the egg-blowing ritual does not dispose of his mother's bad marriage, or her feelings about it, but displaces the responsibility of ritual practice onto Audie. He continues the ritual into adulthood, with his memories that "keep hidden and pop up to the

surface like marsh gas, but only once in a long while” (Elliott 29). While Alison’s ritualistic remembering is one that welcomes communal memory and expression, Mrs. Seaton’s is a ritualistic act of remembering that comes to reveal the flaws and distortions of memory, and is ultimately alienating rather than communal because it forces repression of secret knowledge upon her sons rather than encouraging finality. In short, Mrs. Seaton fails to keep what was good; instead, she keeps the negative memories of her bad memories sealed in her son’s blown-out eggs.

## **Conclusion**

While Kathleen Kirby writes in *Indifferent Boundaries* that “contemporary political writers have seen that the oppressive effects of ‘difference’ result from its being configured as the rigid, exhaustive division of a conceptual space that claims to represent natural divisions and eventually comes to construct material divisions,” Gerald Friesen contends that modern paradigms—including their vast systems of information—disenfranchised ordinary Canadians, including farm families, and reconstructed both their identities and their connection to a specific sense of place (Kirby 4). He writes in *Citizens and Nation* that, “The editorial-page cartoon played [a]...powerful role in establishing the message that farm families (clean lines, straight jaws, plain overalls) were locked in a deadly battle for survival against the vested interests (portly men, business suits, watch chains, and cigars)” (Friesen 151). This deadly battle can be better configured as the battle between urban and rural representations of the Canadian citizen, and because modern ideologies privilege the city as the centre of civilization (with the implication that

urbanization is the natural form of progress for a civilization), rural Canadians, specifically citizens of rural Ontario, have been separated from their history as key elements in Canadian nation-building. Because of this shift, farm women have been doubly disenfranchised: historians have largely ignored their history of unpaid farm labour has been while scholars have also ignored their social feminist practices, and their contribution to the Canadian women's movement in favour of scholarship regarding the Canadian West and its contribution to women's rights.

A hermeneutical reading of rural Ontario literature shows, in the cases of Nellie McClung's *In Times Like These*, Emily Ferguson's (Murphy's) *Open Trails*, Ralph Connor's *Glengarry School Days*, and Marian Keith's *The Silver Maple: A Story of Upper Canada*, that the contribution to both nation building and feminist practices made by rural Ontario settlers has been greatly overlooked. While many scholars mistake McClung and Murphy for Western Canadian feminist writers, many more scholars mistake rural Ontario women in general for politically conservative farmwives. In fact, rural Ontario women used an effective mix of social and equity feminist practices to reshape Canadian politics and law, as well as to improve their own lives and win their deserved recognition and rights as unpaid farm labour without sacrificing their livelihoods or the well-being of their families. Rural Ontario literature suggests that rural women were far from passive; they were working according to their own cultural milieu and using the resources available to them—including the Women's Institutes—as tools for political and social feminist activism.

After WWII, however, Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*, Al Purdy's *To Paris Never Again*, Phil Hall's *Why I Haven't Written*, and George Elliott's *The Kissing*

*Man*, reveal an entire population of Canada that is facing an embattled sense of identity. While modernist practice that privileges urban paradigms have discredited the ideals of McClung, Murphy, Connor, and Keith as archaic or misguided, people of rural Ontario struggle to restore the cultural continuity of their history by mixing modernist literary methods with the symbols and ideological markers of their predecessors. Readings of Munro, Purdy, Hall and Elliott reveal a culture that is nostalgic and disenfranchised, robbed of their rural class status and forced into an urban class paradigm that places them within the illiteracy and (cultural) poverty of a working class label. Canadian literary scholarship, as with all scholarship, should seek to see things as they are, to appreciate Canadian literature's complexities and ambiguities, and to encourage a plurality of voices. Labelling rural Ontario writers as working class, and rural women as non-feminist conservatives, is a great disservice to the complexities and ambiguities of Canadian history, as well as to the writers themselves. The implications of privileging modernist scholarship that privileges the city as the height of civilization wrongly corners rural Ontario writers, and rural Ontario citizens, with simplified constructions of class and assumptions about feminist activism that wrest them from their sense of place and historical continuity. The lack of scholarly attention to rural Ontario literature is an example of the damage ideological assumptions can have in experienced cultural practices.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, Cuneo, Carl J. "Has the Traditional Petite Bourgeoisie Persisted?" *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. 9.3 (1984). 269-301.; Lawr, "The Development of Ontario Farming"; Kohl, "Image and Behaviour". The mistake is also most notable in recent sociological research regarding rural sociology, in which "rural" and "working-class" are lumped into a category that assumes the groups have the same desires and needs. See, for example, S.D. Clark, "The post Second World War Canadian Society." *Canadian Review of Sociology* (12) 1, 1974; and David Laycock, "Populism and the New Right in English Canada." *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. Ed. Francisco Panizza. New York: Verso, 2005. 172 as two of many examples.

<sup>1</sup> Marvin McNinnis offers explanation to the relatively short period of Ontario's important contribution to Canadian agricultural staples, when he notes a shift from Ontario's wheat production to a form of mixed farming focused on meat and dairy products. He writes, "[Ontario] certainly comprised the predominant part of the Canadian agricultural sector in the late-nineteenth century until the settlement of the western plains of Canada and the re-emergence of an export staple in wheat... Another way of looking at Canadian agriculture in the 1867-1897 period is as an interlude between two wheat staple periods" (191). See: McNinnis, Marvin. "The Changing Structure of Canadian Agriculture, 1867-1897." *The Journal of Economic History*. (42) 1, 1982. 191-198.

<sup>1</sup> See Halpern, And on that farm he had a wife. Page 6. (Though it should be noted Halpern makes the mistake of attributing Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy to solely the prairie suffrage movement, ignoring their Ontario roots and commitments. Also see, Carol Bacchi, *Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage*, where she writes, "The organized farmers in the prairie west—the Saskatchewan and Manitoba Grain Growers and the United Farmers of Alberta—and some elements of the Canadian labour movement were among the earliest and staunchest advocates of women suffrage in Canada" (89). A number of articles and books have since been published on the divide between farm and labour women in Ontario and prairie suffragists, who, because the prairies were still largely rural while Ontario was increasingly regarded as an urban province, received considerably more recognition for their protests.

<sup>1</sup> Both Leacock's article, "The Woman Question," and McClung's response, "Speaking of Women" are both available in *Canadian Literature in English: texts and contexts*. Ed. Cynthia Sugars and Laura Moss. Don Mills: Pearson Longman, 2008.

<sup>1</sup> In "Materials for a Biography of Al Purdy," Sam Solecki refers to the ongoing correspondence between Purdy and Bukowski between *Pressed on Sand* and *The Stone Bird*: "The Bukowski letters...are perhaps unique in Purdy's body of work showing him in his maturity shaping for the

occasion an epistolary persona, rather like Bukowski's. The spelling becomes more phonetic, the language more scatological, and the letters are punctuated by laudatory comments on Bukowski's work" (23).

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