



fig.1 Frances Loring, *Girls with a Rail*, 1919, bronze,
71 cm (H), Ottawa, Canadian War Museum.
(Photo: Canadian War Museum, 8503)

HEROES OF A DIFFERENT SORT

Gender and Patriotism in the War Workers of Frances Loring and Florence Wyle

Between 1919 and 1924 the Toronto, Montréal and Ottawa public had the opportunity to view the "home work section" of the Canadian War Memorials Fund (C.W.M.F.) art collection. Established in 1916, the Fund was initiated by Sir Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook), acting in his capacity as Officer in Charge of War Records. Under the guidance of British art critic Paul Konody and National Gallery of Canada director Eric Brown, Aitken commissioned artworks by leading British and Canadian artists for the purpose of providing "suitable Memorials in the form of Tablets, Oil Paintings, etc. to the Canadian Heroes and Heroines of the War."¹ The "home work section" of the collection was a memorial to civilians' home front contributions to the war effort. Among the works exhibited was a series of bronze statuettes by Frances Loring (1887-1968) and Florence Wyle (1881-1968), representing industrial and agricultural war workers. The works are unique among early twentieth-century Canadian sculptures, both for their subject matter and the vision of women they present; eleven of the fifteen bronzes are of women. Like other representations of women produced at this time, Loring's and Wyle's figures form part of the signifying systems through which the designations 'Woman' and 'femininity' were constructed during the war years.

With the advent of the War, the need to unite the Canadian population under the banner of patriotism paved the way for important shifts in the social and economic positions in which the term 'Woman' was installed. As the majority of the nation's energies came to be focused on the war effort, patriotism assumed pride of place among the definitional strategies employed in the construction of English-Canadian selfhood; difference and otherness came to be defined in terms of a common national enemy. Impelled by the necessity to provide a solid patriotic front in the face of adversity, it became possible to draw 'Woman' (so long a key position of Victorian otherness) into the folds of a nationalistic subject unified by global crisis.

Working women were particularly affected by this change. Instead of being regarded as outsiders seeking to encroach on masculine domains of social and economic privilege, women workers were suddenly valued as patriotic subjects whose labour freed men for the fight overseas. Canadian artists were both influenced by and helped to influence this new perception of the role and identity of female labourers in Canada during the war years. As I will demonstrate through an examination of the women war workers portrayed by Frances Loring and Florence

Wyle, that new identity occupied shifting positions, simultaneously inside and outside the perimeters of femininity inscribed by the conventional sex-gender system.

Women, Munitions and Visual Culture

Women were employed in a wide variety of occupations during the War, but it was the munitions worker who most consistently captured the public attention, and who came to emblemize women's home front contributions. In Canada, women first entered munitions factories in October of 1916, their labour necessitated by a critical shortage of manpower. By the end of the War over 35,000 women had been employed in ordnance factories, primarily in Ontario and Québec.

The sudden entry of women into munitions work, combined with the high visibility of these workers (both on the streets and in visual culture), created two erroneous perceptions of women's wartime employment that have persisted to this day. First, it is often thought that World War I initiated a drastic and unprecedented surge of Canadian women into the work force. Historian Ceta Ramkhalawansingh has shown, however, that any increase in the number of women working during the War was "merely an acceleration of a trend that began at the turn of the century.... World War I did not mark a significant departure from this slow rise in female employment."² Second, there is a pervasive but inaccurate impression of a massive influx of women into the industrial labour force during the war years. In actuality, most munitions workers had already been employed in factory labour before the War, but switched to military production because of higher wages.³

The erroneous perception that women inundated the industrial job market during the War has been linked by historian Joy Parr to the sudden abundance of visual images of female munitions workers produced between 1914 and 1919.⁴ Beginning in 1916, the Imperial Munitions Board (I.M.B.) launched a propaganda campaign to promote women's industrial employment. Photographs and film footage of women successfully operating industrial machinery were used to encourage women to join the workforce and to convince reticent employers of the benefits of female labour. The campaign included a widely-seen film and a fully-illustrated booklet entitled *Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada* (1916).⁵

Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's representations of female munitions workers should be considered in the context of this I.M.B. imagery. Together with photographs, newsreels and brochures, C.W.M.F. artworks contributed to a national wartime iconography, emphasizing a new role for Canadian women. In addition to the bronzes of Loring and Wyle, women's labour in ordnance factories was portrayed by George Reid, Henrietta Mabel May, Dorothy Stevens, Charles Ginner and C.W. Jefferys. This marked interest in women's industrial labour con-

trasts sharply with pre-war art production in Canada, and reiterates the precipitous regard for women workers apparent in wartime photography. Among Canadian artworks predating the War, there is not a single prominent image that clearly portrays women engaged in industrial labour. Despite the fact that since the 1880's much of industrial society's most mechanized work had been done by women, women's realm was still constructed as the natural and/or domestic one. Only with the advent of C.W.M.F. patronage was the industrial labour of women finally recorded on canvas and in bronze. This body of Canadian art reaffirms the misconception that the First World War presented women with a whole range of economic opportunities unavailable to them before the conflict began.

A government initiative, C.W.M.F. imagery may also be linked more directly to the Imperial Munitions Board campaign to encourage the introduction of women into all levels of industrial production. The chronicling of women's munition work by respected artists could hardly fail to advance the I.M.B.'s efforts to legitimize industrial employment for women. Although the pictures were not commissioned with the express purpose of recruiting women into the factories, the Memorial Fund administrators were conscious that the works would "partake in the nature of publicity."⁶ Ultimately, Loring's and Wyle's statues did not fulfill this function since they were not ready for exhibition until after the War. At the time of their commission and conception, however, a major continuing concern of the Canadian government was to stimulate public support for all aspects of the war effort.

While there is no evidence to suggest that C.W.M.F. artworks were ever intended to be propaganda tools in the way that I.M.B. photographs were, there is an important coincidence of spirit in the representations of women's industrial labour produced for each body. In its booklet *Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada*, the I.M.B. praised the spirit and competence with which women performed industrial labour. Terms such as confidence, independence and strength were used to describe the workers. "Experience has proved," boasted one caption, "that there is no operation on shell work that a woman cannot do, and, as a matter of fact, is not doing, even to the heavy operations which require great physical strain."⁷ To judge from such comments, it would seem that the War had effected a significant change in perceptions of women predicated on feminine domesticity, dependence, weakness, and passivity. Turning to the Canadian War Memorial sculptures of Loring and Wyle, this conclusion is, at first glance, confirmed.

Disrupting Gender Codes

Three-quarters of a century after their creation, Loring's and Wyle's sculptures are startling for the unprecedented challenge they offer to gender definitions in the post-Edwardian era. When viewed from a contemporary perspective, informed by the reading strategies of feminist scholarship, their works appear to constitute a

radical departure from the visual codes normally employed in the depiction of women by Canadian artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. The physical appearance of the women produces the first unanticipated interruption of gender codes. From a distance, the workers represented in Frances Loring's *Girls with a Rail* (fig. 1) do not seem to be women at all. The appearance of two female figures in caps and overalls, straining with obvious effort to hoist a segment of rail is so unexpected within the context of early twentieth-century art production in Canada, that it is not until one approaches and notices the breasts of the figures that their sex is ascertained. There is a ruggedness of style in the character of the modeling which disrupts the visual language of smooth refinement or pastoral tranquillity that predominates in other representations of working women. Gone are the soft, delicate facial features common to Wyatt Eaton or George Reid's paintings; Loring replaces them with bold, angular faces, set with determination. Her figures move in space, claiming it as their own, not simply occupying it. They stand resolutely, legs set firmly apart, knees and backs bent in a position of activity and exercised strength. Vanished is the frequently coy sexualized posturing of Paul Peel's working class girls, whose skirts he lifted to display their legs. Loring bares a forearm to show the almost exaggerated muscularity and power of a very different code.⁸ By so emphatically rendering the women as actors, rather than passive objects of external actions, Loring simultaneously secures their position as agents and problematizes their definition within a male-defined sexuality. For if, as Teresa de Lauretis argues, "it is objectification that constitutes women as sexual, instating sexuality at the core of the material reality of women's lives,"⁹ Loring's active challenge to objectification brings the nature of the figures' sexuality into question. By giving these women status as agents, Loring has opposed the ordering of a phallocratic symbolization of sexuality, whereby the objectified woman "is so much the sign of sexed-ness that she loses her own libidinal corporeality in the process of becoming the incarceration of sex."¹⁰ In contrast, these women project an immense sense of physicality, but there is no hint that it is channeled into the project of making themselves into erotic objects for men. Arms, necks, and upper chests are revealed, but in the context of figures so far removed from the passively objectified feminine norm, they do not incite scopophilic arousal on the part of the viewer as much as they seem to endow the female figures with their *own* sense of embodiment.

This sense of embodiment, so strong in Loring's *Girls with a Rail*, is intimately linked to the potential of the sculpture to challenge gender inscription, for such a corporeal concept immediately places the discussion on a tricky footing. It may be that the image of the female body is already so saturated with meaning that it has become impossible for women to invoke their own bodies without signifying the fixed and essentialized gendered categories of identity that they are attempting to question.¹¹ Certainly, it is no longer tenable to ignore the fact that

visual representations of women's bodies have predominantly propagated a notion of 'Woman' as the idealized projection of male expectations.¹² And if, as Monique Wittig says, "the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you,"¹³ is it possible for an artist to deploy the language of the female body in order to circumvent a masculinized semiotic appropriation of that body?

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

As I studied the women of *Girls with A Rail*, I was struck by the unyielding sense of bodily integrity that the figures asserted. They are characterized by a sort of unbroken wholeness or self-sufficiency. This integrity, which seems to stem from the women's self-absorption coupled with their vibrant activity, creates a sense of embodiment, a physicality which exists in and for the figures themselves. Loring's women occupy their bodies in such a complete and self-contained way, that the feasibility of successfully imposing masculine terms of identification onto those bodies is placed under scrutiny. Through the integrity of their embodiment, the figures offer an alternative to those modes of representation which unquestioningly foster the co-optation and the fetishization of the female body in patriarchal culture.¹⁴

Admittedly, this reliance on the notion of integrity to counteract the prior signification of the female body by a masculine agenda, labours wearily under modernist notions of a unified subject position. Current theorizing on the function of the body in gender inscription has dislodged the idea of one's physicality as a discreet, self-dependent position, proposing instead a view of the body as a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed.¹⁵ The acknowledgment of the body as a field of *intersection* of cultural forces (rather than simply the ground for the material oppression of women) opens the door to the possibility of contestation in the culturally inscribed meanings of the female body. In this light, Judith Butler's conceptualization of gender as an effect produced through the altogether cultural stylization of the body, viewed not as biological entity but as physical surface, is especially germane. According to this view, the illusion of an abiding gendered self results primarily from the bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds that a subject may choose to adopt.¹⁶ Thus, not only should challenges to gender not be cut off from corporeality on the grounds that the female body is always already a co-opted territory, but in fact, the body is precisely the grounds on which the struggle for gender re-definition - or de-definition - must take place. The bodies of Loring's women are particularly well placed to undertake this struggle, since their very nature as artworks (i.e.,

culturally constructed objects) facilitates a recognition that gender definitions are primarily constructed upon bodies as physical surfaces, exterior spaces. Butler argues that it is through a "stylized repetition of acts"¹⁷ occurring on the level of exterior physical performance that gender is produced and can be challenged. Loring's *Girls with a Rail*, with their 'masculine' dress, determined expressions, muscular presence, active labour and firm stances, offer on a very physical level a stylization of women that runs counter to masculinist definitions of the feminine. Through their physical, bodily appearances, the women in *Girls with a Rail* challenge conventional delineations of femininity. In so doing they reveal that the dominant account of the female body is unable to fully contain the femininity it seeks to inscribe.

This new stylization of women should not, however, be regarded as a simple substitution of a valorized 'female' body for a denigrated one. The effect of Loring's and Wyle's representations of female war workers on gender inscription goes beyond any simple project of dialectical reversal. Their sculptures may be understood as truly radical in that they challenge the actual logic of dualist opposition upon which the traditional gender system is based. A comparison between two of Florence Wyle's works, *Noon Hour* (fig.2) and *The Harvester* (fig.3), will serve to better illustrate this point. Wyle's challenge to gender does not come at the point of the physical differences between the two sexes. On this level she acknowledges difference and celebrates it in her careful attention to the folds of the garments over the woman's breasts, stomach and thighs, and the delineation of the musculature of the man's chest. Instead, the challenge is posed in Wyle's refusal to use these differences to establish an exclusionary and oppositional difference in social meaning between the figures. In each figure the confident pose - hands on hips, chests pressed forward, heads thrust back, arms raised in a gesture of self-replenishment - suggests a nobility, a dignity, and even a heroism involved in the act of physical labour. Although they are depicted in a moment of rest, it is clearly the identity of each figure as a worker that is being ennobled. Through the similar physical posturing of the female and male subjects, Wyle makes it clear that her representation of gender will not repeat the heterosexual model of gender differences based on opposition, in which the One is identified as dominant through the subjugation of the Other - in which the One's subjectivity, presence, independence and strength are assured by an Other that is objectified, lacking, dependent and weak. The heroism in Wyle's female figures is not the glorification of the female body *qua* female. Rather it is the valorization of the woman as active subject of physical action, and as a bearer of a social significance dependent not on a sexual opposition to a physical other, but on active participation in social activity outside the terms of oppositional otherness posed by the traditional gender system.

In their refusal to recognize those terms, Loring and Wyle may be seen to



fig.2 Florence Wyle, *Noon Hour*, 1919, bronze, 65 cm (H),
Ottawa, Canadian War Museum. (Photo: Canadian War
Museum, 8523)

have gone beyond challenges to femininity alone, and to have entered into the project of destabilizing the institution of heterosexuality, understood here as the dominant social construct that (re)produces a specific power differential between men and women through gender.¹⁸ In this sense, the heterosexual contract is not primarily a question of personal sexual practices, but a model for social relations based on "the agreement between modern theoretical systems and epistemologies not to question the *a priori* of gender and hence to presume the socio-sexual opposition of 'man' and 'woman' as the necessary and founding moment of culture."¹⁹ Social discourses on sexuality take place in a very public sphere, and in its social aspect heterosexuality has been constructed around precisely those oppositional elements of gender relations that Loring and Wyle refuse, namely the self-legitimation of the One through the exclusionary opposition of the Other. At the level of their own private experience, Loring and Wyle did live outside the heterosexual contract of gender: they lived together for fifty-five years; they did not marry; they had no children; they considered their work to be the most important element of their lives. At the level of public practice, I suggest that Loring's and Wyle's artworks also transgressed the boundaries of heterosexuality. In their refusal to inscribe men and women within oppositional differences these sculptures do contest the *a priori* status of gender, and thus may truly challenge gendered norms.

Popular Patriots

Given Loring's and Wyle's apparent challenges to the standards of femininity reflected in and constructed by Canada's legacy of visual imagery, one might expect to find that the sculptures were met with some reticence, if not outright disapprobation. This was not the case. Instead, the figures encountered popular and critical approval. To account for this reaction it is necessary to shift the focus of analysis. In the preceding section I constructed a reading of Loring's and Wyle's sculptures based largely on a contemporary interpretation of the visual content of the works. Meaning, however, is never solely resident in the content of a work of art. In the case of representations of female munitions workers, consideration of the images within the context of broader social views about women war workers compels a revision of any reading based exclusively on visual evidence. The War furnished an acceptable vehicle with which to bring notice of women's employment into the public arena. Prior to 1916, the majority of the population dealt with the issue of increasing female employment (and the corresponding challenges to fixed gender categories) by ignoring it.²⁰ Suddenly, women as wage earners were brought to visibility in a new and widespread way. The mechanisms of this process are integral to the construction of women's identities and their relation to hegemonic structures.

In her examination of nineteenth-century British representations of work-

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

In crossing the threshold of visibility, in becoming observed and classifiable, individuals were subjected to, and became subjects of, disciplinary power.... High-cultural images of working-class women formed an integral part of the systematic acquisition of knowledge on individuals and social groups by investigative journalism, social work, state commissions and colonial administration. Women artists were among the new constituency of professional experts who collected information on working-class women, who brought them to visibility and categorization.... Discursive categories transformed the population into easily recognizable individuals classified according to their work and productivity: the seamstress, the prostitute, the servant, the factory girl, the flower seller.²¹

The process of individuation described by Cherry in the development of discursive categories of working women is equally relevant to the Canadian experience. Faced with the sudden visibility of working women during the War, Canadian society struggled to find a way to understand and control the challenges that these women might represent. Through the act of categorization, images of working women became intelligible, the boundaries of their categories functioning to define and contain their identities. Public reaction to Loring's and Wyle's representations of women war workers reveals that these images functioned in precisely this fashion. Newspaper reviews repeatedly framed the sculptures in terms of their representation of certain categories of women. Each solitary figure was clearly seen to represent a specific *kind* of woman. Again and again, reviewers used the words "type" and "class" to identify Loring's and Wyle's women as members of a discursive category who were individuated but never individualized.²² In this case, the category was that of the patriotic war worker.

Patriotism provided a conceptual framework to assist the public in its comprehension of the growing entry of women into the paid labour force. During the War, disciplines as varied as the visual arts, public policy, economics, journalism and philanthropy placed great stress on the patriotic and self-sacrificial spirit of female munitions workers. I suggest that the categorization of working women as patriots was powerful enough to absorb and neutralize the challenges to tradi-

tional conceptions of femininity posed by the works of Loring and Wyle, for these challenges were understood strictly within the confines of the war effort and the discourse of patriotic sacrifice. Demands to Parliament by The National Council of Women for equal pay for equal work, technical training, and a minimum wage for women were peppered with phrases such as "give us a chance to serve," and "let us reinforce our men at the front."²³ Popular literature referred again and again to the "heroism" and "patriotic fervour" that motivated women to work and acted as an *apologia* for their new economic powers.

Maureen Honey, in her study of popular-press representations of working women in America during World War II, outlines how progressive images of working women functioned as propaganda tools. Her analysis presents a new avenue of interpretation for the public reception of Loring's and Wyle's sculptures:

One of these [magazine propaganda strategies] fostered a progressive view of women as strong workers, well equipped to play an equal part in public life. The woman doing a man's work filled this role as she symbolized American adaptability and hardiness. She became the standard-bearer for all civilians who were taking on new tasks, challenging themselves to expand their limits and shedding old habits in order to move forward.²⁴

As Honey is quick to point out, however, the other side of this coin was that "as defenders of liberty, women were cast into a selfless role that conflicted with the concept of female self-actualization through new work opportunities."²⁵ The same dynamic was at play in Canada during World War I. For example, while in all likelihood patriotic considerations were not the primary motivating factors for the majority of women entering war production,²⁶ government, business, and the media repeatedly invoked "the magnificent spirit that prompts women to make the sacrifice involved [in paid labour]."²⁷ This sentiment is echoed in David Carnegie's 1925 history of munitions production in Canada. Writing of the women who were employed in this capacity Carnegie declares:

The motive of self-interest or self-preservation was not the mainspring of their conduct during these dark years. There was behind these very human interests a something which few could clothe in language and analyze, but which found in expression in the common word patriotism.²⁸

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

We have been too comfortable and too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish, and the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the everlasting things that matter for a nation, the great peaks we had forgotten of honour, duty, patriotism, and clad in glittering white, the towering pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven.²⁹

Wartime literature on female munitions workers is strewn with statements like these, indicating a widespread credence in the patriotic explanation for women's new economic and social roles. The result of this belief was that "war work became a vehicle for women to shoulder their civic and moral responsibilities as good citizens rather than a way to become more independent and powerful."³⁰

C.W.M.F. images of women war workers did not remain untouched by this construction of these workers as paragons of patriotism. As a whole, the art commissioned by the C.W.M.F. was envisioned as "a memorial of sacrifice and heroism, expressive of a concentration of effort and production and denial."³¹ Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, wartime representations of working women were more often considered in terms of the nationalistic self-sacrifice Canadian women were willing to endure in support of their fighting men than in terms of women's heroism. An article in the Canadian War Records Office magazine *Canada in Khaki* reflected this perspective quite clearly when it described the C.W.M.F. collection:

The whole vast significance of this war upon the life of the nation will be reflected in these paintings, which will deal with the military training of men accustomed to the peaceful avocations of the city office or the land [and] the self-sacrificing devotion of their womenfolk....³²

British art critic A.B. Cooper was also particularly impressed by the "splendid patience, the pathetic devotion, the utter self-abnegation of the women" depicted in the work of Western war artists.³³

The concepts of devotion and self-abnegation introduced by Cooper are crucial to the assessment of the role that images of working women played in the inscription of gender during and after the War. In a particularly effective ideological manoeuvre, the notion of self-abnegation manages to reaffirm traditional configurations of the feminine, even while being invoked as justification for the workers' lack of the conventionally feminine attributes of passivity and fragility, as well as economic and social dependence. As with the other representations of female war workers, the social meanings constructed around the Loring and Wyle sculptures were filtered through the mechanism of patriotic self-sacrifice, according to which the trappings of conventional femininity could be temporarily suspended, while the essence of allegiance and commitment to men was reaffirmed.

Given their explicit purpose as testaments to a nation at war, the emphasis on patriotism and sacrifice which surrounded representations of female ordnance workers is to be expected. Nevertheless, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that these ground-breaking portrayals of women employed in heavy industry do not seem to have sparked *any* discussion about femininity or women's experience of work outside of the patriotic context. In the press the sculptures were well received, but the women they portrayed were clearly situated in the loyal and supportive role of the "women behind the men behind the gun."³⁴ Reviewers were pleased to see representations of the "Patriotic Canadian girl who stayed at home

and worked.”³⁵ Thus, instead of being perceived as challenges to the boundaries of femininity, representations of industrial women war workers were interpreted as visual symbols of the lengths to which society had been driven by the War. Potentially radical images were absorbed into the patriotic ideology of a people who had become accustomed to the idea of temporary divergences from the perceived natural order - aberrations which were necessitated by the War. But these were viewed exclusively within the context of that crisis and which seemed unrelated to the general social order. Female defence workers were repeatedly reminded that they were “not themselves - that is, not ‘natural’ - but behaving temporarily *like men*. Industrial employment would not permanently endanger their femininity - and neither could such employment be expected to last.”³⁶

Indeed, women’s advances into non-traditional areas of industrial employment in Canada did not outlast the War. The strong post-war desire to return to the ‘normality’ of peacetime, which took its toll most tellingly in increased female unemployment, may also be seen in public reaction to Loring’s and Wyle’s sculptures. By 1919, when the “home work section” of the C.W.M.F. collection was first exhibited at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the backlash against women’s employment was already a social force. A letter to the *Evening Telegram*, published during the Toronto exhibition of the War Memorials, reveals this hostility quite clearly:

Sir - It is a well known fact that in this city of Toronto alone there are over 3,000 registered returned men unemployed, and probably double that number not registered. Can you wonder at this when so many working women are doing jobs some of our crippled boys could do, and I might add that there are a number of married women, with their husbands in good, steady jobs at good salaries, who are working and doing some other person out of a job just for their own selfish ends.... A woman taking a man’s job during the war was all right, but now that the war is over, and the men are back, make these women give up their jobs and tend to their home affairs, and give men a chance to get to work again.... - [signed] Fair Play³⁷

At first, such reactionary sentiments do not seem to have influenced the journalists who reviewed the War Memorials exhibitions. When, in 1919 and 1920, Loring’s and Wyle’s munitions sculptures were displayed at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the Canadian National Exhibition and the Art Association of Montreal, the works were invariably given high praise and lengthy mentions by newspaper critics. The *Globe* declared Loring and Wyle to be “brilliant” artists who had “excelled their own past achievements.”³⁸ Their statues were lauded as “wonderful,” “epic,” “excellent,” “finely executed,” and “a joy to behold.”³⁹ In Toronto they were said to “compel warmest admiration,” in Montréal they attracted a “great deal of attention,” and it was generally agreed that “no one could have done it better than Miss Wyle and Miss Loring.”⁴⁰ Similarly, George Reid’s and



fig. 3 Florence Wyle, **The Harvester**, c. 1938, painted plaster, 115 cm (H), Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario. (Photo: Art Gallery of Ontario)

Henrietta Mabel May's canvases of female munitions workers were consistently mentioned as worthy tributes to the role of Canadian women during the War. Four years later, however, when the "home work section" was displayed twice at the National Gallery, in 1923 and 1924, the response to the works was very different. By this time, when the last vestiges of remembered glory had worn off the concept of women's industrial employment, Ottawa papers virtually ignored Loring's and Wyle's sculptures. When they were mentioned at all it was as an afterthought, as part of a list of artists.⁴¹ Mabel May's *Women Making Shells* (Canadian War Museum collection) received no attention in the local press. In short, by 1923/24 representations of women workers appear to have suffered the same drop in popularity met by the women themselves some years earlier. It is impossible to prove a direct correlation between the two circumstances, but the change does appear more than coincidental. As the years passed, wartime values and the memory of a grateful nation's debt to its patriotic women workers slipped ever further into the background. They were replaced by more recent memories of the 1921 depression and renewed concerns about competition posed by women in the workforce. Like the 'patriotic' women who were forced out of their jobs after the War, representations of female munitions workers were removed from the spotlight once their patriotic justification was overshadowed by the social realities of gender relations in the 1920's economy.

Bombshell Beauties

Patriotism was not the only ideology summoned to defuse Loring's and Wyle's sculptures. Equally reaffirming to standard readings of femininity was the rhetoric of beauty invoked to justify and praise representations of female war workers. Eric Brown eulogized the young women who laboured in munition factories and provided the artist with "a beauty of subject worthy of fifth-century Greece."⁴² Barker Fairley commended Loring and Wyle for their success in turning the dress and attitude of war workers from the butt of snide jokes to "a source of a beauty that is finely nervous and supple."⁴³ This emphasis on women workers as a source of physical and aesthetic beauty was conspicuously absent from discussion of representations of their male counterparts. It reveals a mainstream effort to bolster a concept of femininity that appeared ready to burst its seams from the economic pressures exerted by self-sufficient women war workers.

Naomi Wolf has described the institution of the cult of essential feminine beauty as "a bulwark of reassurance against the flood of change" brought about by women's struggles for increasing independence throughout the twentieth century. In her discussion of the "beauty myth" Wolf focuses primarily on late twentieth-century events and attitudes, but her arguments are equally applicable to women's experiences earlier in the century. Wolf writes that in the face of challenges to the institutions on which a male-dominated culture has depended, it is

necessary to maintain stability either "by directing attention away from the fear-some fact, or by repackaging its meaning in an acceptable format."⁴⁴ For decades Canadian society had attempted to deal with the consequences of increasing women's employment in the former manner. When the exigencies of war production and propaganda made this impracticable, emphasis shifted to the latter strategy. There is no doubt that women's wartime labour induced anxiety. It troubled male workers and trade-unionists who feared new job competition and lower wages; it worried government officials who struggled to fend off demands for day-care, new training programmes and minimum wage legislation; and it distressed returning soldiers who came home to find some unexpected changes in the women they had left behind. Critical preoccupation with the beauty of the women war workers portrayed by Loring and Wyle is indicative of a reactionary response to the fears generated by women's open entrance into the arena of industrial economic activity. Even in images which today appear to present a revolutionary challenge to definitional norms of femininity, the concept of "nervous and supple" feminine beauty could be called upon to reassure the public that although they were workers, they were still women. Their beauty, coupled with their patriotic self-sacrifice, provided the proof.

A View from Elsewhere

This paper proposes a reading of the interaction between cultural narratives of gender and Frances Loring's and Florence Wyle's sculptures of female workers during the First World War. From a late twentieth-century standpoint, the sculptures seem to indicate a new and revolutionary attitude to early twentieth-century women. The figures' dress, postures, and expressions, their apparent strength and sense of physical embodiment, even the movement and modeling of the physical medium in which the women are cast - all of these qualities would appear to indicate the significant implication of these works in a new social and cultural inscription of gender. Viewed in their historical context, however, the disruptive potential of the sculptures seems to have been dissipated, even co-opted, by the discourse of patriotism in which the works were immersed from their conception to their reception by the Canadian public.

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

Teresa de Lauretis writes that we need a "view from elsewhere," a new per-

spective from which to pose a different construction of gender in terms that will take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation, in this case the self-representation of women by women. I suggest that the images of women war workers created by Loring and Wyle provide a glimpse of what that view can look like. De Lauretis continues, locating the ground for this "elsewhere" in the "social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus."⁴⁵ Loring's and Wyle's bronzes occupy precisely such an interstitial space. At the intersection of patriarchy and patriotism emerged a vision which was outside the strict boundaries of either. The hegemonic discourse of gender during the 1920's provided the visual formula of the female body as a suitable object for aesthetic contemplation. The ideology of patriotism, with its predisposition to heroism, opened up a bit of room in the image of the ideal woman. Loring's and Wyle's sculptures move back and forth across the boundaries of representations of patriotism and of gender in its male-centred frame of reference, and into that "elsewhere." By their conflating of categories, these representations of working women problematize what it means to see a woman or to see a patriot. The knowledge (and the corresponding power) which sprang from the ability to identify and define femininity and heroism is equally disrupted. This is the space of the self-representation of women. It is the space in which two women who lived and worked together, independent of many of the claims of the conventional gender system, were able to create representations of women that echoed the challenges they themselves lived. Loring's and Wyle's figures of active, noble working women stand as road markers in the self-representation of women, and in women's own efforts to engage the definitional boundaries of gender in serious debate.

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Notes

- 1 Application for Registration in the matter of the War Charities Act, 1916, 7 Nov. 1916, Records Office, London Guildhall; quoted in Maria TIPPETT, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 26.
- 2 Ceta RAMKHALAWANSINGH, "Women During the Great War," *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, ed. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 261.
- 3 Joan SANGSTER, "Canadian Working Women," *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History*, ed. W.J.C. Cherwinski and G.S. Kealey (St. John's and Toronto: Committee on Canadian Labour History and New Hogtown Press, 1985), 67.
- 4 Joy PARR, "Women Workers in the Twentieth Century," in *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working Class History*, 80.
- 5 SANGSTER, "Canadian Working Women," 28.
- 6 Sir Albert Edward Kemp Papers, National Archives of Canada, vol. 170, Lord Beaverbrook, "Canadian War Records Official Report," 27 Mar. 1918, 6; quoted in TIPPETT, *Art at the Service of War*, 76.
- 7 IMPERIAL MUNITIONS BOARD, *Women in the Production of Munitions in Canada* (I.M.B.: Ottawa, 1916), 32.
- 8 The depiction of muscular women is not entirely without precedent in the history of Western art. For example, Loring and Wyle were known to admire Michelangelo, and although his women were muscular in a different way, it is possible that the Toronto sculptors were influenced by his representations of powerful female bodies.
- 9 Teresa DE LAURETIS, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness," *Feminist Studies* 16, no.1 (Spring 1990): 119.
- 10 Rosi BRAIDOTTI, *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Guild (New York: Routledge, 1991), 194.
- 11 Linda M. ZERILLI, "Rememoration or War? French Feminist Narrative and the Politics of Self-Representation," *differences* 3, no.1 (1991): 8.
- 12 BRAIDOTTI, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 273.
- 13 Monique WITTIG, *Les Guérillères*, trans. David LeVay (New York: Avon, 1973), 114; quoted in ZERILLI, "Rememoration or War?," 9.
- 14 I am indebted to Linda Zerilli for the idea of bodily integrity as a strategy to challenge patriarchal co-optation, although that author uses the term in a somewhat different, and more literal, manner. ZERILLI, "Rememoration or War?," 11.
- 15 BRAIDOTTI, *Patterns of Dissonance*, 219. Judith BUTLER also puts this issue quite clearly when she writes that "the body is not a 'being,' but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeabili-

ty is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality..." *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 139.

16 BUTLER, *Gender Trouble*, 140.

17 *Ibid.*

18 DE LAURETIS, "Eccentric Subjects," 128. For further discussion of the institution of heterosexuality see Catharine MACKINNON, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A Case of Sex Discrimination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Adrienne RICH, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in her *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); and Monique WITTIG, "The Straight Mind," *Feminist Issues*, no.1 (Winter 1981): 47-54.

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

20 RAMKHALAWANSINGH, "Women During the Great War," 264.

21 Deborah CHERRY, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 144.

22 The women represented by Loring and Wyle were referred to as "types" or "classes" in the following reviews: "Art and Artists," *The Globe* (Toronto), 21 Oct. 1919, 10; "More Paintings of War Activities," *The Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 20 Oct. 1919, 10; "Art at the Exhibition," *The Globe* (Toronto), 28 Aug. 1920, 32; "Women Artists' Work Exhibited," *The Montreal Daily Star*, 2 Oct. 1920, 30; "Truth, Beauty, and Strength," *Toronto Star Weekly*, 1 Aug. 1925, 4.

23 RAMKHALAWANSINGH, "Women During the Great War," 286.

24 Maureen HONEY, *Creating Rosie the Riveter: Class, Gender, and Propaganda During World War II* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 215.

25 *Ibid.*

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

27 President of the Canadian Manufacturers Association at its 1916 convention, as reported in the *Labour Gazette* (1916): 1347; quoted in RAMKHALAWANSINGH, "Women During the Great War," 285.

28 David CARNEGIE, *The History of Munitions Supply in Canada, 1914-1918* (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1925), 149.

29 IMPERIAL MUNITIONS BOARD, *Women in the Production of Munition in Canada*, (Ottawa: I.M.B., 1916), 4.

- 30 HONEY, *Creating Rosie the Riveter*, 6.
- 31 P.G. KONODY, *Art and War: Canadian War Memorials* (London: Colour Ltd. and the Canadian War Records Office, 1919), 15.
- 32 "The Canadian War Memorials Fund: Its History and Objects," *Canada in Khaki* 2 (1917): 26.
- 33 A.B. COOPER, "War Themes in Modern Art," *Windsor Magazine* XLI (Jan. 1915): 259; quoted in TIPPETT, *Art at the Service of War*, 72.
- 34 "More Paintings of War Activities," 10, see note 22.
- 35 "Canadian War Art Exhibition," *Montreal Herald*, 25 Sept. 1920, 3.
- 36 Margaret Randolph HIGGONET *et al.*, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 7.
- 37 *Evening Telegram* (Toronto), 20 Oct. 1919, 7.
- 38 "Art and Artists," 10, see note 22.
- 39 "Canadian War Art Exhibition," 3; "Art and Artists," 10; "Women Artists' Work Exhibited," 30; Hector CHARLESWORTH "Reflections," *Saturday Night*, 18 Sept. 1920, 2; Barker FAIRLEY, "At the Art Gallery," *The Rebel* 4, no.3 (Dec. 1919): 125.
- 40 "Art and Artists," 10; "Memorial Exhibit Includes Works of Women Artists," *Montreal Herald*, 2 Oct. 1920, 3; "More Paintings of War Activities," 10.
- 41 "Hon. H.S. Beland Officially Opens Exhibit War Memorials," *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 Jan. 1923, 5.
- 42 Eric Brown to Sir Edmund Walker, 17 Oct., National Gallery of Canada Archives, File 01.01.
- 43 FAIRLEY, "At the Art Gallery," 23.
- 44 Naomi WOLF, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 17.
- 45 Teresa DE LAURETIS, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 25.

DES HÉROS D'UN AUTRE GENRE

Féminité et patriotisme en temps de guerre

Les Travailleurs de Frances Loring et de Florence Wyle

En 1918, le *Canadian War Memorials Fund* commanda aux sculpteurs canadiens Frances Loring et Florence Wyle des statues de bronze pour commémorer le travail des femmes dans l'industrie et l'agriculture pendant la guerre. Ces figures présentent un intérêt particulier, en ce qu'elles révèlent l'ambiguïté des termes «femme» et «féminité» en temps de guerre. Caractérisées par des négociations tumultueuses entre des concepts opposés de féminité et de patriotisme, les oeuvres de Loring et de Wyle occupent des positions fluctuantes, à la fois à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des périmètres de la féminité définis par le système conventionnel «sexe/genre».

Les statues font partie d'un grand nombre d'images de femmes au travail produites durant la guerre. Ces images ont contribué à entretenir l'impression inexacte que la Première Guerre mondiale a provoqué un afflux de femmes dans l'industrie canadienne. En dépit du fait que la plupart des femmes employées dans les usines de guerre soient venues d'autres industries, les femmes affectées au ravitaillement étaient perçues comme une nouveauté produite par la guerre. Cependant, la nouveauté ne résidait pas tant dans la réalité de la participation des femmes dans l'industrie, que dans la représentation visuelle généralisée de ces femmes. Parmi les oeuvres d'art canadiennes antérieures à la guerre, il n'y en a pas une seule de quelque importance qui représente clairement des femmes à l'oeuvre dans l'industrie. En dépit du fait que, depuis les années 1880, une grande partie du travail le plus mécanisé de la société industrielle ait été accompli par des femmes, le foyer était toujours considéré comme étant leur domaine naturel. Ce n'est que grâce au mécénat du C.W.M.F. que le travail des femmes a pu enfin être représenté par des artistes canadiens de renom, tels George Reid, Mabel May, Dorothy Stevens et C.W. Jefferys. Les oeuvres créées par Loring et par Wyle pour le C.W.M.F. prenaient place dans cette nouvelle vague de représentations publiques de femmes au travail, à côté des photographies et des films de l'*Imperial Munitions Board*. Ces images étaient, pour la plupart, positives et élogieuses. Les légendes qui accompagnaient les photos de l'IMB louaient l'ardeur, la compétence et l'énergie que ces femmes apportaient à leur travail en usine. Cela semble indiquer un changement important par rapport à une perception de la féminité fondée sur l'attachement au foyer, la dépendance, la faiblesse et la passivité. À première vue, les sculptures de Loring et de Wyle pour le C.W.M.F. semblent le confirmer.

Dans une perspective contemporaine, ces oeuvres semblent s'inscrire dans une approche radicale de la définition des genres. Les travailleuses sont représentées comme des «act-eurs» capables d'occuper une position active à l'intérieur d'une sexualité définie selon des critères masculins. Par leur activité vibrante et leur apparente absorption en elles-mêmes, les figures de Loring et de Wyle manifestent une réalité corporelle qui se présente comme une alternative à des modes de représentation qui alimentent la cooptation et la fétichisation du corps féminin. D'autre part, les sculptures peuvent aussi être interprétées comme des défis «actifs» aux définitions sexistes, dans le sens proposé par Judith Butler. Pour cette dernière, le genre est un effet produit par la stylisation culturelle du corps, vu non pas comme une entité biologique mais comme une surface physique. Elle suggère que les identités sexuelles sont produites d'abord par la répétition stylisée d'actes au niveau de la performance extérieure, physique. Vues sous cet angle, les travailleuses de Loring et de Wyle sont particulièrement bien placées pour entreprendre la lutte pour la redéfinition des genres. Ainsi, les femmes dans la sculpture de Loring *Girls with a Rail*, avec leurs vêtements masculins, leur air décidé, leur présence musclée, leur travail actif et leur attitude énergique, présentent, sur un plan très physique, une stylisation des femmes qui contredit les définitions masculines du féminin.

L'effet des représentations de Loring et de Wyle des travailleuses des usines de guerre sur la définition des genres va au-delà d'un simple projet de renversement dialectique. Leurs sculptures peuvent être comprises comme étant véritablement radicales en ce sens qu'elles sont un défi à la logique actuelle des oppositions dualistes sur lesquelles le système traditionnel des genres est fondé. La comparaison entre deux sculptures de Florence Wyle qui représentent dans une pose identique l'une, une femme travaillant en usine, et l'autre, un homme, ouvrier agricole, révèle les termes de ce défi. Il est fondé, non pas sur un rejet des différences physiologiques entre les sexes, mais sur le refus de l'artiste d'utiliser ces différences pour établir une distinction exclusive et opposée sur le plan de la signification sociale entre les personnages, tous deux valorisés en tant que *travailleurs*.

Dans leur refus de reconnaître une construction des genres posée en termes d'altérité opposée, les oeuvres de Loring et de Wyle peuvent sembler aller au-delà de la féminité, et rejoindre la déstabilisation de l'hétérosexualité comme modèle de relations sociales. Dans son contexte social et institutionnel, l'hétérosexualité dépend justement de l'auto-légitimation de l'Un par opposition à l'Autre, ce que Loring et Wyle refusent. Ces dernières vivaient effectivement, sur le plan personnel, en dehors des conventions hétérosexuelles. J'aimerais suggérer aussi que, dans la mesure où elles refusent de circonscrire les femmes et les hommes dans leurs différences opposées, leurs sculptures de travailleurs des industries de guerre se placent également en dehors de ces conventions, ce qui présente un réel défi aux normes sexuelles.

Toutefois, lorsqu'on place ces sculptures dans leur contexte historique, leur potentiel dérangeant est largement dissipé par le discours sur le patriotisme dans lequel elles étaient plongées. Si on examine les réactions de la presse et de la critique, on se rend compte que ces représentations novatrices des femmes dans l'industrie lourde n'ont pas provoqué de discussion sur la féminité ou sur l'expérience de travail des femmes en dehors du contexte patriotique.

Avant 1916, la majeure partie de la population canadienne a traité de la question du travail des femmes (et des défis complémentaires à des catégories sexuelles fixes) en l'ignorant. Lorsque cette stratégie fut devenue impraticable, la société canadienne s'efforça de trouver un moyen de comprendre et de contrôler les défis que ces femmes pouvaient représenter. La catégorisation des représentations féminines les rendait compréhensibles. Les articles de journaux parlaient constamment de ces sculptures en termes de représentations de certains «types» ou «classes» de femmes, en classant les femmes représentées par Loring et par Wyle sous la désignation de «patriotes». Par extension, le travail de ces femmes était perçu comme une aberration sociale causée par la guerre et motivée par l'esprit de sacrifice des femmes en faveur des hommes partis à la guerre. Alors que les sculptures de Loring et de Wyle étaient bien reçues par les critiques, les femmes qu'elles représentaient étaient infailliblement cantonnées dans le rôle de soutien loyal de «femmes derrière les hommes derrière les canons». Les journalistes y voyaient des images rafraîchissantes de «la jeune Canadienne patriote restée au pays et travaillant» pour le retour du père, du frère ou du fiancé. Ainsi, malgré son radicalisme apparent, la nouvelle vision de femmes au travail proposée par Loring et par Wyle était rendue acceptable par les manœuvres d'une idéologie patriotique qui limitait la perception de l'activité économique des femmes à l'intérieur de la lutte restreinte de l'industrie de guerre.

Également confortante pour les idées courantes sur la féminité, la rhétorique de la beauté était invoquée pour justifier et glorifier les représentations des travailleuses dans les usines de guerre. En discutant des sculptures de Loring et de Wyle, on soulignait la beauté physique lorsqu'il s'agissait de sujets féminins, mais on n'en parlait pas à propos de leurs contreparties masculines. Naomi Wolf a décrit l'institution du culte de la beauté féminine essentielle comme «un rempart contre la marée du changement» opéré, au cours du XX^e siècle, par la lutte des femmes pour obtenir plus d'indépendance. Le travail des femmes dans l'industrie devait sûrement être une cause d'anxiété pour plusieurs membres de la société, entre autres les syndicalistes, les travailleurs masculins, les agents du gouvernement et les soldats de retour du front. Il me semble que l'accent mis sur la beauté des travailleuses de Loring et de Wyle révèle un effort général pour promouvoir un concept de la féminité qui paraissait sur le point d'éclater sous les pressions économiques et sociales exercées par les travailleuses de l'industrie de guerre, devenues indépendantes.

Le contraste marqué entre les lectures contemporaine et historique des oeuvres de guerre de Loring et de Wyle est un rappel opportun de la complexité du champ de la signification. Les figures habitent un curieux espace interstitiel. À la croisée du patriarcat et du patriotisme, les artistes ont réalisé une vision qui se situe en dehors des strictes limites de l'un et de l'autre. Le discours hégémonique sur le genre durant les années vingt a donné lieu à la formule visuelle du corps féminin comme objet approprié de contemplation esthétique. L'idéologie du patriotisme, avec sa prédisposition à l'héroïsme, s'est fait une place dans l'image de la femme idéale. Ainsi, les sculptures de Loring et de Wyle oscillent entre les représentations du patriotisme et du genre dans leur cadre de référence centré sur le masculin et un espace qui se situe au-delà de ces représentations. En faisant éclater les catégories, ces représentations de femmes au travail posent le problème de ce que signifie voir une femme ou voir une patriote. La connaissance (et le pouvoir correspondant) qui a surgi de la capacité d'identifier et de définir la féminité et l'héroïsme s'écroule également.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette