WE GAVE OUR GLORIOUS LADDIES:
CANADIAN WOMEN’S WAR POETRY, 1915 – 1920

by

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ABSTRACT

Women's home-front poetry of the Canadian Great War (1914-1918) betrays a conflicted sense of Canadian identity, stressing as it does both the familial continuities of the Commonwealth and the new sovereignty celebrated by patriots who saw the war as an opportunity to assert Canadian independence. At the same time it traces a conflicted sense of female duty in wartime, as women become both the symbolic avatars of their nation and the producers of national. This thesis addresses the context of women's popular poetry during the Great War, with specific reference to the propagandistic project of the Canadian War Records Office and, more specifically, the poetry of Katherine Hale (1874 – 1956) and Mrs. A. Durie (1856 – 1933). Their work, and the work of other poets, valorise female sacrifice in war-time, and voice male soldiers on the battlefield in a kind of ventriloquism. Both of these strategies allow disenfranchised, colonial women to write back to the war, to both challenge and contribute to Canada as a national project.
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PROLOGUE: THE GIRL BEHIND THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN

In the spring term of 2006 I began looking for Canadian poetry of the First World War and found John Garvin’s 1918 collection Canadian Poems of the Great War in the stacks at Koerner Library. The book was vandalized, with John McCrae’s and Duncan Campbell Scott’s poems cut out of the binding, and with several generations of ballpoint annotations in the table of contents. Canadian Poems of the Great War contained two hundred and fifty pages of Canadian poetry related to the Great War written by men and women in the armed forces and at home. While I recognised some of the names—Charles G.D. Roberts, Robert Service, Wilfred Campbell and John McCrae—most of the

¹ The title is taken from the popular song “Keep The Home-fires Burning” of 1914 (lyrics by Lena Ford and melody by Ivor Novello). The second verse runs:
   Overseas there came a pleading,
   "Help a nation in distress."
   And we gave our glorious laddies
   Honour bade us do no less,
   For no gallant son of freedom
   To a tyrant's yoke should bend,
   And a noble heart must answer
   To the sacred call of "Friend." (17 – 24)
The song was further popularized by John McCormack in a 1917 recording.
authors were unfamiliar, and many of the unfamiliar writers were women. I began to
look for more work by some of Garvin's poets such as Katherine Hale, Isabella Watson,
Annie Glenn Broder, Annie Bethune McDougald or Amy Redpath Roddick. However,
their work was absent from contemporary collections of Canadian war poetry like We
Wasn't Pals (2001) or We Stand on Guard (1985), and as I began to search through other
twentieth-century anthologies—particularly those edited by Bliss Carmen (1935), Earle
Birney (1953) and Ralph Gustafson (1942, 1958)—I found that, despite the quantity of
material these women produced, their work was only marginally represented, and their
war poetry was not included at all. Instead, I found copies of the original publications on
microfiches at The University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, in
scrapbooks in the British Columbia Archives and the Vancouver Public Library's Rare
Books Room. It is this discovery that best illustrates my process for this research, in
which a combination of accidents drew attention to ephemeral and neglected work by
Canadian poets who were intentionally disregarded, inconspicuous and yet in plain sight.

This disregard is due—at least in part—to the quality of the poetry, which often
reiterates the exhausted clichés and conventions of war literature: sacrifice, patriotism,
mother-love, Christ on the battle-front, tears on the home-front, honour and chivalry.
However, the work of this poetry—in rationalising or disputing the war, in constructing
national and martial dimensions for domestic spaces and in replicating imperial
ideologies—argues that it should be remembered as a trace of the conditions that brought
us into war in the first place. Further, it reveals in painful detail the complicity of female
gender roles with the conventionally masculine spheres of nation-building and war. In
other words, this poetry makes war into women's work.
Initially, my work was that of a surveyor, mapping the territory of Canadian women’s First World War poetry. My first months were spent in reading and cataloguing the material I could find and tracking it by date, source and publishing information. While some of the poems were products of local vanity presses—work that had circulated “among friends”—others were published in newspapers, and in collections published by McClelland, Goodridge and Stewart, J.M. Dent & Sons, Ryerson Press or other major presses of the period. At the same time, I tracked war poems through anthologies of Canadian poetry published after the Great War in order to determine when this work disappeared, and it disappeared almost immediately after the war ended, suggesting that its cultural work had been done. Despite extensive contributions to the discourse on war by poets, critics and journalists, these women are conspicuously absent after the nineteen-thirties. John McCrae’s work endured in Canadian and international anthologies of response; F.G. Scott, Robert Service and Charles G.D. Roberts continued to appear through the nineteen twenties as well as in our contemporary anthologies such as those mentioned above. However, the women writing in response are absent, although at the time they were active contributors to the discourse of war. Helen Coleman, S. Frances Harrison and Annie Bethune McDougald are mentioned in an 1918 address by poet, historian and critic W.D. Lighthall, titled “Canadian Poets of the Great War.” Marjorie Pickthall and Katherine Hale appear in John Ridington’s 1917 lecture “The Poetry of the War,” where he states that “in our own Canada, the poetesses often equal the poets in the quality of their work” (32) with Hale’s “Grey Knitting” “included in most of the war anthologies” (32). Beyond these lectures, and John Garvin’s 1916 and 1918 anthologies, neither poet’s war work re-appears in later anthologies. However, Helen Coleman
published *Marching Men* and Annie Bethune McDougald published *Songs of our Maple Saplings* in 1917. Marjorie Pickthall published *The Lamp of Poor Souls* in 1916 and Katherine Hale’s collection *Grey Knitting* appeared in 1914, *The New Joan* in 1916 and her long poem *The White Comrade* was published in 1918. My point in listing these works—and these are only those texts explicitly related to the First World War—is to demonstrate their authors’ active participation in Canadian literary culture.

Their disappearance from later collections of war verse is in part because our conception of war poetry changes in the years following the First World War. While Lighthall and Ridington set “civilian” war-verse beside work of the frontline, later anthologies stress the authority of military experience over that of the home-front, thus re-defining “War Poetry” as a genre. The poets who survive are Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen. In Canada, Benjamin Freeman Trotter, Peregrine Acland, Hartley Munroe Thomas and Frank Prewett have been recovered with the growing interest in our national war literature, and in each case anthologists have represented the war through poetry of action and experience.

The poetry I have found and catalogued is not part of that narrative. It records, instead, the strategies by which those on the home-front, separated from direct experience of war, produce the discourse of that war through their separation, both voicing the absent or dead soldier and imagining themselves as active participants in the work of war. For the purposes of this paper, I limit my analysis to the poetry of women, though home-front men wrote at an equal remove from action, and deployed many of the same conventions to different effect. Women writing at such a disconnect must consciously negotiate the
markers of identity—gender, race and nation—that both sent men to war and denied women the rights of a citizen.

Siegfried Sassoon’s 1918 poem “The Glory of Women” describes just this estrangement, but further links it with the ideological dimension of war. He associates the domestic space—of knitted socks, fireplaces, and story telling—with both the denial and celebration of collective violence:

You love us when we’re heroes, home on leave,
Or wounded in a mentionable place....
You crown our distant ardors while we fight,
And mourn our laureled memories when we’re killed.
You can’t believe that British troops ‘retire’
When hell’s last horror breaks them, and they run,
Trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood. (1-11)

This domestic scene—the hearth itself—is a place of transfiguration, where violence becomes honour and the dead soldier becomes a national hero in the eyes and minds of those who tell that soldier’s story. While the call to action comes from outside, it is amplified at home: the iconic Great War recruiting poster shows a man in a nursery asked by his daughter: “Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?” suggests, in turn, that a principled domestic space generates a right-thinking soldier. It is also the space where the cowardly or physically inadequate man’s failure will be acknowledged personally.² Sassoon’s narrator refuses to recognise himself as the soldier

² Occasionally women fail to enforce such right thinking. Beatrice Hickson’s “In Hospital” (ca. 1918) is a soldier’s monologue describing a wrong-headed wife who wanted her husband to stay home. The poem in turn models correct behaviour for both woman and soldier, as the husband rejects wifely sentiment in favour of more vigorous virtue:
these women describe. To borrow Louis Althusser’s term, he resists his interpellation as an heroic soldier, refusing to be “hailed” by the ideology that would produce him as a male, British, military subject. In Sassoon’s formulation at least some of the power of interpellation lies with the women who deploy the words that define him as a soldier: honours, laurels, medals, chivalry. The space in which the poem’s mother imagines her brave “soldier laddie” is also the space in which the narrator encounters the language that constructs him as a soldier. At the same time, his lived experience as a soldier is rendered inaudible in the encounter: the poem’s iconic Great War mother is “dreaming by the fire” (12) and knits socks for her son while “his face is trodden deeper in the mud” (14). In common with the work of other trench poets like Wilfred Owen, “The Glory of Women” is one half of a dialogue, written from beneath the definitions imposed on the soldier by the women who propose to describe him in heroic terms. Or, at least, the definitions ascribed to that woman by the soldier.

She never wanted me to go at all...
Sometimes I lie and wonder what she’ll say
When first she sees my bloomin’ legs are gone—
And yet,—if I could have them back to-day
I’d go again and help to Carry On! (33-40)

3 Wilfred Owen’s “Greater Love” (1917) traces a similar tension between the experiences of battle- and home-fronts. In this case the tension is explicitly erotic and the relationship betrayed is not between mother and son but between heterosexual lovers, replaced by the greater authenticity of homosocial—if not homoerotic—relationships in wartime. Owen’s poem begins, “[r]ed lips are not so red / As the stained stones kissed by the English dead” (1-2). As in Sassoon’s case, the poem posits the inaccessibility of the soldier—to non-soldiers—because of his traumatic experience. However, this inaccessibility is imagined in gendered terms, and more significantly in terms of women’s bodies. The poem observes an erotic parallel between suffering male bodies at war—particularly as they die—and women’s bodies as objects of desire. It further locates this “real” desire at the frontline, concluding with the biblical admonition to prostitutes (and apparently to women on the home-front): “Weep, you may weep, for you may touch them not” (24). Again, this explicitly erotic parallel argues for the complicity between gender and war-making. That is, the fallen soldier requires the relict; the battlefield requires the hearth. These battle-field erotics appear often in Katherine Hale’s work and will be examined in detail later on.
It is to this woman—who authors the soldier as she describes him—that I return, and whose work I try to recover in the poems absent from our anthologies of war. For example, Katherine Hale’s “Grey Knitting” (1914) returns us to an earlier point in the dialogue, specifically to a spectral female presence watching over the soldier on the battlefield. Sassoon’s anger at his own mis-representation in this domestic dream dovetails with Hale’s use of the familiar, heroic language of early twentieth century war: the unnamed soldier’s death is his “great hour” (14) as he fights he is “laughing” (13). If Sassoon imagines a woman dreaming, innocent of her son’s true experience, this is the dream of that woman as she knits. Further, Hale locates a kind of agency in those women who “weave the web afar” (9), literally the “grey knitting” that was often a part of the home-front war-effort, but also, metaphorically, the web of identity that Sassoon calls into question. Hale’s poem, like Sassoon’s, returns questions of masculine and national identity to the hearth and aligns domestic, feminine work with the ideological work of war, and, implicitly at least, of nation building. The distant, hallucinatory sound of needles—heard at the moment of death, no less—that mark a fanciful female presence on the battlefront:

Suppose some soldier dying, gaily dying,

Under the alien skies, in his last hour,

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4 According to Garvin’s notes in Canadian Poems of the Great War, “her poem, ‘Grey Knitting,’ has been widely copied, and is included in several anthologies” (72). It appears in that anthology, as well as Canadian Poets (1916). It is referenced in Hale’s biography in The Golden Treasury of Verse (1928) as “widely known” and “one of the most popular war-poems written in this country” (109). Grey Knitting is also the only collection mentioned by name in the Katherine Hale entry for The Encyclopaedia of Canadian Literature.

5 I do not argue for a dialogue between the authors but between their conceptions of military and domestic space. Of course, a more literal dialogue between similar poets is not unprecedented: In early drafts Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce Et Decorum Est” (1918) was dedicated to Jessie Pope, a British war poet known for her bloodthirsty and patriotic zeal.
Should listen, in death's prescience so vivid,
And hear a fairy sound bloom like a flower—
I like to think that soldiers, gaily dying
For the white Christ on fields with shame sown deep,
May hear the fairy click of women's needles,
As they fall fast asleep. (13-20)

Hale imagines a bizarre frontline, populated by dying men who meditate on the sound of knitting needles as they “fall fast asleep.” Despite its apparent success, and the success of Hale’s poetry in general, it is a disturbing misrecognition of institutionalised violence: it mistakes suffering for gaiety and finds in bloodshed a transcendence that discredits Hale as a critical commentator on war. However, the poem also restates Sassoon’s argument regarding the links between domestic and national space, and further it traces the means by which home-front women imagine themselves into the work of the frontline. That is, Hale mobilizes a spiritual, female presence on the battlefield, which webs the dying soldier with “love”:

Whispers of women, tireless and patient,

“This is our heart's love,” it would seem to say,

“Wrought with the ancient tools of our vocation,
Weave we the web of love from day to day.” (9-12)

The spectral woman shares the space of the dying soldier in an “ancient” continuity. Hale’s web—protecting and confining, made of “whispers,” representing a “gay” soldiers’ death in Christ’s name—argues for war-writing as female vocation, and one that

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6 In Katherine Hale’s short biographical note, Garvin writes that “…several of her poems have been set to music. Dear Lad of Mine was used by distinguished singers in metropolitan centres during the period of the Great War” (109).
spans domestic and military space. Such a vocation implicates the overtly peripheral woman in the work of war, not in her actions, but as she dreams by her fire, mourning and crowning the dead, and whispering to the living.

The historical context for this self-conception is not only the popular literature of war produced in England by writers like Rudyard Kipling or Rupert Brooke, but also Canada’s ambiguous independence, both autonomous nation and member of the British Commonwealth. Much contemporary literature celebrated the familial continuities of the Commonwealth and even imagined a utopian, global British empire emerging from carnage. In these lyrics Canadians were called upon to defend the Empire, and they responded with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, returning to “Mother England” when—under threat—she called her children “home.” Repeatedly, Canadian identity was conflated with British, while the lyrics themselves imagined threatened English landscapes in terms established a century before by the English romantic poets.

Meaning, power, and historical significance were repeatedly displaced: first, to the Britain, and second, to the male soldier as he encountered and enacted violence on the battlefield. Moreover, women writing war-poetry were aware of this displacement, of both their national alienation from British centres of power and their gendered exile from Canadian citizenship.

This discontinuity is resolved in later histories of the Canadian Great War, which imagine Canada’s “War of Independence” in the victory on Vimy Ridge. According to
this myth the Canadian Expeditionary Force proved its maturity on the battlefield and so forged a place for Canada on the international scene. In his history of this narrative, Jonathan Vance examines the ideological link between war-making and nation-building, stating that the country’s “progress from colony to nation by way of Flanders, an interpretation born in the earliest days of the war, has become the standard method of judging the impact of 1914-18” (10). This narrative was selected, even required, by the nation Canada became, or as Vance puts it: “only the memory of the Great War could breathe life into Canada, giving birth to a national consciousness that would carry the country to the heights of achievement” (11). The same narrative dominates Desmond Morton and Jack Granatstein’s history, Marching to Armageddon, which explicitly links the bloodshed of Vimy Ridge with the rights of an independent nation: “for Canada the Great War was a war of independence. By 1918, the self-governing colony that had trusted its fate to British statecraft was not only committed to speaking with its own voice in the world, it had won on the battlefield the right to be heard” (1).

According to historian Tim Cook, this mythos was the deliberate creation of Lord Beaverbrook’s Canadian War Records Office (CWRO), and he traces its creation, dissemination and acceptance in Clio’s Warriors a history of the Canadian World Wars. The CWRO documented the war for the press, but it also produced histories like Canada in Flanders and popular annuals like Canada in Khaki. Beaverbrook’s stated goal was the production of an “official” version of the war (Cook, 39) that would distinguish Canadian from Commonwealth identity and celebrate the “citizen-soldier” of the

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7 Despite this familiar “coming of age” narrative, British and Canadian national and cultural identities remain continuous much later than the First World War. Consider that the 1927 English textbook Introduction to Literature—“authorized by the minister of education for use in the public schools of Alberta” (1)—which lists patriotic work by Sir Walter Raleigh, Robert Browning, Shakespeare and Henry Newbolt in the section titled “Our Country.”
Canadian Expeditionary Force, particularly as he opposed the professional German army. This conception of the military stresses the democratic impulse in the Canadian army, with love of country depicted as the source of “true” heroism (Cook, 30). These twin impulses—the separation of British and Canadian identities, and the celebration of the citizen-soldier—were disseminated in the media through reportage, painting, photography, film and commentary.

The women writing in the CWRO’s context used two strategies to repatriate their voices in the face of the familial continuities of the commonwealth and the valorized citizen-soldier of Beaverbrook’s communiques. The first strategy was one of ventriloquism: women on the home-front ventriloquising soldiers; Canadians ventriloquising the English countryside of the romantic poets, and Canadian women ventriloquising those distant, English men who had the power of decision. This is manifested in poems that “voice” the male soldier, often when he is wounded or dying. A. Beatrice Hickson’s four-line poem “Our Captain” uses a double ventriloquism, as it voices both the unnamed soldier who watches and the dying Captain himself:

Both legs were shattered, and his arm was gone;
He had a bloody bullet in his side.
They brought him in: and gasping, “Carry on”—
He nodded to us, smiling, as he died. (1-4)

This ventriloquism is a kind of prosopopeia, a device in which the poet imagines a voice for the absent or dead, conferring, in the process, a mask or a face, in some cases an identity like the one Sassoon recognised and resisted in “The Glory of Women.” In Paul de Man’s words, prosopopeia produces a public identity, a persona that renders the absent
speaker “intelligible” despite his or her absence (926), and in this particular context puts the dead into dialogue with the living.

The second strategy for re-possession lies in a valorisation of female war experience, specifically in the act of “sacrificing” her “brave laddie.” In this case, feminine agency lies in her power to inspire men to battle and give birth to sons who will fight. This strategy is best summed up in L.M. Montgomery’s novel of the First World War, *Rilla of Ingleside*: “Our sacrifice is greater than his,’ Rilla cried passionately, ‘Our boys give only themselves. We give them’” (120). Even the right of authorship is indirect and arises as a temporary response to grief, as is clear from the dedications and memorials that accompany many of the poems and contextualise them as mourning rather than literature. This provisional right to speak about and for the absent soldier is effected through valorized female sacrifice.

This preoccupation with womanly responsibility for and relationship to the fighting man also informs Mrs. A. Durie’s tribute to her son, *Our Absent Hero* (1920), which describes her son’s death and her own grief. The poems of the collection serve as a memorial, and Mrs. Durie explicitly links grief with authority, thereby arguing for her right to “voice” by virtue of her mourning. In “Good-bye Forever” she describes their final parting:

I stand

8 Wilson MacDonald’s “The Girl Behind The Man Behind The Gun” of 1915 also celebrates female suffering and grief:

There’s a harder game than fighting; there’s a deeper wound by far
Than the bayonet or bullet ever tore,
And a patient little woman wears upon her heart a scar,
Which the lonesome years will keep for evermore...
She is fighting fiercer battles than a soldier ever knows;
And her triumph is an open grave, at dawn. (9-24)
To-day, and see you through a mist of pain,
Knowing that I shall henceforth look in vain
For smiles of yours: for while I waved the sand
Of your young life was ebbing...
No voice was there, nor deep-toned, mystic bell
To toll your passing; there was just a line
Of glistening rails; and you had said farewell
And vanished, smiling, from this life of mine (3-12)

Mrs. Durie, like Sassoon’s dreaming mother, cannot follow her son beyond this goodbye, and her poem marks the point at which he passes from her sight into the inaccessible space of the war itself. However, Mrs. Durie continues to write poems, and she becomes a spectral presence on her absent son’s battlefield, imagining Captain Durie’s death in “His Comfortable Words,” his experiences of April, 1917 in “Vimy” and his own willing sacrifice in “The Richer Grace.” Mrs. Durie’s authority to voice the absent or the dead arises from her loss: a vocation as second-hand witness to the ineffable experience of the frontline.
ONE: GOOD-BYE FOREVER

Criticism regarding Canada's Great War poetry has selected a canon that stresses the trauma of direct battlefield experience, as witnessed by the works revived in *We Wasn't Pals* or *We Stand on Guard*. These anthologies include works by battle-front writers like Frank Prewitt or W.W.E. Ross, rather than the ostensibly uncritical patriotism of women's home-front verse, with its embarrassing disconnection from the reality of mechanised warfare. Contemporary criticism also addresses that standard work of Canadian war poetry, John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields." The poem appears in several recent critical texts, including P.S. Sri's "John McCrae's 'In Flanders Fields' (1915) in the Light of Timothy Findley's The Wars (1977)," which appeared in the 2003 collection *Under Fire: The Canadian Imagination and War*. Sri argues that Findley's and McCrae's texts are inevitably in conversation, with McCrae's jingoism resolved in *The Wars*' rejection of chivalry. Complicating Sri's reading of McCrae's uncritical patriotism, Nancy Holmes' article "'In Flanders Fields'—Canada's Official Poem: Breaking Faith" interprets the poem as an argument between overt war-mongering and private anxiety. According to Holmes, the second stanza is particularly unsettling because it places the reader among the dead through the first person pronoun "we."
undifferentiated voice of the dead and the first-person call for vengeance leave the reader in an uncomfortable position: listening to and taking orders from the dead.

Though Holmes does not use the term, this disquiet suggests prosopoeia in Paul de Man’s definition. Significant for this discussion is the threat that arises as the dead are made audible: if they speak, then the living author and audience themselves become masks or mouthpieces for the silent, unspeaking dead. In de Man’s words, the living are rendered voiceless because “the symmetrical structure of the trope implies by the same token that the living are struck dumb, frozen by their own death” (928).

Though the reader temporarily finds herself numbered among McCrae’s dead, in the last stanza Holmes finds a return to more familiar commonplaces: the dead make their customary demands for vengeance, aligning them with the institutions that required war in the first place. This is what Holmes calls “[t]he adoption of imperial and European values in desperate opposition to lived experience,” (xx) a comment that might just as easily be made of Katherine Hale’s or Mrs. A. Durie’s work. As Holmes also argues, this literature of anxiety is distinctly Canadian. The Great War mobilized the post-colony’s ambiguous independence, fusing British and Canadian identities in a familial Commonwealth. The Canadian response to this call is imagined in terms of vocation, as in Louie Davoren Burke’s 1915 poem “The Empire’s Call (A Recruiting Song)” which describes a motherly call and a filial response,

England, the Mother, is calling, aye e’en to the ends of the earth;
Calling to those who respect her, and who boast of their English birth,
What is the cry to her children? What is she asking to-day?
“Sons of the Empire, come help me to keep the dread tyrant away!” [...]
Will you laugh while mothers are weeping for the lads who once were their pride—

Who gave of their best to the Empire, and like brave British heroes have died? ()

Holmes recognises that such imperial apologetics are unfashionable. Post-Fussell Great War literary scholarship is in part responsible for such blindness to the explicitly patriotic, as represented by McCrae's complex and frustrating lyric, or Burke's celebration of colonial sacrifice. A definition of "war poetry" that requires its authors be active soldiers ignores home-front verse, instead finding poetic authority in first-hand trauma and the literature of resistance, as represented above by Siegfried Sassoon's "The Glory of Women." This, at least in part, explains the presence of W.W.E. Ross rather than Katherine Hale in Canadian anthologies of literature and criticism.

Although Katherine Hale was a minor literary figure during her life, only one piece of criticism has been published since her death: Susan Atkinson's "Challenging Exoticism: Race, Gender and Nation in the Poetry of Katherine Hale," published in 1998 in *Proceedings of the 6th International Literature of Region and Nation Conference*. While W.P. Percival's 1948 collection *Leading Canadian Poets* includes a short article

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9 Critic James Campbell calls this position "Combat Gnosticism," defined as "the belief that combat represents a qualitatively separate order of experience that is difficult if not impossible to communicate to any who have not undergone an identical experience" (202). Citing Fussell in particular, Campbell challenges the conventions regarding the "trench lyric" as the fundamental genre of war poetry. Such critical ideology has "limited severely the canon of texts that mainstream First World War criticism has seen as legitimate war writing and has simultaneously promoted war literature's status as a discrete body of work with almost no relation to non-war writing" (202). However, noncombatant poetry is not simply eliminated from the canon, it is actively rejected, conflicting as it does with this "Gnostic" interpretation of the trench lyric. Further, Campbell recognises that the opposition is gendered: "[o]nly men (there is, of course, a tacit gender exclusion operating here) who have actively engaged in combat have access to certain experiences that are productive of, perhaps even constitutive of, an arcane knowledge" (203).

10 The other reason being that W.W.E. Ross is a better poet.

11 I have not yet found this text.
on Hale by Lotta Dempsey, it is more belle lettristic biography than criticism. A short critical biography appears in the *Canadian Poetry Project*’s “Hidden Rooms” \(^{12}\) section, where Wanda Campbell makes reference to Hale’s preoccupation with marginal figures such as women, artists and first nations people. This preoccupation is directly relevant to my discussion, insofar as Campbell observes that “Hale explores how extreme historical conditions served to strengthen women by allowing them a courageous and active role.”\(^{13}\) Further, Campbell sees Hale’s project as one of re-inscription, because her poems speak for the marginalized figures mentioned above.

In contrast with the few critical references to Hale, Mrs. A. Durie appears as a figure of absurd, ghoulish grief, more often remembered for her 1921 attempt to steal her son’s body from his French grave than for her writing. I have found no critical assessments of her work, though she appears in Jonathan Vance’s *Death So Noble* in relation to the Imperial War Graves Commission, in a 2001 *Toronto Life* feature article by Veronica Cusack and in a later, fictionalized biography by the same author. In each of these cases Durie’s story is more significant than her writing—which, according to Cusack, includes two novels and an unfinished memoir in the City of Toronto Archives.

As a figure of motherly grief, however, Durie’s self-presentation parallels popular memorialization of the Great War. Walter Allward’s Vimy Memorial gives pride of place to a *Mater Dolorosa*:\(^{14}\) “on the eastward wall stands a heroic figure of a cowled

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\(^{12}\) Lady novelists of the Canadian Great War appear with more frequency in critical works—primarily Montgomery, for example, Amy Tector’s “A Righteous War?: LM Montgomery’s Depiction off the First World War in Rilla off Ingleside” (*Canadian Literature* 2003) or Donna Coates’ “The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women’s Great War Fictions” (*Canadian Literature* 1996).

\(^{13}\) The *Canadian Poetry Project*’s “Hidden Rooms” website includes no page numbers, so I have left those out.

\(^{14}\) The *Mater Dolorosa* is “Our Lady of the Sorrows,” or the grieving virgin. The thirteenth
woman—Canada mourning for her dead” (61), as she is described in the 1936 memorial book *The Epic of Vimy*. The Veteran’s Affairs’ “Vimy Memorial Website” describes her with “eyes [...] cast down and her chin [...] resting on her hand. Below her is a tomb, draped in laurel branches and bearing a helmet. This saddened figure represents Canada - a young nation mourning her fallen sons” (VAC Website). “Canada Mourning for her Dead” stands with her back to “The Spirit of Sacrifice,” a direct reference to McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields,” his face upturned as he “throws the torch to his comrade” (*The Epic of Vimy*, 61), and a spread-eagled figure lying on the altar. The monument’s iconography eerily reproduces Mrs. Durie’s own public self-conception as described in her 1920 poem “Requiem,” where she imagines a double monument to her son’s heroism and her own grief:

If you would make a carven stone for me,

Grave me as one low-lying in the dust

Before a soldier form, erect and full

Of pride. (1-4)

Both Durie’s poem and Allward’s allegorical *Mater Dolorosa* and “Spirit of Sacrifice” gender the relationship between action and memorial. In Durie’s case prosopopeia

century liturgical hymn “Stabat Mater” describes the virgin at the crucifixion, in terms later taken up by writers like Mrs. Durie:

The grieving Mother stood
beside the cross weeping
where her Son was hanging.
Through her weeping soul,
compassionate and grieving,
a sword passed....
She saw her sweet Son
dying, forsaken,
while He gave up His spirit. (1-24)

becomes a means of positioning both the dead and the living, as she casts herself as the mouthpiece through which the lost beloved speaks; she is the builder of memorials and the engraver of epitaphs. Mrs. Durie becomes the living conduit of a dead voice, and self-effacing as she constructs a “face” — in de Man’s sense — for her son.¹⁶

The post-colonial critic Anne McClintock accounts for this division of action and memorial when she examines the construction of national identities. Gendered, domestic and familial language dominates the discourse of the commonwealth as it enters the First World War, and this domination is seen in ideologically inflected terms like “patriotism,” “fatherland” or “mother-tongue.” In this conception of the nation, men’s bodies and identities are, in McClintock’s words, “contiguous with each other and with the national whole” (62), that is, their relationship with the nation is metonymic and literal rather than symbolic. By contrast, women are not agents of the nation, but its symbolic reliquary, as imagined in the bodies of Allward’s grieving Canada, Britannia, Lady Liberty, Germania and Marianne. McClintock locates the specific boundaries of national and racialized identity in female bodies and their regulation by marital and reproductive law (45).

Further, McClintock argues that the official inequality of gendered bodies is written into the institution: “despite nationalisms’ ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender difference” (61). In wartime, however, the relationship between state and body is complicated, as the corporeal frontier of McClintock’s marriage laws is relocated to the

¹⁶ Veronica Cusack addresses Mrs. Durie’s creation of an heroic identity for her son—“facing” him in de Man’s sense—in her preface to The Invisible Soldier: “Anna Durie’s poems and memoir detail her soldier son as a mythic hero, yet he is absent from any list of honour sand medals. She describes a man whose existence I could not discover. An invisible man” (x, 2004). Captain Durie’s absence is double, and therefore must be doubly faced: he is both dead and unrepresented in the Roles of Honour.
literal frontline of the nation’s military—the inevitable, violent consequence of the metonymy of male body for nation. Read in this light, the male body in war has much in common with the female body in the gendered discourse of nationalism: it is subordinate, aestheticised, and less contiguous with the nation than severed from and sacrificed by it.

Writing of postcolonial struggles in Africa and India, the critic Elleke Boehmer also addresses the gendering of national discourse:

[l]iterary texts [...] are central vehicles in the imaginative construction of new nations, and [...] gender plays a central, formative role in that construction. Postcolonial nationalist identities, iconographies and traditions are refracted through gender-tagged concepts of power, leadership, lineage and filiation, including, for instance, maternal images of nurturing and service (14)

In this formulation, writing women such as Katherine Hale and Mrs. A. Durie contribute to Canada as an imaginative project even when they limit their commentary to lyrics of knitting or motherly grief. The entangled narratives of family, gender and nation deployed in their personal lyrics are both manifestation of and response to their authors’ patriotic war-time duty. The gendering of national identities in Boehmer’s argument identifies a space for female contribution and response, but one carefully circumscribed by the household and family. In fact, the domestic institutions themselves become one means of imagining that nation. Post-colonial theorist Anne McClintock argues that such institutions are in fact required to imagine the nation: “[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space” (63). Further, McClintock argues that the nation, as an idea, imagines itself as transcendent through the domestic
continuities of the family, whether the private home or the larger household of the Commonwealth. However she goes on to explain that,

[w]hat is less often noticed [...] is that the temporal anomaly within nationalism—veering between nostalgia for the past, and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past—is typically resolved by figuring the contradictions as a ‘natural’ division of gender. Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic ‘body’ of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward-thrusting, potent, and historic) embodying nationalism’s progressive, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity. Nationalism’s anomalous relation to time is thus managed as a natural relation to gender. (66)

Canadian Women’s poetry of the First World War articulates just this tension between nostalgia and evolution, with the war represented as both original and teleological, both the end of history and the return of antique ideals. Katherine Hale’s “The Vision”—the opening poem from the titular “New Joan” suite in her 1917 collection—imagines the call to battle as both an awakening and a return, with St. Joan herself heralding a new age:

A soldier’s soul returns the centuries down—
Radiance again! Love’s gleaming mystic mate,
She who was burned for witchcraft and for state
In the old market-place of Rouen town. (1-4)
The returning soldier-saint speaks to the poem’s narrator of “[a] legion of all-souls […] who ride again for country and for King, / And with them, as the ardent sun with spring, / See the enchanted ones that life calls dead” (9-12). It is significant that St. Joan is a woman and a soldier, linked with the dead, the seasons, with a secular king and an unnamed nation, because these elements invoke both the atavistic national space McClintock identifies with women, as well as the “forward thinking” masculine space of lived history. This blending of categories appears often in Hale’s work, and in the work of other women writing about the same events. The soldier, whether the literally female Joan or the objectified, feminised man who appears in Mrs. A. Durie’s collection becomes a means of negotiating between the two subject positions McClintock posits.

Like the martial housewives of Hale’s “Grey Knitting” the returning soldier-saint of “The Vision” celebrates collusion in officially subordinate voices—the disenfranchised women who write poetry of war. The war serves as a visionary illumination which returns Saint Joan to the earth, but also produces woman and soldier in tandem, as twin expressions of the domestic, familial fantasies of the nation itself. Hale represents the experience of absent and inaccessible soldiers by way of a contested female body: Saint Joan is both martyr and virgin-mother, linking sacrifice and reproduction.

The literary language Katherine Hale uses to describe, celebrate and memorialize the soldier-saint had been established before the First World War began. It is expressed most perfectly in Rupert Brooke’s 1914 Sonnets, but also appears in the brittle histrionics of Henry Newbolt, or in Laurence Binyon’s “For the Fallen,” now permanently fixed in the civic liturgy of the Remembrance Day service. These literary conventions describe the soldier who enters the lists in 1914 as boyish, tall, brave, idealistic, pure of body and
mind. This purity is often articulated through the mother-son bond, which is shared equally between his biological mother and his mother-country. Each woman—literal or allegorical—preserves a childish primacy in her son’s heart, and in each case she grieves for him as she would grieve for a lover. In death, he achieves a national, pastoral apotheosis—living on in eternal youthfulness, bare-headed, “straight of limb... steady and aglow” (Binyon, 10). These boys come to death like “swimmers into cleanness leaping” (Brooke, 4); they come “with songs to the battle” (Binyon, 9). Aesthetic objects of eternal contemplation, these un-differentiated “brave boys” are the measure of transcendent nationalism, and their perpetual, inaccessible gloriousness is balanced by a worldly grief, located in the Mother who “gave” them that others might live.

In The Great War and Modern Memory, Paul Fussell calls this the language of “personal control and Christian self-abnegation (‘sacrifice’), as well as the violent actions of aggression and defence.” (21). He locates the “tutors of this special diction” (21) in literature: the pseudo/neo-medieval romances of Tennyson, George Alfred Henty, William Morris and Rider Haggard. Fussell provides a kind of translation for the customary, exhausted language deployed to describe the soldier, which invokes medieval conventions and chivalric metaphors to describe a modern-day knight: his horse is his steed, the enemy is the foe, danger is peril, actions are deeds and one’s death is one’s fate (22).

Addressing just these popular conventions the literary critic Allen Frantzen sees a redemptive shift from “sacrifice” to “Anti-Sacrifice” in the neo-medievalism of the late

17 The “pastoral apotheosis” is later reflected in the Military Cemetaries designed and maintained by the Imperial War Graves Commission (now the Commonwealth War Graves Commission), where the soldiers’ graves are presented in an earthly Eden. Charles Causley, describing a Second World War visit to the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly as it appears in poetry and popular visual art. In poems, postcards, magazine illustrations and stories, the soldier is re-imagined as one who willingly submits to his own death, rather than the powerless object of sacrifice (3). In this new chivalry, the soldier rescues the world from war’s consuming violence because he places himself between it and the things he loves. He “reminds us why there is war: not because God wills it, as Honore Bouvet claimed, not simply because the world is enmeshed in cycles of violence, as Rene Girard claims, but because ideas and traditions can be worth dying for—and worth killing for. Chivalry explains why such dedication, single-mindedness, love, even bloody mindedness are, after all, necessary and good” (263). Such a conception of the fighting man is politically expedient, even convenient in the years leading up to 1914. This celebration of willing, private sacrifice is misdirection: if the soldier’s death is private and—more importantly—a willing “anti-sacrifice” it effaces the institutional context that requires such slaughter.

Frantzen’s necessary and naturalised “bloody mindedness” highlights a restrained violence underlying the new chivalry and the self-conceptions it provided for men and women. At the same time, the grief and resurrection of the individual soldier becomes both a resolution of past suffering and a call to future acts of vengeance. The dead, no longer able to speak for themselves—as the living soldier was forbidden to speak by censorship law and the chain of command—become the unresisting agents of national ideology. “We are the dead,” say the unnamed, undifferentiated soldiers of John McCrae’s iconic poem, and these dead do not sleep. Instead, they raise an unanswered question regarding the living: what did you do in the Great War?
The invocation of chivalry, the codification of the language used to represent war, and the masochistic submission of what Frantzen terms “anti-sacrifice” all produce a curiously passive soldier. This passivity is part of the work of war literature, and the regulation of his soldier’s body—in both life and death—preoccupies poets as they attempt to represent their subject. Such regulation begins in the domestic space, whether private or civic, presided over by a biological or a national mother. In either case the “call” from the imperial matriarch elicits patriotic feeling in her son: if the declaration of war produces a question regarding racial loyalty and imperial belonging, then the soldier is its answer, reinscribing Canada’s position in the Commonwealth family. The regulation is formalized by a uniform and parades of marching men. It is both final and most perfect at the moment of a soldier’s death. That is, his sacrifice becomes the ultimate performance of national identity, as if, in dying, he produces the nation as something worth dying for: sacrality conjured into being by those who chose to kneel at Canada’s altar. In this narrative the female figure either sprinkles the blood—the mother who sends her son away—or is the one before whom the blood is sprinkled—the allegorical figure of the nation.
I

The familiar narrative of Canada's First World War is biological, as the new country develops from adolescence to maturity. In this story—now a truism of Canadian history—war's bloodshed is the young post-colony's initiation into full-nation status. While this version of events has been re-inscribed—and retro-fitted—in histories written since then, the narrative itself was a product of the Canadian War Records Office, established in 1916 by Sir Max Aitken, following his role as Official Eye Witness, appointed by Sam Hughes in 1914 (Cook, 13). In this capacity Aitken toured the front and collected documents and stories for the first volume of his history *Canada in Flanders*. This initial private interest had expanded, by 1916, into an official appointment with a staff of writers and archivists, mandated to collect and catalogue diaries, accounts, maps and orders related to Canadian actions in Europe.

Three elements of the CWRO's work are relevant to my discussion of women's poetry during the Great War. The first is the literary dimension to Max Aitken's project. He mobilized poets, novelists and journalists in support of the Allied powers, and it was their texts that reified an independent, national, Canadian identity. The lyric became a way of disseminating that identity in popular collections like the soldier-edited *Garlands*
From The Front, published yearly from 1915 through 1919, Canada in Khaki, or broadsheets and collections by CWRO-promoted poets like Canon F.G. Scott, Charles G.D. Roberts or Theodore Goodridge Roberts. Second, this literary propaganda created a very specific kind of Canadian military experience, as well as a sign system for describing it. Many of the poems written in response to the CWRO’s propaganda combine chivalric images with contemporary values of pluck and constancy, the quiet heroism of the common man with the grand narratives of race, blood and belonging mobilized in opposition to autocratic Prussianism. The third relevant dimension to this centralized, historically-conscious, literary culture is the way it genders experience and response. Given that meaningful action was located firmly in the body of the male citizen-soldier described above, women were relegated to the necessary—if less dramatic—support roles. It is here that domestic and national narratives are linked, because poets like Katherine Hale or Mrs. A. Durie re-imagine such roles in heroic terms, remaking housewives and mothers into the nation’s highpriestesses who sacrifice their men for a reborn world. In the democratic army every private soldier is a knight by nature of his nationality, and every woman—witnessing their chivalry through CWRO communiqués—is a heroine because she can “realize” manly suffering. The woman who both urges her son on and grieves his death becomes the exemplary figure of that narrative.19

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18 Each of these texts was modelled on the King Albert Book, a collection of histories, songs, signatures, poems, cartoons, coloured plates and short stories.
19 The parallel images of suffering and sacrifice—mother at home, and son in the field—make military service a function of virtuous motherhood, as in L.M. Montgomery’s “Our Women”:
   Mother of one, the babe you bore
   Sleeps in a chilly bed.
   He gave himself with a gallant pride
   “Shall I be less proud?” she said.
“Canadian War Records: The Making of History” written by the anonymous “Records Officer” for the 1917 yearbook—and CWRO publication—Canada in Khaki celebrates the CWRO’s academic work, and stresses the collection’s objectivity: “the aim of the office has not been to supply an essay for the moment, but a possession for all time” (115). However, the interpretive work of the CWRO belies the passive “archivist’s” position that this short history imagines for the office. Under Aitken, the CWRO did more than collect the detritus of contemporary warfare. It became the means by which he disseminated his conception of Canada’s fighting men and controlled their image overseas. His officers wrote Canada’s history in tandem with the Great War, establishing an “official version,” as events took place, gathering and interpreting historical materials and re-packaging them for contemporary media. The office distributed newspaper articles, photographs and anthologies, and these texts—whether naked propaganda, literary history or verse—stressed Canada’s rise among the ranks of the colonial forces to a place of respect in Europe, and, with that respect, the status of an independent nation (Cook, 21).

Woman, you weep and sit apart,
Whence is your sorrow fed?
“I have none of love or kin to go
“I am shamed and sad,” she said. (5-12)

In this case the good mother is one who has a son to sacrifice, and her virtue finds its apotheosis in the moment of her loss. As the citizen-soldier is most perfectly a citizen-soldier when he dies for his country, the citizen-mother is equally perfect when she sends a son to his death.

20 At the same time there are remarkable continuities between British and Canadian identities, best represented in the constitution of the Canadian Expeditionary Force as it entered action in 1914, 70% of which was British-born (Cook, 10). For this reason Canadian soldiers were initially undifferentiated within the British Expeditionary Force. In a similar merging of colonial and imperial identities, Max Aitken served as both British Minister of Information and Canadian representative in the War Room (Cook, 13). This ambiguous conception of the Canadian soldier also shows up in Holbrook Johnson’s introduction to the British-published collection by Frank S. Brown of Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry (“the poet of the Pats”), Contingent Ditties and Other Songs of the Great War (1915). Holbrook refers to the two nationalities interchangeably as he described Brown: “[h]e was the type of the British soldier […] willing to
Further, the anonymous Records Officer mentioned above is conscious of the ideological dimension of such record keeping, and he explicitly links home-front witness with military nation-building:

It might be easy in one sense to brush aside all this work and to declare it the mere extras and advertisements of the serious business of war. But [...] under modern conditions, nations are fighting nations, and are sacrificing bone and sinew to an extent never known before, and realization alone can justify the sacrifice. We must see our men climbing out of the trenches to the assault before we can realise the patience, the exhaustion, and the courage which are the assets and the trials of the modern fighting man. (121)

The anonymous officer writes a short history of interpellation. Articles like this allow the home-front witness to imagine the soldier, and in that imaginative act they recognise themselves as active participants in the work of war. By arguing that the witness "alone can justify the sacrifice" the Records Officer presents the CWRO's imagined reader as an active participant in war-work—not as a combatant, but as one who gives such action meaning. Just as Sassoon's poem, "The Glory of Women," locates the creation of meaning and identity at the hearth, so the CWRO's texts locate the opportunity to make sense—through narratives of gender, nation or trauma—in those who read and write about war, rather than those who wage it.

The soldier himself is rendered voiceless by this "realization," meaning that square brain and brawn with the general effort towards the attainment of an end known to be righteous and certain" (6). Later he refers to Brown as "this khaki-clad son of the Empire" (6). Silence is often required of and associated with the soldier, as in W.D.Lighthall's description of the contemporary, Canadian fighting man: "Fierce tests are forging men and will return to our home life a stern and determined army, hating shams, not afraid of true revolutions, and accustomed to ideals, though singularly silent about them" (Lighthall, 45). Soldiers are also
others at home or on the front must speak to and for that absence. His identity is overwritten by the structure of command within his army, by enemy ordnance, and by the system of propaganda and censorship produced by the CWRO. In other words, he is pacified by the mechanisms that require him to think, react and behave as a soldier and promise to represent those actions. Further, this identity is not only produced by the writers who produce such texts, but by the reader herself. The buyer of home-front newspapers is implicated in the work of war; reading becomes a patriotic act. The CWRO sought to control the war’s textual dimensions, at least as they related to the CEF, and in turn valorised both the soldiers they describe and the audience who demanded that description. The woman at home reading a CWRO communique in her local newspaper becomes a significant witness to events, no longer alienated from meaning and action, but a participating and contributing voice. In the essay’s argument witness becomes action.

And Aitken carefully selected what the civilian witnessed. The 1916 edition of Canada in Khaki is a soldier’s anthology; Aitken solicited submissions from the CEF. However, he rejected those works that challenged his conception of the hardy, brave, funny and sensible Canadian soldier: “accounts that emphasized fear and bitterness were excluded in favour of stories emphasizing abilities to stick it out and remain cool under fire” (Cook, 23). In place of those excluded works, Aitken selected photographs and military journalism by officers of the CWRO, poems by pro-war British civilians like silent by nature of their deaths, but the stoic, living soldier is equally amenable to the definitions imposed upon him by statements like Lighthall’s. In Helena Coleman’s “Convocation Hall, May 18th, 1917” soldiers are silent by virtue of their being dead:

But those who lie
Far on the Flanders field to-day
Had not an answering word to say;
Their silence thundered their reply (16-19)

The lost soldier is tragic for his silence, but silence is required of the living.
Jessie Pope and Laurence Binyon, an essay by the British Minister of Propaganda/Canadian novelist Gilbert Parker, and amusing or sentimental verses by Canadian soldier-poets R.M. Eassie and W.M. Scanlon. Drawings and cartoons in *Canada in Khaki* celebrate the wit and reason of the enlisted man above the pretensions of the officer class, while a sentimental serial features a young officer as its hero. Published and distributed in Canada, the book became one of the means by which those on the home-front could witness war,

Texts like *Canada in Khaki* are popular evidence of what Jonathan Vance calls the “colony to nation narrative” (10), particularly as the transformation was imagined in terms of the citizen-soldier. That is, the new Canadian independent identity was born in tandem with a hero of the “other ranks,” remarkable for his pluck rather than his panache in battle. This conception of the citizen-soldier is the hybridization of democratic impulse and militarism in a new egalitarian chivalry, which found its model in the idealized democracies of Athens or Republican Rome (Braudy, 249). In this new model of wartime masculinity nationality trumped class, allowing both the aristocrat and the workingman to partake of a kind of sacred Britishness by nature of his birth within the borders of the Commonwealth.

Outside of uniform this citizen was remarkably unthreatening. The soldier-poet Theodore Goodridge Roberts, who imagines military capacity as an extension of civic deference, writes that “[t]he prize-fighter may make a good soldier, but the mild young man in the corner bookshop makes a better soldier … The junior clerk who yesterday trembled before the displeasure of his paunchy employer today dies gloriously for England on the field of battle” (T.G. Roberts, cited in Cook, 30). Elsewhere the
celebrated private soldier is obedient, uncurious and—importantly—physically and emotionally robust, as in Holbrook Johnson’s description of Canadian soldier-poet Frank S. Brown as the model of a *British* Tommy: “healthy, cheerful, untroubled by mental subtlety or overweening ambition” (Johnson, 6). Brown’s literary work reflects that unsubtle and un-ambitious character, as Johnson finds “nothing obscure or precious about the verses” (Johnson, 10). This soldier is a passive figure is celebrated not for who he is, but for his very emptiness, his suitability to host the animating spirit of his nation—whether British or Canadian—and his unprofessional passion for that nation.

The CWRO’s authority to create such identities and to produce such response lay in its own celebrated immediacy, because it claimed to have “snatched” its sources “from the firing line, from men still red hot from the fiery ordeal” (*Canada In Khaki*, 114). Such urgency attempts to efface the discontinuities between home- and battle-fronts, inventing a transparent text that promises to unite all literate citizens in the “truth” of war. In the years following the First World War, such fantasies of shared experience were challenged, and one truism of early twentieth century is alienation between home- and battle-fronts, that is, the “home-front divide” described by critics—and World War Two veterans—Paul Fussell and Samuel Hynes. Fussell describes the active soldier’s resentment of staff officers and civilians in *The Great War and Modern Memory*: “it was not just from their staffs that the troops felt estranged: it was from everyone back in England. […] The visiting of violent and if possible painful death upon the complacent, patriotic, uncomprehending, fatuous civilians at home was a favourite fantasy indulged by the troops” (86). Returning soldiers saw that they did not control their own representation or their history, and in the years following the war Veteran’s groups
lobbied for a complete and official history of the CEF (Vance, 166), which has never been produced.\textsuperscript{22} The Aitken-sanctioned “colony-to-nation” narrative remains intact, though in later versions it is private trauma that buys maturity for both man and nation, instead of collective heroism.

Despite the adversarial division between frontline and rear echelon—or between Flanders and Toronto—that Fussell describes, the home- and battle-fronts are \textit{not} discontinuous, and the CWRO’s fictions betray the link between domestic and national identities. As the home-front reader is addressed by texts describing, and therefore constructing, Canada’s idealized representatives overseas, that reader becomes a witness implicated in and contributing to their efforts. At the same time, as Fussell and Hynes argue, the continuities between home- and battle-front are \textit{not} those promised by the CWRO. That is, they do not lie in shared experience or trauma on the battlefield, but in a shared experience of the ideological machine that requires that men march away and that women cheer them on.

II

The contemporary critical response to Canada’s war poetry locates both official and unofficial literature in the discourse of nationalism, imagining the poet as a mouthpiece for eternal Canadian values, especially while those values are both threatened and enhanced by the Great War. Critics of the time—here represented by the editor John

\textsuperscript{22} Much critical literature of the war emerged in the last half of the nineteen-twenties or later: \textit{Goodbye to All That} (1927) and \textit{Journey's End} (1928) in Britain, \textit{All Quiet On The Western Front} (1929) in Germany. In Canada many of the canonical responses to the war—written by veterans—weren’t published until the nineteen thirties. \textit{Generals Die In Bed} by Charles Yale Harrison appeared in 1930. \textit{God's Sparrows} by Philip Child appeared in 1937. W.W.E. Ross published \textit{Laconics} in 1930.
Garvin, the poet and historian W.D. Lighthall and the critic John Ridington—identified a link between poetry and the nation itself, whether the first expressed the second, or the second inspired the first. With the exception of Binyon’s 1914 ode, lines “For the Fallen” in Riddington’s discussion, the poems chosen to represent this link are lyrics, a form associated at the time with interiority: the private voice “overheard” in John Stewart Mill’s formulation. If the lyrical mode circa 1914 belongs to the subjective, and the subject is itself produced by national ideology, then the lyric is the genre of subject-creation, the aesthetic symptom of Althusser’s interpellation. Poetry in general and the lyric by example is theorized as a private expression of collective ideals, produced by the biological and spiritual continuity between subject and nation.

John Garvin edited two anthologies of Canadian poetry during the First World War and included with them short introductions that contextualized the work of poetry with that of war and nation-building. The nation is a moral and aesthetic object in Garvin’s poetics, with the poet seen as one means by which the nation is celebrated and understood. In his introduction to Canadian Poems of the Great War, Garvin explicitly links poetry—and more particularly second-rate poetry—with nation building, when he writes that “great poets are the seers and prophets of a nation” (1918, 3) and “[a]ll writers of good verse cannot be great poets [...] but those of minor qualities reflect and influence their own generation and have an important mission in the evolution of national life”23

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23 The secondrate nature of much Canadian war poetry was recognised elsewhere at the time. An anonymous commentator in Macleans magazine wrote of contemporary response: “[t]he war has brought forth a tremendous crop of poetry—and most of it has been bad; so bad, in fact, that in the public mind war poetry now stands almost for something ridiculous” (Macleans January, 1916, 47). In a similar vein the anonymous reviewers of Saturday Night observe of one collection: “wars are bad for poetry and poets. They prevent the writing of good verse, except in rare instances” (Saturday Night, February 6, 1915, 9). Despite such criticism, war poetry was still written, published and read.
(1918, 3). In his earlier anthology of 1916, *Canadian Poets*, poetry becomes a means of escape and transcendence: "[a]lmost simultaneously with the Great War, has come a renaissance of Poetry, which is significant of that law of balance by which the heart turns instinctively from the terror and confusion of devastating human emotion, to the purity of a clearer and serener air" (1916, 5). In this argument poetry allows reader and poet to apprehend principles beyond the terrifying historical moment. Those principles are linked with the nation itself: the "serener air" is produced by the empire as well as the poet and occurs inside a kind of lyric space, within the poem itself and the "serener air" of the imagined nation.

Garvin celebrates the lyric because it is "natural," an argument that dehistoricises the political work of the form, and separates the authentic lyric voice from more unambiguous propaganda such as the histories and communiques of the CWRO. If the CWRO reported present-day history to the Canadian public, the lyric lay outside that history. In Garvin's argument poetry is organic, inspired, and authentic, expression rather than epistemology. Further, Garvin's introduction constructs poets as "the seers and prophets of a nation of the world" (1918, 3), which in turn constructs the nation as a sacred entity, requiring a prophet or seer. The argument quietly links the organic, inspired poem with an organic, inspired nation, placing both neatly outside history. Paralleling Ernst Gellner's argument that nations produce origin myths that efface the history of their own creation—denying, as they do, that such an institution is man-made and historical, rather than divine and transcendent—Garvin also makes Canada into a private experience. The citizen's experience of the nation is aesthetic, accessible chiefly through the private meditations of a poet. In Garvin's argument the poet is a medium for
the nation, with the lyric a trace and reminder of that mediation. This parallels the construction of the citizen-army: the soldier becomes the temporary avatar of the nation for whom he is deployed; the woman becomes the biological origin of the nation's citizens and the poet becomes the nation's prophet.

In Garvin's argument the poet's "function is to interpret life and nature in terms of beauty and passion, and through imagination and inspiration, reveal the Infinite and the True" (1918, 3). This interpretation is also an index of moral decay, suggesting a certain anxiety regarding his own literary cosmology and the links he observes between transcendent poetry and a transcendent nation. He explicitly links the love of poetry and its attendant idealism with conformist morality and a convenient desire for self-sacrifice: "in proportion as the individual or the nation despises or neglects poetry, there exists a state of moral and spiritual degeneracy. Materialism prevails, and loyal service and generous sacrifice give place to selfishness and unfair advantage" (1916, 2).

Addressing similar issues in 1918, W. D. Lighthall, poet, critic, historian, vocal anti-modernist and British-Canadian Imperialist, spoke to the Royal Society of Canada on the subject "Canadian Poets of the Great War." He used terms very like Garvin's to discuss the link between "national exaltation [and] intense literary activity" (41) and further prophesied a Canadian poetic renaissance following the Great War. More importantly for Lighthall, this coming literary activity would be populist and spontaneous: "not merely a bookish matter, but a voice issuing out of our people's deepest soul" (41). However, Lighthall renders Garvin's idealized poetic authenticity in physical terms, describing the lyric's imperative as a voice from the body itself, whether private or national. Lighthall first describes contemporary Canadian literature in these
biological terms as a "formless mass of new utterance" which was, even as he spoke "welling up day by day hot from the lifesprings of the new generation" (50). He saw this utterance as a kind of patriotic sediment from which would emerge our new "Homeric age" (62). Extending the biological-literary metaphor to his conception of the Canadian citizen-soldier, he states that Canadian war poetry is "unexcelled" in three areas:

no other verse is more bathed in the blood and agony of bitter struggle: none
speaks from a soul of more uncompelled and undiluted chivalry; and none other
proceeds specifically from our Canadian point of view, and so to speak courses
directly in our national veins (61).

According to this argument, literature is continuous with the right-thinking Canadian body. The text is a blood-drenched object, but also an unspecified infection coursing through the nation’s—and the individual’s—veins. However, this physical nationalism, and its poetic outpouring, is not independent, and Lighthall, like Garvin, is careful to locate Canada in the larger family of the British empire, defining the nation in terms of the commonwealth as "a people brought together as a working political organism within a certain territory" (42). Such an organism is not separated from the mother-country and is definitely not "a sovereign state: Canada’s nationhood is still a statehood in the United States of Britain" (42).24

Canadian war poetry, like the war itself, is a celebration of bodily continuities

24 Lighthall’s address is also teleological, as though he had absorbed the CWRO’s suggestion that the Great War would become the new originary scene of Canadian identity. He writes:
This is our Homeric Age. There never will be a greater fight. There never will be a vaster battlefield. There never will be richer experiences, more terrible shadows, more tragic trials, more glorious courage, more splendid triumphs, a higher tide of Empire, a worthier cause to live and die for (62).

With a similar sleight-of-hand regarding identity-construction, Garvin simply states that Canadian identity is ambiguous: "to-day Canadians have no doubt of their national independence, [and] are prouder than ever of their integral position in the British Empire" (1916, 6).
between Britain and Canada. Both Garvin and Lighthall cast poets as the prophets of the nation and the purest interpellators of imperial subjects. The physical dimension of this interpellation is particularly relevant to women’s war poetry, preoccupied as such poetry is with the production and destruction of soldiers and with the poet’s willing or unwilling function as the one who generates soldiers as well as poems. In an address made in September, 1917, John Ridington further demonstrates the links between the lyric space and the national subject. In “The Poetry of the War,” he identifies significant poets and poems without distinguishing between home- and battle-fronts, instead identifying unity in shared horror:

Poetry seeks and insists upon the personal, the dramatic, the elements of life. This vast, machine-made war dwarfs the merely personal: no cycle of human experience can comprehend or include its immensities. At best a poem can but reflect a single and minute facet from the blood red ruby of war. From this gigantic task of depicting it as a whole, in all its horror [...] heroism [...] sacrifice and tragedy [...] degradation, exultation, purification, the Muses shrink back, appalled, shuddering, impotent. (5)

The war may “dwarf” the personal, but the personal also allows response through the “single and minute” facets of the lyrics Ridington describes in his address.  

Ridington’s conception of war poetry eliminates the possibility of understanding more than the private experience of any given moment. Later in the address Ridington links this interiority with the poetry of women—mentioning Marjorie Pickthall and Katherine Hale—as a particularly personal instance of that response. That is, a response

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25 Though Ridington mentions Binyon’s lines “For The Fallen” and the Robert Stead’s memorial “Ode to Kitchener,” his primary examples are lyrics from Rupert Brooke, Julian Grenfell and Alan Seeger.
valuable for what it is—subjective, private, internal—rather than what it might do—

commend on events that have already defeated the muse:

The War Poetry of Women [...] runs the whole gamut of the war,—protest
against war itself, its barbarity, its horror, its ruins of their personal happiness; it
voices their courageous steadfastness, the terror they will not permit to conquer
their souls; it inspires men to heroism, and sometimes flames with a white heat of
patriotism; it sets forth women’s many-sided missions of mercy, and looks across
the vale of tears and terror to calm, bright plains of peace. (31-2)

Instead of describing or commenting on contemporary events, Ridington’s female poets
limit their discussion to affective response. Their poems are significant for feeling rather
than action: courage, terror, patriotism, inspiration, happiness. He also associates
women directly with a patriotism which, elsewhere, he has declared dead and absurd in
light of the new post-national world. In his words, “Patriotism in its old sense—that of
love for a geographical locality or historical sequence of events—has been gradually
dying as a motive stimulus to men” (5-6).

As these critics locate themselves in the narratives of violence and belonging that
structured the Great War, they link the production and appreciation of poetry with the
nation itself. Furthermore, the selections they make to support their arguments suggest
that such appreciation is often produced and performed through the lyric, a genre
associated with subjectivity. Just as the CWRO’s emphasis on the role of home-front
witness relocates the power of interpretation to those outside the battle, the lyric’s
interiority, the emphasis on willing, private sacrifice rather than institutionalised murder,
relocates both meaning and responsibility to the private citizen. Women—as they are
here imagined—are particularly well suited to internalize these demands. Such
interpellation turns a womb into a national space that parallels the “richer earth” of a
soldier’s grave: origin and memorial in a tautology of produced and sacrificed soldiers.
THREE: THE MATER DOLOROSA

I

The poetry I discuss here is non-experimental and familiar because it reuses clichés and conventions established elsewhere by poets like Rupert Brooke, A.E. Houseman, Rudyard Kipling, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson or Robert Browning. As a result, it is easy to dismiss as the uncritical imitation of more important originals, the simple regurgitation of imperial ideology, or as colonial women aping the wiser masters I list above. At best it is unoriginal and at worst it is actively offensive in its celebration of female and colonial submission. However, I began to suspect that the thirty-five poets I surveyed were aware of their own estrangement from the poetic forms they appropriated and that they negotiated deliberately with the contemporary, literary language of war, even while that language belonged to another gender and another landscape. The awareness is apparent in the work’s apparatus: memorial dedications and fundraising details frame the work as patriotic duty as much as literary endeavour. It also shows up in lyric strategies such as the ventriloquism I have already identified, as well as the context they create for their work in contemporary, British war-verse by Binyon or Brooke.
In this chapter I trace the common strategies such writers used to respond to distant centres of power, but also to align themselves with such centres. While embracing their own regulation as viable, productive bodies, they also become agents of such regulation because they represent and speak for the soldier-bodies they doubly produce, both as authors and as mothers. Ventriloquism fuses these two positions, when a woman, writing on the home-front speaks for a Canadian soldier on the battle-front. Such poems often describe the moment of death, or take place during convalescence while a disfigured and handicapped soldier meditates on his experience. As in the celebratory battle-poems, death in war-time is the consummation of the citizen-soldier’s pledge to his mother-country. In this lyric argument agency lies with the woman who produces the soldier, rather than with the soldier himself. Further, this agency is private: the biological/national mother’s power does not lie in legislated authority, but in her private connection with the object of her persuasion—her son.

The poetry is clumsy. However, such clumsiness is far more revealing than more accomplished verse: these poems are not sophisticated enough to hide the mechanics of identity creation in wartime. As a result, the poems are full of self contradiction, both celebrating a woman’s “duty” to produce men for war and send them away to it, and betraying their anxiety about the moral implications of such “duty.” In a similar triangulation of colonial selves, the poems reveal a slippage between Canadian and British imperial identities. Often the terms “Canadian” and “British” are interchangeable; often they are related in familial language, with Canada a daughterly sub-species of the larger British genus. In either case, these writers seem unsure of their own position in the
conflicting identities invoked by the CWRO, whether independently Canadian or proudly British.

The dedications, prefaces and statements of intent that surround the poems often invoke the authority of the poet’s private grief, citing the poets’ connections with men on active service in much the same way that soldiers’ service biographies are included in the publishing information provided in the collection. This authority extends in some cases to fathers as well as sons, as each woman locates herself in relation to the CEF, or earlier British and Canadian battles. In her long narrative poem about the taking of Vimy Ridge, published in the chapbook *Over The Top, or The Taking of Vimy Ridge by the Canadians* (ca. 1917), Mrs. Sutton invokes her four sons in service, her grandfather who served in the Crimea and her incapacitating arthritis. Laura Elisabeth McCully first invokes her own dead in the preface to her collection, *Birds of Dawn and Other Lyrics* (1919), saying “Sam Wood, naturalist, has gone alone. Emmanuel Tasse, of Ottawa, whose wife composed and brought out our war song, died the following year […] Of our boys who went to the war some of the dearest and the best are dead or missing” (xx). However, McCully, like Mrs. Sutton, also mentions her own chronic illness and the “lurid” poetry produced by the swamp that stood outside her front door. Mary-Bell Currie Bolish cites her brothers in “Homage,” the first poem in her untitled collection (ca. 1916). Helena Coleman dedicates *Marching Men: War Verses*, to “HHS,” and “The

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26 Individual poems are also located in the larger history of the Great War, either through those dedications mentioned above, or through particular events memorialized, often battles. Sheila Rand’s “On A Canadian Prairie, May 24th, 1915” records the day Italy joined the Allied forces. Margaret Hilda Wise wrote a quatrain for “The Heroes of Gallipoli.” McDougald wrote “Langemarck” and “St Julien April 22nd, 1915” regarding, respectively first and second Ypres, also tackled by Mrs, John Archibald Morison in “Ypres.” Florence Randall Livesay, Mrs. A. Durie and Mrs Sutton described Vimy, with Helen Taylor and Alice M. Winlow, wrote about refugees in Poland and Belgium.
‘very gallant Gentlemen’ / Who gave their lives for Canada’ (2), and she quotes Laurence Binyon’s “For the Fallen”: “To the innermost heart of their own land they are known / As the stars are known to the Night” (23-24). Mrs A. Durie’s poetic and emotional authority arises from her son’s death, and she begins her 1920 collection with the statement that “Captain Durie, to whom this volume is reverently dedicated, was killed in action December 29th, 1917” (3). Durie details his exploits in the style of a military communiqué, concluding “no eulogy of his life would be complete that did not place emphasis on his fearlessness in action, his devotion to duty and his gallantry in the field” (1). Rose E. Sharland dedicates “Pro Patria” (ca. 1916) to “WY,” and Helena Coleman dedicates “Autumn 1917” to “ALT.” Lilian Leveridge’s “A Cry from the Canadian Hills” was written for her brother, Frank Leveridge.27 These dedicatory gestures suggest a response to the anonymous CWRO officer who wrote that “realization alone can justify the sacrifice” as they make remembrance the explicit context of creation: realization and sacrifice frame the texts in the form of these introductions, dedications and significant dates.28

Such contextualization is not only a claim to their right of authorship. The writers themselves are preoccupied with legitimizing their own creations, and particular grief becomes a means of doing this. However, although they have a patriotic duty to celebrate grief in literature, there is also an anxiety of creation arising from their place as biological authors of the soldiers they memorialize. This anxiety arises, I suspect, from a

27 Other authors link their work more generally with the war effort, as in Louie Davoren Burke’s dedication of 1915: “this little book is dedicated to the brave fellows on land and sea who are daily sacrificing life and limb that we at home might dwell in safety and freedom” (1), suggesting that Burke was less personally connected with the CEF.

28 In his forward to McDougald’s Songs of Our Maple Saplings, W.D. Lighthall describes “War Debt” as “possibly the finest poetical outburst thus far written regarding the Great War” (2).
worry about what, exactly, such suffering purchases, especially in light of the repeated
metaphors of exchange used to describe the war, as in Annie Bethune McDougald’s
popular “War Debt”:

[...as Mary, all human, all divine,

That all such fair investment of fine gold

Should buy us but a crown of glistening, bitter tears.

[...] we bow the head

In high renunciation.

‘Tis thus we women pay. (xx)

Such suffering buys bitter tears, but also the right of authorship, which must be, in turn,
disowned.

Using similar language of exchange, Virna Sheard writes in “Crosses” that the
dead are “paid” with crosses at the Somme and in Verdun; the poem’s unnamed
addressee is called to “read” both the literal and the literary graves with, “At the dawn of
day you count them / And at the setting of the sun” (7-8). In another Sheard poem, “The
Young Knights,” the dead are similarly “paid” in texts written on the body of those who
remember: “across our hearts their names are carven deep / In waking dreams, and in the
dreams of sleep, / They bring us still ineffable delight” (23-25). Helena Coleman’s
“Autumn 1917” similarly defends the writing of poems as an act of remembrance, rather
than an exercise in authorship:

Your name in Canada’s heart, my brothers

Shall be remembered long with tears!

We give you vision back for vision,
Forgetting not the price you paid. (23-26)

In each of these cases, female writers legitimise their poetry by contextualising it as grief, suggesting an almost ghoulish link between writing woman and dying man. Amy E. Campbell makes this exchange explicit in “The Test” when she writes of “Our Lady of the Snows,” arguing that if the motherly nation “can meet with old true valor, chivalry’s claim” (10), she will, in turn, “find her proud reward on history’s page” (11). This reward comes only when the allegorical woman has paid “with rich young blood war’s awful toll” (8).

The female, literary war-effort also appears as a kind of haunting, with women as spectral presences that do the moral work of war on the battlefield. Rose E. Sharland’s 1916 lyric, “The Woman’s Part,” identifies precisely where women contribute to the creation of soldiers and, by extension, nations. Though women cannot fight, they can

Arm with our thoughts of fire the wavering arm,

Weave round each warrior adamantine charm

Of course, patience, zeal to help him. (2-4)

The fiery thoughts of Sharland’s poem parallel the click of fairy needles that sounds through Hale’s “Grey Knitting.” In both cases the authors deploy a kind of militarized sentiment that contributes to the war-effort ideologically if not literally. Significantly, this sentiment renders distance irrelevant: the imagined correlation places women on the battlefield and grants them the authority to write by nature of that mystical presence. Helena Coleman’s 1917 poem “Challenge” identifies the same haunting, in this case accounting for the distance between home- and battle-front by denying it:

Soldier, far from thee I stand,
Yet I take thee by the hand,
Doff this woman’s robe of weakness,
This inheritance of meekness,
Bid thee harden to the strife,
In the hour supreme of life. (35-40)

As in Sharland’s and Hale’s poems, women rise to the work of war through the men they inspire to self-regulation.

This inspiration is not always as gentle, and the imperial mother does not only use the quiet seductions suggested by the word “charm.” In S. Frances Harrison’s “Before It was Light,” England is personified as a brutally possessive mother:

Not alone she trod the Valley, not alone she set her teeth
To the gripping of her Empire; ere she cast away the sheath
Sons and daughters railed round her sternly girt for quick affray
From the rocks of the Atlantic, to the gates of Mandalay. (25-28)

Another means of producing Sharland’s “charms” is the invocation of chivalric history for Canada’s new-made knights. In Blanche E. Holt Murison’s “The Mothering Heart,” the “good” mother creates her son biologically and socially as a modern-day knight:

“The Mothering hands of Empire / Are belting on swords today” (16-17). “Knightly” authority lies in a medieval British past, requiring a similar slippage between British and Canadian identities. As in the case of continuity between mother and soldier, the substance of connection is blood itself. In Agnes Maule Machar’s poem “Hearts of British Men,” the “fire that leaped to conquer at Crecy and Poitiers” (6) leaps in Canadian soldiers overseas. Annie Bethune McDougald invokes the same battles in “Langemarck”: 
Shades of old Crusaders
Looked on in the moon-lit gleam
When the best blood of Canada
Mingled with the stream
That flowed at Cresy and Poitiers. (xx)

As the soldier is great by virtue of his British blood, so is the woman who bore him. In creating a space for a direct, sacrificial female contribution to the work of war, such literature also foregrounds the eerie passivity of the idealized fighting man. It also highlights the parallels between the regulated, aestheticised body of the woman, and the regulated, aestheticised body of the soldier. The soldier is both sacred and beautiful, “young, with starry eyes” (31), as Virna Sheard describes him in her poem “Yesterday.” In “Woman’s Share” by Beatrice A. Hickson he is “[t]all and straight”; in Gertrude Bartlett’s “The Blessed Dead” soldiers are “a star-like host” (24).

Grief also confers authority in poems that use Christian narratives of salvation, especially those poems that position the narrator as Mary, witnessing her son’s passion. This battlefield passion often appears in tandem with pagan images of generation, death and resurrection—although the prevalence of flowers and springtime in the trenches stresses rebirth rather than the more problematic issues of generation and death. These poems are more inclined to celebrate the risen Christ, as represented by a daffodil growing on Vimy Ridge, than to examine the historical conditions that lead to his crucifixion. For example, Annie Glenn Broder describes soldiers’ passions in explicitly Christian terms: “March in battle order many a lad / Who thought to go his way alone has met / Christ at the Crossroads calling him to—Come!” (12-14) in “Christ at the
Crossroads.” The Christian cross is obliterated in her “The Crossless Calvary,” but the
story endures with a

sight most strange, of pathos infinite;

A crossless Calvary, the cruel rood

Crude emblem of insensate hate, its wood

Shattered by flying shell in desperate fire. (1-4)

The Passion also becomes a means of unifying generation, death and rebirth. The pastoral
rebirth rescues suffering from meaninglessness because it places wartime death firmly in
the context of sacred and natural cycles, just as the chivalric re-vision of the modern
Canadian soldier associates him with Christian virtue. In “Thy Sons Shall Come From
Far,” Blanche E. Holt Murison first conflates British and Canadian identities with “why
should we lament / That British sons were greater than we guessed?” (9-10) and then
challenges us to find their death tragic. Although it is unfortunate that they lie in “alien
earth” still, “a brighter day shall show the way they went” (12). S. Frances Harrison’s 29

“The Mother” stresses the continuity of mother and son—at least as far as their bodies are
concerned. In this narrative of motherly sacrifice, the slain son is entirely passive, more
object than man:

Out of my travail, my boy.

Out of old flesh, new flesh;

29 Also known as “Serenus.” “Mrs J. W. P. Harrison of Toronto. Author of Crowded Out and
Other Sketches, Pine, Rose and Fleur De Lis, The Forest of Bourg-Marie (a novel), In Northern
Skies and Other Poems, Ring Field (a novel), etc. Born in Toronto, February 24th, 1859, daughter
of John Byron Riley. Educated in a private school for girls, and later, for two years in Montreal.
Ranked in early womanhood as a professional pianist and vocalist. A composer of music. As a
poet her fame rests chiefly on her pen pictures, in villanelle form, of French-Canadian character
and life. They are unique in their originality and interest” (Garvin, 1918, 79)
Out of old bone, new bone;
Out of my side, my treasure and pride;
My breast his earliest throne.
Stiff in the trenches, and stark…
Proudly I give my boy. (4-16)

Such motherly pain is also pleasure, as Harrison writes: “After the bitter, the sweet /
After the pain, the joy” (13-15), suggesting moral rewards for willing sacrifice.

The bosom-throne of Harrison’s poem finds its analogue in burial, as in Helena Coleman’s “France’s Flowered Fields,” which combines the floral re-birth of springtime with the motherly “embrace” of the grave: “In France’s flowered fields they lie, / And she will hold them close and dear” (1-2). The dead are repeatedly gathered, as flowers or children, to the motherly French earth of Coleman’s grave, or Harrison’s breast-throne, or Gertrude Barrlett’s England in “The Blessed Dead.” In the latter poem a personified England grieves for her “countless slain” (2) as they lie “beneath grey seas and battle-riven sky” (3). In keeping with Harrison’s stress on the bodily continuity between mother and son, Agnes Maule Machar’s “Hearts of British Men” imagines Canadian soldiers as a physical answer to the initial Maternal call: “[y]ou did not see her stalwart sons, swift hasting to her side / Not surging seas can keep them back, nor distance can divide, / They answer swiftly to her call, across the western sea” (8-10).

Further paralleling the slippage between British and Canadian identities, the bodily continuity between mother and son materializes in the literal continuity between the dead soldier and the earth that “embraces” him. The inter-penetration of such bodies produces the flowers that cover no-mans-land in spring, according to the poems, at least.
Florence Livesay begins “From a Grave in Belgium” with the epigraph, “The Amen of Nature is always a flower.” This floral rebirth challenges the Christian resurrection because it describes the soldier’s physical re-composition rather than his resurrection as a body of light. Livesay uses the floral return twice, first in “From A Grave in Belgium.”

Here the flower is a text, a letter from the dead:

The missive comes from overseas
It grew, one writes, where he is sleeping […]

The dead flower speaks
Not of a grave and its defilement:

Only of love and reconcilement. (1-6)

In Livesay’s “A Daffodil from Vimy Ridge” the exchange between dead man and living woman is also romantic, with the flower as the means of an indirect kiss:

Daffodil springing from field so grim,
Daffodil, kiss me, kiss me from him
And give me his message! Answer me! Say
How did he fall on that piteous day? (1-4)

Melita Aitken’s poem “The Result” combines floral returns with the metaphor of exchange, and again represents the flower as a text that must be read by survivors:

“[w]hat does the red poppy say? / ‘Red is the blood of the pulsing hearts, / So still at the end of the fray’” (14-16). In the examples from Livesay and Aitken, the flower becomes a mouthpiece for the dead, allowing authors to imagine a dialogue between living poet and absent soldier.
Grace Blackburn’s “In A French Hospital,” the last words of a dying soldier, who speaks of death as an oedipal return to the mother:

I was her gift to France... she bade me go,
And when she bade me go she sealed her gift
With kisses. I have kept them for this hour.
Ah! You must tell her that I died for France,
But that I kissed my mother with my soul;
Kissed back her son (11-16).

The short monologue combines many of the conventions already identified, but constructs another layer of authority for Blackburn by placing these conventions in the mouth of a dying soldier rather than a home-front woman. The preoccupations remain the same, however, as even a dying soldier is concerned with womanly duty and responsibility in wartime: while Blackburn’s monologue ventriloquises a man, it is preoccupied with a woman. As such it is a kind of double masking, a double prosopopeia that first produces the voice of a dying man, and through that voice describes a woman. That is, it borrows the authority of the dying soldier to address the relationship of women to the battle-front. Further, the soldier willingly divides himself between mother and duty, giving his life for France, but keeping his soul and his kisses for his mother.

This preoccupation with how men on the battle-front imagine women on the home-front appears in Durie’s work as well, including “The Richer Grace.” The poem also includes a similar division of the spoils, as Captain Durie speaks to his mother from beyond the grave, saying, “[m]y glowing, vigorous youth was only prized / For what it meant for you, and that dear land / That nourished me” (5-7). In each case the dead
soldier relinquishes his body and wills it to his mother. The mother in turn becomes her son’s relict, keeper of his memory as the motherly grave keeps his body. Ruth Strong’s “A Blind Soldier in A Garden” similarly voices a man as he encounters a woman on the battlefield, in this case in a dream-fairy who leads him to a garden. Again, the imagined male point of view is concerned entirely with a female haunting, as a dancing girl appears to him, “[h]er hair flaming in the sun, / Her blue eyes smiling over the wet red stones, / Her arms stretched out to me” (15-17). Her embrace, however, is the “cold, drear mist […] Flanders Black!” (19-20), again conflating grave, trench and woman, this time in the imagined encounter between soldier and spectre. This is a mutual haunting, at least as far as these women imagine it, with men speaking from absence in order to forgive the women who sent them away, and women dreaming that they are helpful presences on the battlefield.

II

In 1921 Mrs. Anna Durie travelled to France planning to re-patriate her son’s body, whether or not the Imperial War Graves Commission gave her permission. On a night at the end of July she successfully disinterred his body with the help of some local men, but the horse pulling her makeshift hearse bolted, scattering coffin and remains on the road outside the Corkscrew British Cemetery. Mrs Durie and her assistants returned Captain William Arthur Peel Durie to his original grave (Vance, 63), and she did not successfully relocate him until 1925, when all the bodies in the Cemetery were removed. While most of the bodies were re-interred in France when the Corkscrew cemetery was moved, his was brought “home,” as described on Captain Durie’s memorial tablet “HIS BODY WAS
BURIED IN THE BRITISH / MILITARY CEMETERY CITE AT ST PIERRE-FRANCE / REMOVED TO CANADA AND RE-INTERRED HERE / AUG 22 1925”
(Veterans Affairs Website).

Veronica Cusack writes about Captain Durie in a Toronto Life article of November, 2001 titled “Family Plot: Beyond His Mother's Protective Embrace, Arthur Durie Came Into His Own During World War 1.” In 1915, when Captain Durie crossed the Atlantic with the 58th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Cusack, 2001) his mother followed him. Once in England she oversaw Captain Durie’s career, even demanding explanations from his commanding officer when he remained behind while the 58th shipped out to France: "Major Hicks, whom I did not recognize, had a long chat with me, and I said boldly: 'You have humiliated my son before the whole battalion, and broken his heart'" (A. Durie, cited in Cusack, 2001). Captain Durie saw action at First Ypres, Vimy Ridge, Avion, Passchendaele and Hill 70 (RBC Roll of Honour), before his death on December 29, 1917 at Lens.

Mrs. Durie was born in 1856 and in 1879 married a man forty-four years her senior, Lieutenant-Colonel William Smith Durie. Together they had two children, and Mrs. Durie was soon widowed. While her daughter, Helen, went from Bishop Strachan to an Honours degree at the University of Toronto and to graduate work at Columbia, her son William was less ambitious and more dependent (Cusack, 2001). Despite their poverty after the Lieutenant-Colonel’s death in 1885, Mrs. A. Durie remembered their aristocratic, military history and her ambitions for her son reflected those roots, both in his education at Upper Canada Boys’ College (Toronto Star, 1918) and later in England.

30 While Lieutenant-Colonel is in some places referred to as the first Commanding Officer of Toronto’s Queen’s Own Rifles, there is no reference to him in the briefer versions of the Regiment’s official histories.
Before he enlisted, Durie was a clerk at the Royal Bank in Toronto (RBC Roll of Honour).  

In 1920 Mrs. Durie published a memorial collection of poetry with Ryerson Press, titled *Our Absent Hero: Poems in Loving Memory of Captain William Arthur Peel Durie, 58th Battalion C.E.F.* In the dedicatory note, she gives this short biography of her son:

Captain Durie, to whom this volume is reverently dedicated, was killed in action December 29th, 1917, while his battalion was holding the line at St. Emile, near Lens, France. On the evening of October 26th, 1917, during the attack on Passchendaele, after heavy fighting throughout the day, he went five times through drum-fire to save the wounded, who had lain since the early morning on the field; an incident that will be forever associated with his name. No eulogy of his life would be complete that did not place emphasis on his fearlessness in action, his devotion to duty and his gallantry in the field. (Durie, 1)

Her collection further explores, illuminates and formalizes this account of Captain Durie’s service, using the conventions described in the previous chapter to construct him as a fallen hero and herself as his relict. Mrs Durie’s text establishes her authority of grief in one of its first poems “My Heart It Is A Shrine For Deeds Of His” in which her remaining years are devoted to his memory, like jewels in a casket, or marble sculpture. In both cases, memorialization is an aesthetic act, and her memories are objects of contemplation:

I count my store; set this or that aside,

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31 The Royal Bank’s website includes details about employees who died during the First and Second World Wars, including text from their 1920 Role of Honour.
Like glittering gems, too precious to be worn:
This had its birth in Flanders; here he died,
This proved a herald of the approaching morn. (9-12)
The chapel of the poem is a familiar, internal space—both the grave and the womb that have already appeared: “I inward turn my thoughts into / The deeper recess where his image lives [...] / A living thing, that comforts like a prayer” (13-19). While those other spaces produce soldiers or flowers, this one produces art—the gems and stones of the previous stanza, and the poem itself.

Durie further formalizes her relationship with his memory and her own authorship, in “Requiem” which describes another object of contemplation—a memorial to Captain Durie and her own grief: “If you would make carven stone for me, / Grave me as one low-lying in the dust / Before a soldier form” (1-3). This soldier is lovely, with “face upturned” (12) and stands in a saintly “aureole light, / with laurel crown” (10-11), therefore doubly honoured by Christian and Pagan terms. The standing figure is perfect and transcendent and, according to the epitaph, explicitly rejects the earthly worshipper at his feet: “While much he loved / This woman at his feet, she was but clay / When likened to the Cause for which he died” (12-14). Though she is unfit to “bind the latchet of his shoe” (5), and though he is a royal, sacred sacrifice, she remains his author, glad when he calls her “mother” “to catch / The low, articulate sound that named him hers” (8-9). This possessive is significant. While Durie may have remained his relict all her life, he remained the eternal object of her loving gaze, and by his death he granted her the authority which allowed her to write Our Absent Hero.
In “Vimy Ridge” Durie uses the same convention—the art-object as memorial—to link representation and grief:

The cross I wear? That came from Vimy Ridge
La Folie Farm, which always makes a bridge
Between my mind and the battle. The scarred wood
was picked up by my hero, when he stood
After the fight on Vimy, and for me
Sought out the shattered fragments of a tree

[...] But do you catch

The blaze of the word “Lens” across the arms?

That’s where my soldier fell. (1-10)

Her authority is not civic, but personal. She writes because of her son’s part in the battle, not because Vimy Ridge is a point of Canadian origin. Again, it is the aesthetic object—the cross taken from Vimy and then carved with his death-place—that drives the poem, even while its status as art is secondary to its role as memento mori.

Later in the poem the erotic and the aesthetic combine in a sexualised battlefield, as she describes blood running from gaping wounds, soldiers “pressing on,” breaching the “cleft” line when they take the hill. As he leads the attack, Captain Durie is “tingling with victory and manned / With steadied will” (xx). Durie eroticises the battle, and fetishizes her sacrificed, soldier-son, re-creating him as an art-object within her text, itself another memento mori. It is difficult to read her work and not be disturbed by her obsession with her son’s body, or suspect that her grave robbing was an attempt to do in life what she had done in her poems: regulate his memory in aesthetic terms. Perhaps
because of the ghoulish and melodramatic details of Mrs. Durie's adventures with her son—before and after his death—she has appeared more often as a figure of grief and neurosis than as a poet. In Jonathan Vance's Death So Noble, her poetry is a footnote, and her story otherwise serves to illustrate his arguments regarding the Imperial War Graves. Veronica Cusack's fictionalization The Invisible Soldier and the early Toronto Life article which began her research in the subject also stress the personal, familial dimensions of the story. Both Mrs. Durie's actions and the current interest in her life suggest the oedipal undercurrents in Canadian war poetry was not exclusively literary, but part of a lived understanding of family, nation and desire. Our Absent Hero describes both her powerlessness in war and grief, and the obscure, indirect actions she could take: second-hand, as she writes herself—accurately or not—into the narrative of his service; first-hand through her memorialization of that service in the collection itself.

III

Katherine Hale was the pen-name of Amelia Garvin, born Amelia Warnock in Galt, Ontario in 1874. She was a journalist, critic, musician, biographer, remarkable for the breadth of her career, as well as for writing popular poems like "Grey Knitting" composed in 1914 while she was literary critic for the Mail and Empire (Garvin 1916, 324). During the First World War she published three collections of war poetry, Grey Knitting (1914) with Briggs, and The White Comrade (1916) and The New Joan (1914) with McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart.

32 Wife of John Garvin.
33 I have found her birth year listed as 1874 in The Encyclopaedia of Literature in Canada, and as 1878 in Wanda Campbell's article on her at the Canadian Poetry Project, as well as in UBC Library Catalogue's author-heading.
In Wanda Campbell’s short biographical essay on Hale she describes her “fascination with Canadian history and her efforts to re-inscribe women into that history.” This effort makes her poetry “worth studying despite her apparent acceptance of the dominant discourse and power structures of her time. Hale [speaks] for a variety of marginalized figures, especially female artists” (Campbell). Furthermore, her three books of war-poetry are more than topical; they relate to her conception of “the female poet as a warrior, independent and aspiring” (Campbell).

Despite these aspirations her poems are full of familiar tropes: flowers grow from the bodies of fallen soldiers; mothers weep for their sons; Christ is the “White Comrade” who leads the dead of Flanders toward their subtle, heavenly bodies; war itself is pagan renewal, blood-bought, but worthy of new-made knights. However, Hale’s war-poetry is not best represented by the platitudes and conventions of “Grey Knitting” although that might be the most-reprinted of her war work. In other poems she reveals a far more complex anxiety regarding both the benevolent, “motherly” nation, and the regulation of female bodies as the source of potential cannon fodder—the physical womb of that nation. Mothers, as they appear in her poems, are darkly seductive, more often menacing than benign in their association with graves, desire and a deep, exhausting history of human violence.

It is not that Hale resists the gendered division of labour in wartime or nation-building—her “Grey Knitting” lacks any saving irony and celebrates exactly the repressive, ideologically potent domestic scenes that enrage Sassoon in “The Glory of Women.” Her challenge is in the way she imagines the consequences of those conventions. Taken together the poems “Soul of the Earth,” “The Hearts of Mothers,”
“The World Renewed,” “London” and “The Mother” reveal a narrative that begins in the arrival of the New Joan and ends in a death that is also return, whether to the allegorical “Mother England” in “London” or the grave itself “Soul of the Earth.” At the same time, the death of un-named soldiers finds its parallel in conception, whether through the grave or a woman’s body, thus providing future wars with the soldiers they do not yet require, but will one day destroy.

Instead of the platitudes of grief and remembrance, where women are relicts, permanent witnesses to men’s suffering, Hale’s figures are eternally reproducing bodies. The grave promises no conclusion for Hale, and the dead—whether in Christian rebirth, or the biological alchemy of the grave—always rise to fight again. In “The Vision”—first of the New Joan series—the titular character is eternal, but “called... still / Upon the wheel of reincarnate birth” (7-8).

Hale’s “The Hearts of Mothers” describes violent, productive female bodies while using the familiar conventions of the motherly war-poem, specifically the virgin birth, the passion, and new manifestations of “ancient” combat. It begins as the titular mothers resonate almost biologically with war, their response unspoken and explicitly bodily: the hearts of mothers “hide” (1) things. These “things” occupy the body in military terms: “troops of strange thoughts” (3) that “move therein / Silently to and fro” (3-4). The poem continues:

They are not thoughts of yesteryear,
Or thoughts of you and me
And that which we have done, or do,
By air, or land, or sea.
But these are thoughts steel-bright with pain,
And death-thoughts bare and stark,
And shining thoughts of armaments
That glitter through the dark.

They move, old passions and revolts,
Fresh-called, yet stiff with scars,
To music crimsoned with the clash
Of endless ancient wars. (5-16)

The third and fourth stanzas synthesize the bodily and military metaphors in a language of pain, including scars and spilled blood, all associated with the un-described—or indescribable—"thoughts" of the opening stanza. Though we do not know the nature of these thoughts, and Hale suggests that they are hardly conscious, these thoughts are "steel-bright with pain" (9), they glitter (12) and move restlessly with "old passions and revolts" (13); they are themselves "armaments" (11); they are less ideas than bodily memories of "endless, ancient wars," (16).

The language of military exchange and awakening culminates in the final three stanzas, where "new life" (20) is conceived, though that life is destined for a bloody crucifixion if the "frail, bright flower" can be read as Christ: Mothers "dream of a strange blooming / That dawns in greater birth: The frail, bright flower of selflessness / Brought back again to earth" (21 – 24). Despite the teleological promise of such a return, this militarised reproduction is unending, as Mothers, the "givers of all life" (25) feel "great
need to give again / The utmost dower of womanhood, / All mystery—all pain” (26 – 28). The poem links female contemplation with mechanised violence, finally weaponising conception itself. Creation, whether on the page or in the womb, becomes war-work.

In Hale’s “The World Renewed” from The New Joan (1916) the womb is again a doorway rather than an origin point, with Joan of Arc the patroness of such militarized—but immaculate—conception. In the same way that martyred soldiers pass through the grave and are sanctified, “[e]ternal Law” (11) returns through the womb, in the form of the Great War, which “belt[s] [the] world in sudden fire” (12). As in “Soul of the Earth” and “The Hearts of Mothers,” the return of a Christian and chivalric purity belongs to female reproduction; it is the mother who requires the sacrifice of her son. Responsibility lies in the woman’s body because it produces the nation’s citizens, or because it becomes the temporary avatar of the nationalist muse, but that body can only bear such symbolic responsibility as long as it submits:

The deathless soul of Joan through us sings:

Spirit of Life, radiant and glad and free,

Come, as of old, be born again of me.

Through me recover that which man has lost,

Mine was the making, mine the precious cost.

Out of my body come the sons of men,

Into my keeping give their souls again,

And let me make this world God’s little room.

Wherein Love’s splendours live again and bloom. (20-28)
The "little room" of line twenty-seven is both the womb and the world, both generative and sepulchral. The narrator to whom it belongs recognises the primacy of God inside her body. In turn, her agency comes not from action, but as a self-regulating conduit for divine intention. Paralleling "The Hearts of Mothers" with this submission to the biological imperatives of creation and destruction, "The World Renewed" imagines that bloodshed must produce something. The remaining "New Joan" poems in the series restate this conviction in erotic terms. For example "The Vision," imagines the Great War as an opportunity for erotic and sacrificial encounters:

Woman and man, renewing faith's old tryst,
Breast, shuddering, the deeps of this last war,
And high above them gleams the stranger-star,
Silver in blood-red skies—the grail of Christ. (13-16)

This encounter produces a subject undefined by gender, the "New Joan" of the poems' title: "O you who see a vision in the night, / And you who ride high-hearted, woman-man / I call you by the name of the New Joan" (13-19). "The Law," from the same series, also celebrates this un-gendering of people in wartime—a sexual teleology—with "...until man and woman be, / Woman in man, the two in one, / The latter days have not begun" (14-16). In each of these examples the spectral female presence of "Grey Knitting" has been replaced by a complete blending of genders. If the war's redemptive promise is fulfilled the woman will no longer haunt the battlefield and call men to honour, but will be one half of the fighting soldier.

Hale merges male and female through ventriloquism as well, particularly in "London," also from The New Joan of 1917. The poem begins with the epigraph "A
Canadian soldier, returned to ‘Blighty,’ speaks” and describes the moment of return to a capital at once homely and unheimlich with its “misty, half-lit ways” and “small streets / [that] Wandered zig-zag with no apparent plan” (26-7). This city-womb—origin of empire and un-known mother to the unnamed Canadian soldier—is as unnerving as the militarised womb of “The Hearts of Mothers” or “The World Renewed.” Its unfamiliarity is matched with a sense of return: “Yet knew we were at home” (28) the soldier says in conspicuous italics after he has found his way through the misty streets. The city appears as “the Old Grey Mother” herself, eternal England in the figure of a woman in a flowered hat who stops the soldiers on their way. It is unsettling to consider that these flowers are the celebrated blooms off no man’s land, crowning the grave/womb of a nation. England is dreadful and motherly:

> With awful eyes
> She stared, and asked, and answered in a flash:
> ‘Ah, well! You’re nearly dead, poor dears, but I—
> I, who am here forever, come again’ (32-35).

Just as Hale’s earlier mothers contemplate “endless, ancient wars” (16), this personified nation is defined by inescapable pain—whether childbirth, death or grief—and the corresponding demand that she endure it. The soldier—historical and dreadfully mortal—can only listen. However, the encounter produces something in the soldier, a reversed insemination as he apprehends the eternal unities of Empire:

> a strange new vision of the heart,
> A love just dawning, an age-old surprise,
> A sudden turning to those splendid arms
That are forever open. Thus we came

Broken by war, home to her splendid arms. (44-48)

The resolution and peace prompted by this return parallels the sexual teleologies of the “New Joan” series, though it also marks a return to the more conventional language of Canadian identity: British by blood, even if Britain is distant and inaccessible.

But Hale’s double prosopopeia produces something more than a reinscription of utopian imperialism. Just as the flowers that bloom in no-mans-land are missives from the unspeaking dead, Hale’s soldier can respond to the unanswered or unanswerable questions of women removed from action. The “love just dawning” in the soldier’s heart echoes the female haunting in “Grey Knitting,” and the imagined voice of the soldier speaks less about the horrors of war than about Hale’s anxiety regarding what women do in wartime. If prosopoeia produces identity by the masks it imposes on those who cannot speak, then Hale is producing the character of women in wartime through a double masking, imagining the soldier imagine the woman.
EPILOGUE: DYING GAILY DYING

The lyrics of “The Maple Leaf Forever” imagine a Victorian *translatio imperii*. Canada’s early, unofficial national anthem, written by Alexander Muir in 1867, locates Canadian origins in British potency, as British men father the Canadian dominion at the battles of Quebec, Queenston Heights and Lundy’s Lane. In the case of Quebec the generative moment is an encounter—metaphorically, the Battle on the Plains of Abraham—between a feminised Canada of the “fair domain,” and General Wolfe of the firmly-planted British flag:

In the days of yore from Britain’s shore
Wolfe, the dauntless hero came
And planted firm Britannia’s flag
On Canada’s fair domain (1-4)

In this creation story, Canada arises as the hybrid child of a particular British man and the virgin earth of the new motherland. The freshly conceived nation is Canadian, not by nature of a struggle for independence from its imperial family, but because of British battles with French and American forces, and the continual fight for continued British control of the new, female, Canadian territories. The thistle, shamrock and rose entwined in the maple leaf are not original, but a new recombination of original materials,
positioned in line with other such British children. The ultimate expression of such patriotic fervour is in the second stanza of the anthem, where British soldiers “bravely fight and nobly die” for their as yet dependent, colonial homeland. The penultimate expression of such patriotism is to write a poem that celebrates that bloodshed and fervour.

Fifty years after its invention this anthem illuminates the preoccupations and anxieties betrayed by Canadian First World War poetry and, because it is a war poem in its subject matter, it is a reminder that battles are often retroactive points of origin for the modern nation-state. Significantly, “The Maple Leaf Forever” authorizes and aestheticises violence, aligns the military encounter with the generation of identity, and writes Canada’s bloodline in heroic, British terms. More importantly it genders the components of nation: historical and political action is masculine; the landscape of such action is feminine. The anthem reminds its audience that nations are created in familial terms and persist through domestic narratives written large to unite its citizens in a geographically defined family. The political advantage of such self-conceptions are apparent in August, 1914, when national, racial and gendered identities codified in just such patriotic doggerel delivered thousands of men to the recruitment offices. The literal arms race between Germany and England has a literary dimension in popular culture:

At Queenston Heights and Lundy's Lane

Our brave fathers side by side

For freedom's home and loved ones dear,

Firmly stood and nobly died.

And so their rights which they maintained,
We swear to yield them never.

Our watchword ever more shall be:

The Maple Leaf Forever (16 - 23)

The soldier who fought at Queenston Heights or Lundy’s Lane is necessarily a man. Benedict Anderson’s or Eric Hobsbawm’s arguments regarding the rise of contemporary nationalism describe a carefully gendered conception of what it means to be “British” or “American” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wartime celebration of masculine powers necessarily marginalised women because it linked belonging with homo-social violence and camaraderie. Citizenship was expressed as a gendered relationship between masculine citizen and feminine nation. But, like Canada itself, which can be both independent and of the Empire, the Canadian citizen-soldier of 1914 was in an ambiguous position as both agent and instrument of his nation. Ironically, representations of that soldier’s body—whether as son, martyr, or knight of the new chivalry—hold more in common with the “fair domain” of the feminised Canadian landscape than with Brave Wolf. “Her” landscape passively accepts the masculine definitions—borders, flags and monuments of battle—written across it. The Canadian soldier of the Great war is similarly over-written as he becomes the vessel of his nation’s ambitions.

In the years after the First World War Canadian veterans challenged the narratives of sacrifice and patriotism that sent them to war in the first place. At the same time the CWRO’s propaganda produced 14-18 as Canada’s “War of Independence,” identifying the nation’s growing sovereignty with ordeals endured in the trenches; this story of bloodshed and authority was better served by first-hand accounts from combatants then
by patriotic home-front verse. A discourse of individual trauma and post-war independence replaced those celebrations of chivalry and imperial unity, eclipsing the older narrative as it did. However, works by Hale and Durie betray those earlier conditions and with them the circumstances that produced the Great War in the first place.

As women and as colonials they faced a double separation from action and expression. Their poetry struggles on both fronts, both repeating and reworking the gendered tropes of motherhood, imperial families and national mourning. In effect, they render soldier and woman in parallel terms by nature of their bodily subordination to their homeland. They also render the two in complementary terms as the first suffers and the second grieves, writing the narrative of the *Mater Dolorosa* into the nation’s origin story. Such flexibility allows women the right of authorship, because, by right of grief, they can fill soldier’s mouths with their own speech. In such poetry the soldier can be a woman-man, an aestheticised warrior, a passive objet d’art granted to France by his author-mother. In each case, voicing that un-voiced soldier allowed women like Hale and Durie to imagine themselves into their national community, to assuage their survivor’s guilt by putting forgiveness into the mouths of the dead and to make—at least in the poetic space—their own contributions to the work of war.
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