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Women and Children in Context:
Laura Muntz and the Representation of Maternity

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Arts.

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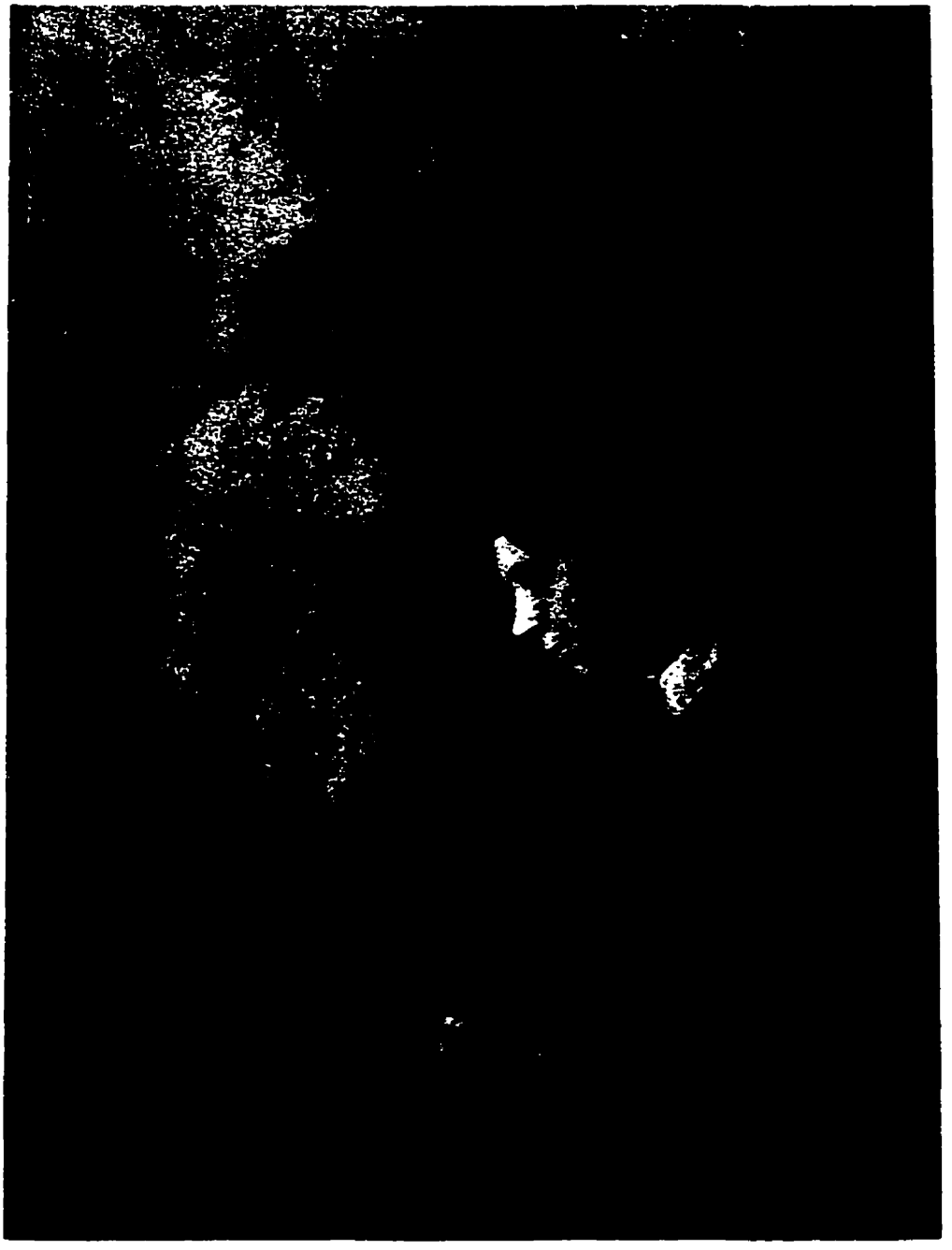

Portrait of Laura Muntz

Photograph by Harold Mortimer Lamb, c.1909

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with several aspects of the life and work of the Canadian painter Laura Muntz (1860-1930). It examines in particular Muntz's images of women and children both within the cultural themes and ideologies of the period and from the perspective of contemporary twentieth-century theories of gender. The introduction and literature review outline the broad issues surrounding the artist in her time and present a summary of her critical fortunes in Canadian art historical literature. Chapter one provides a discussion of Muntz's life and artistic production between 1860 and 1898, the year in which she returned to Toronto after a decade of study and work in Europe. The following two chapters are conceived as case studies of single paintings, observed in the context of various discourses that surround them. Chapter two analyses Muntz's *Madonna and Child* in terms of hereditarian theories, eugenics, maternal feminism and the Canadian social purity movement and considers the broader, psychological implications of gender, specifically in the *fin-de-siècle* associations of femininity and death. Chapter three examines the imagery in Muntz's *Protection* with reference to North American Symbolist painters and their relationship to the constructs of the feminine ideal. As a whole, the thesis elucidates the complex layers of meaning that Muntz's images of women and children contributed to the popular conceptions of femininity and motherhood current in her time.

Cette thèse porte sur plusieurs aspects de la vie et de l'oeuvre du peintre canadien Laura Muntz (1860-1930). Elle examine en particulier les images de femmes et d'enfants peintes par Muntz dans le cadre des idéologies et des thèmes culturels de son époque, ainsi que dans la perspective des théories contemporaines du vingtième siècle sur la condition féminine. L'introduction et l'analyse bibliographique brossent les grandes lignes des questions concernant l'artiste à son époque et présentent un aperçu du sort que lui accordent les critiques dans les ouvrages d'histoire de l'art canadiens. Le premier chapitre traite de la vie de Muntz et de sa production artistique entre 1860 et 1898, année de son retour à Toronto après dix ans d'études et de travail en Europe. Les deux chapitres suivants sont conçus sous forme d'études de cas portant sur des peintures individuelles, observées dans le contexte des différents discours dont elles font l'objet. Le chapitre deux analyse l'oeuvre *Madonna and Child* de Muntz en relation avec les théories héréditaires, de l'eugénique, du féminisme maternel et du mouvement canadien de pureté sociale de l'époque et considère les implications psychologiques plus larges du statut de la femme, spécifiquement l'association fin de siècle entre féminité et mort. Le chapitre trois examine le choix d'images impliqué dans l'élaboration du tableau *Protection* de Muntz en se référant aux peintres symbolistes nord-américains et leur rapport aux concepts de l'idéal féminin. Dans son ensemble, la thèse élucide les couches complexes de signification qui sont à l'oeuvre dans les images de femmes et d'enfants de Muntz. Elle vise à examiner en quoi ces images contribuèrent aux conceptions populaires de la féminité et de la maternité en cours à son époque.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to my advisor, Christine Ross, for her encouragement and perceptive criticism. I am also grateful to the Lyall family, including Laura Muntz's stepson the late Edward Lyall, both for their enthusiasm for my project and for allowing me access to the paintings in their possession. My gratitude goes, as well, to Madelein Muntz for her generosity in sharing the results of her own research into Muntz family history, and to Peter Douglas, for his hospitality and for compiling for me his collection of written sources, memorabilia and works of art. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Laurier Lacroix, who first brought Laura Muntz's work to my attention.

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CHRONOLOGY

1860	18 June: born Laura Adeline Muntz, Radford Semele, Warwickshire, England, to Eugene Gustavus Muntz and Emma Louise Muntz, first cousins. The second of six children, baptized 29 November 1860, Anglican.
1866-67	Family lived in London while preparing to emigrate.
1869	Family emigrated to Canada, first settled in Orillia Township, Simcoe County, Ontario.
1876	Family resided at "Maple Grove Farm," Alport, Muskoka Township. Father not suited to farm life and income most likely augmented by relatives in England.
1879-80	Met William Charles Forster, drawing master at the Hamilton Public Schools.
1881-82	Lived with the Forster family in Hamilton, took lessons from Forster.
1882-83	Continued studies with Forster. By 1883 studied during the day and taught art classes in the evenings in Hamilton. Fall 1882 - winter 1883, studied with William Cruikshank and Lucius R. O'Brien at the Ontario School of Art, Toronto.
1883-87	Continued studies with Forster and taught in Hamilton. Fire destroyed family farm at Alport, parents left for England c.1883-85, returned in 1885 to settle in Toronto.
1887/1889	Studied for three months probably at the St. John's Wood School of Art, London, England. Death in the family occasioned her return.
1888	Opened her first studio in Hamilton, King Street, above Thompson's Artists' Emporium. Received first portrait commissions and continued teaching.
1890-91	Studied at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design with George Agnew Reid. Resided with family and spent summers in Hamilton.
1891	Elected member of the Ontario Society of Artists (OSA). First exhibited with the OSA, won first prize for *The Wide, Wide World.* First exhibited in the Toronto Industrial Exhibition (TIE).

1891-98	Left to study in Paris, fall 1891. Studied at the Académie Colarossi with Gustave Courtois, Joseph Paul Blanc, Pierre Fritel and Eugène Giradôt. Met Wilhelmina Douglas Hawley, who until 1899 taught watercolour classes at the Colarossi, where she had earned a silver medal in 1894. Earned tuition fees by acting as *massière* at the Colarossi. Briefly worked on the staff of the *Quartier Latin*, journal of the North American students in Paris.
1893	Exhibited at the World Columbian Exposition, Chicago. First exhibited with the Royal Canadian Academy (RCA) and the Art Association of Montreal. Returned to Toronto for the summer and taught at G.A. Reid's private studio.
1894	First exhibited with the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français, Paris and continued to exhibit in the Salon until 1899. Painted in Holland. Continued to send works to the exhibitions of the OSA and the TIE throughout the 1890s.
1895	Received Honourable Mention at the Salon for *Dis-Moi?* Returned to Toronto during the summer, taught at Reid's studio. Elected Associate Member of the RCA. Founding member of the Hamilton Palette Club. Lived in Paris with Wilhelmina Hawley, 111, rue Notre Dame des Champs.
1896	Spent summer teaching North American students in Rijsoord, Holland, with Hawley.
1897-98	Shared living quarters with Hawley in Paris, 9, rue des Fourneaux. Returned to Rijsoord to teach in the summers of 1898-99.
1898	Returned to Toronto, address 16 Rusholme Road. Opened studio in the Yonge Street Arcade with Wilhelmina Hawley, who had accompanied Muntz to Canada. Both women gave classes at the studio. Hawley married in 1901 and moved permanently to Holland. Muntz remained at the Yonge Street Arcade studio until 1905. Students included Estelle Kerr, Marion Long, Mary Wrinch and Henrietta Shore.
1899	Member of the Executive Council of the OSA, 1899-1903, also on the Executive Council of the Central Canadian Exhibition, Fine Arts Department.
1900	Exhibited with the Women's Art Association of Canada.

1900-01	Art director and instructor of painting and drawing at St. Margaret's College, Toronto.
1901	Awarded silver medal at the Pan-American Exposition, Buffalo, for *Girl Knitting*. Lived with family at 235 Beverley Street to 1905. Taught art at Branksome Hall, a private girl's academy in Toronto.
1904	Awarded bronze medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, St.Louis, for *The Little Scribe*. Exhibited with the American Society of Artists, New York.
1905	Taught art at Havergal College, Toronto.
1906	Moved to Montreal. Resided and had studio at 6 Beaver Hall Square, where she remained until 1912. Specialized in portrait commissions.
1908	Taught art at Miss Edgar's and Miss Cramp's School, a private girl's academy in Montreal. One of her students was Lilias Torrence Newton.
1909	First woman asked to exhibit with the Canadian Art Club.
1910	National Gallery of Canada purchased *A Daffodil*.
1911	Father Eugene Gustavus Muntz died in Toronto.
1913	Residing at 4205 Dorchester Street. National Gallery of Canada purchased *Madonna with Angels*. Sister Ida Muntz Lyall died in Toronto.
1914	Resided at 310 Grosvenor Avenue, home of Harold Mortimer Lamb. Donated *Girl With Seagulls* to the Patriotic Fund.
1915	Returned to Toronto and 10 July married widowed brother-in-law, Charles William Bayley Lyall. Harold Mortimer Lamb stated that she "married her deceased sister's [Ida's] husband in order to manage his household and bring up his children." Lyall family resided at 24 Bernard Avenue. Continued to exhibit primarily in Toronto and Montreal, but new family responsibilities caused her to drastically reduce her painting activity. Allowed membership with the OSA to lapse until 1924. Elected member of the Toronto Heliconian Club, a social and philanthropic club for women employed professionally in the arts.
1919	Attempted to resume daily painting schedule. Wrote to Harold Mortimer Lamb of her admiration for the work of Tom Thomson -- his

"magnificent breadth and sincerity, that wide world mind poured out in paint on those small panels."

1920 Mother Emma Louise Muntz died in Toronto.

1921 Travelled to England with husband Charles Lyall and brother Harold Muntz.

1924 Actively resumed painting career, reopened studio. Re-elected member of the OSA.
Exhibited in the British Empire Exhibition, Wembley.

1925 Received small number of portrait commissions; complained to Harold Mortimer Lamb that "business is bad."

1926 Art Gallery of Ontario purchased *Oriental Poppies*.
Travelled to New York in winter or early spring, with several watercolours, presumably to exhibit or sell. Stayed in New York with former pupil, artist Henrietta Shore and commented that the city "has its advantages and disappointments -- both, but it is enlightening there is no doubt about that."

1927 Busy with many portrait commissions; sold several large works, one to the Art Gallery of Toronto, another to the Nutana Collegiate Collection, Saskatoon.

1928 Continued to be very busy with commissions and exhibitions. Travelled to England in the summer with husband Charles Lyall.

1930 Ill and bedridden from June on. Diagnosed first with a bad heart, then with severe goitre which caused weight loss, palpitations and fainting spells. Muntz specified that a lump had been diagnosed, but that it did not "show on the outside"; she believed that her illness was caused by overwork and worry and refused to have an operation.
Died 9 December at the Toronto General Hospital. Buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto.

INTRODUCTION

Situating the Artist

The decades around the turn of the nineteenth century marked the high point of the cult of motherhood in Canada. Glorification of the mother was closely linked to the notion of the New Woman and to conservative, middle-class maternal feminism which promoted the accepted belief that women's innate humanitarian and nurturing qualities justified their participation in public life. Consequently, although it endorsed universal suffrage and greater social involvement, maternal feminist philosophy nevertheless remained closely bound to the traditional sphere of home and family. Drawing support from certain beliefs current within the social and natural sciences, maternal feminism equated motherhood with the pure and selfless image of the Virgin Mother, just as women in general were seen as the potential saviours of a society undergoing alarming social and economic changes.

Laura Muntz did not have children of her own, although she married into the large family of Charles William Bayley Lyall at 55 years of age.[1] On one level, her paintings of mothers and children, particularly those conflated with the image of the Madonna, participated in the ideology of the woman-saviour. But just as the turn of the century constructions of women could not contain the excess beyond the text, so Muntz's

[1] After her marriage to C.W.B. Lyall in 1915, Muntz signed her works with both her married and her maiden names; consequently, early twentieth-century references as well as modern ones cite her as either Laura Muntz, or Laura Muntz Lyall. Her practice of sometimes adding her married name to the signature on paintings completed before 1915 adds to the difficulty of dating her work. Since my thesis concentrates on the work produced before her marriage, I refer to her throughout as Laura Muntz.

images of women suggest an identity that speaks more of longing and desire than of an imposed, idealized femininity.

Despite the fact that Muntz came from a conservative and privileged background, she was a working woman and a dedicated, professional artist. From the days of her earliest studies in Toronto, she reinterpreted the popular subjects of women and children to express alternative notions of femininity. Her Symbolist paintings, in particular, speak of a resistance to the largely patriarchal culture of her day. Brought up in England, and with a decade of European art training behind her, Muntz returned to the relatively unsophisticated milieu of Toronto. Yet her symbolist-inspired images were anything but provincial, and the themes in these paintings suggest an artist who tried to give expression to her philosophical and social concerns.

Laura Muntz was one of English Canada's leading artists in the last decade of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century. She was a familiar name in Canadian art circles, having exhibited widely in Toronto and Montreal, as well as participating in exhibitions in France, England and the United States. Toronto's *Saturday Night* magazine for 7 June 1913 reported that "One of our leading artists says he considers Laura Muntz the greatest painter in Canada, and the greatest woman painter on this continent."[2] Although the author of this article may have thought the praise over-effusive, she agreed that Muntz "is certainly unrivalled in her own particular line -- that of children's portraiture."

Until the time of her marriage in 1915, Muntz had single-mindedly pursued a professional career that included commissioned work, teaching and exhibition. From 1915 until 1924 she all but abandoned her professional activities and consequently faded

from public attention. Her return to the art world six years before her death brought her a degree of commercial success through portrait commissions, but did not revive her critical acclaim. Like the great majority of historical Canadian women artists, today she is largely forgotten. Nevertheless, because she had been so well known in earlier decades, her work has sporadically reappeared in exhibitions and her name recalled with praise.[3] In 1984, a journalist addressed the lack of both public and critical interest in the historical artists predating the Group of Seven.

> Is there an undiscovered nineteenth century heritage of Canadian art? Collectors today are beginning to admit that there is, and serious attention is being given to the works of people like Laura Muntz Lyall, F.M. Bell-Smith, Mower Martin, and Frederick Verner.[4]

That same year Toronto art dealer John Morris described Muntz's *The Japanese Kimono* (Fig. 1.34) as "one of the best pieces of Canadian art [that he had seen] for years."[5] The enigmatic quality of many of Muntz's paintings has engaged modern viewers as it did her contemporaries. In 1972 a journalist for the *Globe and Mail Weekend Magazine* offered a humorous account of his experiences at an art auction, where he "went slightly out of his mind" over a painting by Muntz. He states that despite the fact that the auction included many works by the Group of Seven, "there is really only one painting in the entire offering that I want badly enough to actually pay for" but

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[2] Estelle Kerr, "The Artist," *Saturday Night* (7 June 1913): 29.

[3] Some recent exhibitions which included works by Laura Muntz are: Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, "Nutana Collegiate Collection," August 1966; The Winnipeg Art Gallery, "Mother and Child," 14 May - 13 August 1967; The Woodstock Art Gallery, Ontario, "Kids: An Exhibition of Children in Landscape," 28 October - 23 November 1974; Agnes Etherington Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, "From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada," 12 December 1975 - 1 February 1976, The Grange, Art Gallery of Ontario, "Toronto Children at the Turn of the Century," March - April 1976; Art Gallery of York University, Ontario, "Another World: Salon and Academy Paintings c.1805 - 1925," 12 January - 1 February 1976; The Macdonald Gallery, Queen's Park, Toronto, "The Child in Ontario Art," 27 June - 29 July 1979; Nancy Poole's Studio, Toronto, "Historical Exhibition of Portraits/Landscapes," 25 October - 6 November 1986; The Edmonton Art Gallery, "The Canadian Art Club 1907 - 1915," 1988; The Kenderdine Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, "Historical Canadian Women Artists," 3 July - 19 September, 1993; Masters Gallery, Calgary, "A View of One's Own: Canadian Women Artists 1890-1960," March, 1994.

[4] "Canadian Classics: Canadian Art Before the Group of Seven," *Arts West* 9, no.4 (April 1984): 15.

[5] "Canadian Classics" 16.

confesses that although "I am completely taken by it, I have never heard of Laura Muntz and I don't know what she sells for."[6] Along with the popular subject of "child-life," Muntz was best known for her representations of both secular and religious madonnas. Her *Madonna With Angels* (1912, National Gallery of Canada) was included in the American publication *The World's Great Madonnas*, in which the painting is described as "symbolic, of course."[7] The same painting, with a similar text, was featured once again in 1978 in the Catholic *Queen of All Hearts Magazine*.[8] A chapter of this thesis examines one representation of a madonna and child by Laura Muntz, and discusses the many ways in which the image is indeed symbolic, albeit within wider parameters than those of conventional Christian imagery.

It is not the aim of this study to analyse the general state of the arts in English Canada during the more than thirty years in question, nor does it attempt to promote a definitive view of either the artist or her paintings. Rather, my purpose is to situate Muntz's artistic practice in relation to certain aspects of the multitude of events and ideas that were current in Canada, Europe and the United States during her lifetime, which I feel resonate in the works I examine. My methodological approach is guided by the conviction that social ideologies and discourses form the fabric of the conscious thoughts and unconscious desires of both producers and viewers of art, and correspondingly that theories which perceive artistic production as autonomous should be mistrusted. Rather than attempting to distil the various facets of Laura Muntz's life

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[6] Anthony J. Patterson, "Diary of a Mad Bidder," *Globe and Mail Weekend Magazine* (28 October 1972):16-18. The painting in question was *Young Girl With Daffodils* (reproduced in the article, present location unknown), a moody, Aesthetic-Symbolist portrait of a robe-clad girl holding a single daffodil. The author was not successful in acquiring the painting, which sold for $1,950.

[7] Cynthia Pearl Maus, *The World's Great Madonnas: An Anthology of Pictures, Poetry, Music, and Stories Centering in the Life of the Madonna and Her Son* (New York: Harper, 1947) 540.

and work into one authoritative truth, my intent has been to keep the process of interpretation of both the paintings and their contexts open and fluid. The challenge in examining historical art from a current theoretical perspective lies in permitting the image to express its inherently multivalent nature, while maintaining the awareness that the process of historical interpretation is necessarily mediated by one's own culture, and that one's understanding of the discourses of the targeted past is inescapably altered by current cultural perspectives. Although postructuralist theories have taught that the "truth" of the present, much less the past, can never be completely recovered, they have encouraged us to value new interpretations, despite the fact that they could never have been formulated during the historical period under study. Marsha Meskimmon's recent study of twentieth-century women artists' self-portraiture reflects my own approach in its intention to be "not exhaustive, but suggestive...and indicate ways in which women's work might be recontextualised and rediscovered."[9]

Literature Review

The exclusion of women producers from art's written history, a fact acknowledged by extensive scholarship, applies equally to Canadian women and is especially evident in the case of historical women artists. The common perception that "there have been no great women artists" in Canada has until recent times persisted unchallenged and it was perhaps only Emily Carr's name that was known to international art audiences. The first sustained inquiry into the correlation between

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[8] Viola R. Ward, "The Madonna - Eternal Source of Divine Inspiration," *Queen of All Hearts Magazine* 28, no.5 (January-February 1978): 36-40.

women artists and "greatness" was presented by Linda Nochlin in 1971,[10] in an essay which provided an important starting point for a feminist investigation into women's exclusion from the art-historical canon. However, though Nochlin rightly singled out the institutional bases for women's lack of participation in "high" art production, she did not question either the constructed and patriarchal nature of the notion of "greatness" itself, or the assumption of genius as a necessary component of the artistic personality. Griselda Pollock's more productive inquiry into the associations between "women, art and ideology"[11] proposed a contextual rather than an evaluative consideration of women's artistic contributions and, moreover, called for a re-examination of the very foundations of the art-historical discipline.

Although Pollock's influential article was written in 1983, Canada's historical women artists still have not been examined adequately from this perspective. The most inclusive publication on the subject to date, Maria Tippett's *By A Lady*, makes a valuable contribution to the literature by bringing to public attention the extensive and varied production by Canadian women in the arts.[12] It is less successful, however, in providing a meaningful analysis of the social and cultural factors which conditioned both the lives and the work of female artists and does not attempt to complexify the handed-down understanding of "feminine" art-making by examining the situation from a theoretical perspective. Tippett does not heed Pollock's call for a feminist *intervention* into the history of art and rather attempts, in a dated fashion, to insert women's production into

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[9] Marsha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlet Press, 1996) 10.

[10] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971), reprinted in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

[11] Griselda Pollock, "Women, Art and Ideology: Questions for Feminist Art Historians," *Woman's Art Journal* 4, no.1 (Spring-Summer 1983): 39-47.

[12] Maria Tippett, *By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Viking Penguin, 1992).

the structure of the traditional canon. As Janice Helland succinctly observed in her reading of this text, "Tippett summarizes women's status as secondary, leaves the hierarchies in place and fails to question how and why [a] particular discourse exists."[13]

Tippett's afterword raises problems of methodology and interpretation. She proposes that "one must consider the circumstances under which a work had been created, and *judge* it accordingly. *On their own terms* Canadian women artists have an exciting body of art to their credit"(italics added).[14] To begin with, Tippett does not in fact follow her own advice and consider the circumstances of production in a satisfactory way. Moreover, her perception of women's art as a separate category requiring its own standards of judgement discloses her fundamental belief that women's art is second-rate. Tippett's remark that "for whatever reason, women simply could not win the approval that their work deserved" [201] confirms her adherence to patriarchal ideologies of both gender and culture. Unconcerned with the enormous differences effected by time, place, education, social and economic class and individual psychology, Tippett gathers together artists as varied as Frances Jones Bannerman, Laura Muntz, Lucy Tasseor, Susan Scott, Hilda Woolnough and Thérèse Joyce Gagnon, and unites them, in essentialist fashion, into a community of "female centred art." [202] Furthermore, she distinguishes the former group from yet another arbitrarily selected company of artists -- Paraskeva Clark, Ghitta Caiserman-Roth, Wanda Koop, Molly Bobak and Shirley Wiitasalo -- who, Tippett says, "attest to women's ability to respond to issues beyond their experience." [202] This kind of unsupported and subjective categorization is recurrent in *By A Lady*, and designates an approach which, in my view,

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[13] Janice Helland, *Journal of Canadian Art History* 15, no.1 (1992): 127.

[14] Tippett 202.

cannot give access to a deeper reading of a work of art, whether produced by a man or a woman. To take Muntz as a case in point, Tippett characterizes her work as essentially "female" on the basis of a simplistic connection between the maternal subjects which she painted and femininity. The truth of the matter is that maternity was "an issue beyond" Muntz's direct experience, since her most significant explorations of the subject began decades before her own involvement in family life, which occurred only in her mid-fifties.

My argument in this thesis questions Tippett's categorization of Laura Muntz as an artist who did not engage with "deep" ideas, since I believe that Muntz's images of mothers and children grapple with a variety of social, psychological and philosophical issues. Moreover, they should be read as *commentaries* on gender rather than perceived as "evidence" of a shallowly-conceived femininity. Linda Nochlin was correct in stating that it is futile to look for stereotypical signs of femininity -- "daintiness, delicacy, preciousness" [15] -- as binding characteristics in women's art across the centuries. It is indeed futile to ask, as Nochlin does rhetorically, whether Mme Vigée-Lebrun is more or less feminine than Fragonard.[16] A more productive inquiry would investigate the ways in which Vigée-Lebrun's art might be *feminist*, since it can be argued that throughout the ages a significant amount of women's artistic production shows signs of resistance to dominant ideologies of femininity. Hildegard of Bingen, Artemisia Gentileschi, Geertruydt Roghman, Angelica Kauffman -- and indeed Laura Muntz -- have little in common except for the fact that their art permits access to a view of female experience and female subjectivity positioned as an alternative to the prevailing characterization of

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[15] Nochlin 149.
[16] Nochlin 149.

women as "other" to the masculine norm. Yet the acceptance of this possibility should only be a starting point to an investigation of the precise conditions and meanings of the resistance; the aim of the historian should be to elucidate the various and contradictory discourses of a particular time and place, rather than reduce the historical differences of women's experience to yet another totalising construction of gender.

The reader learns very little about Laura Muntz in Tippett's survey, but what little is said gives the impression of an artist who perhaps was appreciated in her own time, but is of no interest to ours.[17] In contrast, Joan Murray's recent memoir of her experiences as a curator of Canadian art makes similarly brief mention of Laura Muntz, yet her comments serve to encourage future research.

> I was particularly interested by paintings that had entered the collection at the turn of the century, by artists such as Frederick Challener and Laura Muntz Lyall. They were of high quality, and like the [Florence] Carlyle and the [J.E.H.] MacDonald, had as their subjects the gentle stories favoured by juries of an earlier day. Lyall's *Interesting Story* shows two children sitting on a sofa reading a book; light from windows behind the charming heads falls on the book and their clothes.[18]

Informative modern sources for Laura Muntz are two Masters theses: Margaret Fallis' work of 1985, and Julia Gualtieri's 1989 study of Muntz, Florence Carlyle and Helen McNicoll.[19] The strength of Fallis' thesis lies in the biographical information it provides (although not entirely correct or complete) and in the notation of Muntz's exhibition history. But while the author's research of archival material has proven

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[17] Tippett labels Muntz's *A Daffodil* as "saccharine" to modern eyes. I discuss Tippett's comments in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[18] Joan Murray, *Confessions of a Curator: Adventures in Canadian Art* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1996) 79.

[19] Julia Gualtieri, *The Woman as Artist and as Subject in Canadian Painting (1890-1930): Florence Carlyle, Laura Muntz Lyall, Helen McNicoll*, Master's Thesis, Kingston: Queen's University, 1989; Margaret Fallis, *Laura Muntz Lyall A.R.C.A. 1860-1930*, Masters Thesis, Ottawa: Carleton University, 1985. Gualtieri and Fallis, like Maria Tippett and Joan Murray, refer to the artist as "Muntz Lyall," although they all concentrate on the work that she produced before her marriage.

extremely useful, her discussion of several of Muntz's well-known canvases is cursory and restricted to an analysis of style and iconography.

Julia Gualtieri considers her subject in more depth and proposes to "primarily examine the image of women by women."[20] She structures her analysis into three categories, through which she examines the image of "woman as solitary reverie", "mother figure" and the "New Woman." [10] This framework allows her to present an impressive amount of statistical information, some of which is useful in providing the reader with a general understanding of institutional Canadian art practices. It is enlightening to learn, for example, that between 1880 and 1930 there were twenty-four female Associates of the RCA to seventy-six male Associates, but that these unfavourable proportions were not reproduced in women's participation in the exhibitions of the RCA, since between 1890 and 1930 there were 334 women exhibitors to 452 men. [47-48] However, the overweighting of statistics leaves one wishing for more explanation behind the numbers. To say that thirty-one of the forty-eight paintings that Florence Carlyle exhibited between 1895 and 1916 related to either reverie or mother-and-child subjects [166] begs many unanswered questions regarding the cultural relevance of such themes. Despite a tendency toward too many numbers and unproblematic generalizations -- "Carlyle and Lyall [...] always painted realistic contemporary mother figures [and] unencumbered depictions of motherhood,"[167] -- Gualtieri's thesis exposes and addresses the canonical structures of Canadian art histories and issues of gender. She does, however, make statements that would not withstand the scrutiny of a deeper understanding of feminist theories, as for example that "there was surprisingly little reference to gender in the reviews of these women's

[Carlyle, Muntz, McNicoll] art." [54] The predominant attitude toward "artistic genius" in Canada, just as in France and Britain, was that it was inescapably gendered, and although this view was articulated within the familiar discourse of "equal but different," women's artistic "creation" was rarely discussed without reference to biological creative function and "natural" nurturing sensibilities. Walter Sparrow's preface to his *Women Painters of the World* (1905) is characteristic of the prevailing conviction that style was necessarily gendered.

> Style is the man in the genius of men, style is the woman in the genius of the fair. No male artist, however gifted he may be, will ever be able to experience all the emotional life to which women are subject, and no woman of abilities, how much soever she may try, will be able to borrow from men anything so invaluable to art as her own intuition and the prescient tenderness and grace of her nursery-nature. Thus, then, the bisexuality of genius has limits in art, and those limits should be determined by a worker's sex.[21]

Further in this thesis I examine the implications of gender in the language of art criticism, referring to Tamar Garb as a guide for a comparison of Canadian practices with those of nineteenth-century French critics.[22]

There has been no central archive established for Laura Muntz since her death, and what little archival material exists is scattered over various locations. The several letters by Muntz's hand which have been preserved in the British Columbia Provincial Archives provide a glimpse of an intelligent, thoughtful and complex person, but they contain almost no mention of her working method and artistic purpose.[23] More

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[20] Gualtieri 7

[21] Walter Sparrow, *Women Painters of the World* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905) 11.

[22] Tamar Garb "'L'Art Feminin': The Formation of a Critical Category in late Nineteenth-Century France," *Art History* 12, no.1 (March 1989): 39-65; also *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.)

[23] The are five letters in the British Columbia Provincial Archives, addressed to Harold Mortimer Lamb. Harold Mortimer Lamb Files, MS 2834, v.1, f.15. There are also several in England, addressed to Marie Douglas, Muntz's close friend and granddaughter of W. C. Forster, Muntz's first art teacher in Hamilton. Muntz Collection, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dorset County Museum, England. I discuss contents of the letters in Chapter 1, "Character and Correspondence."

informative sources are the descendants of the Muntz and Lyall families, and the artist files in the holdings of major Canadian art galleries and libraries.[24] Moreover, the most illuminating commentaries on Muntz's work are not to be found in art-historical publications (with the exception of the writings of Newton MacTavish) but rather in the articles written, in large part, by female journalists. The struggle for suffrage and the emergence of the New Woman contributed to many women's sense of community and encouraged Canadian journalists such as Jean Grant, Harriet Ford, Estelle Kerr, Irene B. Hare, M. J. Mount, Madge MacBeth, and Marjory MacMurchy to champion women's professional activities in the arts.[25]

The progressive exclusion of women from the more recent histories of Canadian art has been discussed in other texts.[26] By the time that Laura Muntz died in 1930, the Canadian art establishment had validated the landscapes of the Group of Seven as the ultimate expression of nationalist sentiment. Muntz's symbolic figures seemed like relics of another century and her portraits, though commissioned through to the last years of her life, were perceived, as portraiture often has been, as the prosaic aspect of artistic production. Neither of these genres, and especially works within them produced by a woman, fit into the construction of the muscular, nationalistic artistic identity fashioned during the years between the World Wars. More central to the issue, as Susan Butlin has observed, was the fact that those women who did paint the heroic northern landscapes perceived to exemplify Canada's particular character, were also excluded from the art-

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[24] The most informative sources have been the Hamilton Gallery of Art and the Hamilton Public Library, and the Art Gallery of Ontario.

[25] Ford and Kerr were artists in their own right; a study of female journalists such as those mentioned above would make an important contribution to the history of women's participation in Canadian culture.

[26] Julia Gualtieri provides a summary of both the inclusion and exclusion of women artists in Canadian histories from 1914 to the 1970s; Susan Butlin's Masters thesis discusses the same texts in a more analytical manner, concentrating

historical canon.[27] The rationale for this omission is rooted in discourses of gender rather than in the style or quality of women's work. Maria Tippett quotes the British art critic C. J. Holmes, whose words epitomize the dominant attitude on both sides of the Atlantic: "In choice of subject [women artists] will do well not to forget the sympathies of their sex, and to avoid aiming at the heroic, the complicated or the grandiose."[28]

Although Laura Muntz has fared better than most female artists of her generation in the historiography of Canadian art, the critical attention given to artistic production by women has been in general brief and inadequate. Despite the fact that their work was shown in exhibitions in the European capitals and in the art centres of Canada and the United States, Canadian women were virtually ignored in international art publications.[29]

Muntz was the only Canadian artist listed in Clara Clement's ambitious publication *Women in the Fine Arts from the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.* (1904).[30] The entry includes only Muntz's name, however, with the clarification that the artist did not reply to the circular sent out by the author. Perhaps Muntz was singled out as the sole Canadian representative not just on the basis of her awards in the United States (where Florence Carlyle, as well, had won an Honorable Mention in 1901 and a silver medal in 1904), but also on the strength of her success in

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specifically on the critical fortunes of Florence Carlyle. Susan Butlin, *Making a Living: Florence Carlyle and the Negotiation of a Professional Artistic Identity*, Masters Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1995.

[27] Florence Carlyle painted the mountainscapes of British Columbia c. 1912. Butlin 13.

[28] Tippett 35.

[29] Canadian women artists were a recognized presence at international fairs such as the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), the Pan-American Exhibition in Buffalo (1901), where Muntz won a silver medal, and the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition held in St. Louis (1904), where Muntz was again distinguished with a bronze medal.

[30] Clara Waters Clement, *Women in the Fine Arts from the Seventh Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904) 245. Clement does list another artist born in Canada -- Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes (1859-1912) -- but although Armstrong Forbes was Canadian by birth, all her artistic training took place in Europe and she spent almost all of her life in England.

Paris, where she had been the first foreign woman to receive a major prize (Honourable Mention) at the 1895 Salon of the Société des Artistes Français.

Clara Clement's inclusion at the beginning of the century of more than 500 women artists underscores their progressive omission in later North American art histories. In Canadian texts art production by women came to be discussed briefly and as a segregated category. Female artists were thus marginalized and finally all but erased from the canonically formulated histories of later years. In the publications which appeared throughout the 1940s the names of several Ontario artists tended to recur, along with that of Laura Muntz -- Florence Carlyle (1864-1923); Mary Hiester Reid (1854-1921); Sidney Strickland Tully (1869-1911); less often Charlotte Schreiber (1834-1922), distinguished by her election as the first female full member of the Royal Canadian Academy; and more cursorily still, Mary Wrinch Reid (1878-1969), Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles (1866-1928), and Helen McNicoll (1879-1915). Of the last generation of women born in the nineteenth century, the artists of the Montreal Beaver Hall Group attracted more critical attention than Ontario women. British Columbia's Emily Carr (1871-1945), although belonging to the earlier generation, also found more favour with later art historians such as Russell Harper and Dennis Reid, and with the current critical atmosphere which privileged landscape painting. It should be mentioned as well that as the century progressed, women artists were increasingly placed within the orbit of their male teachers and associates, and their work examined against the model of masculine production.

In a popular publication of 1913, *Canada and Its Provinces, a History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions by One Hundred Associates*, the prominent

Toronto art collector and commentator on the arts, E. F. B. Johnston profiled ten Canadian women artists, some in as little as a single sentence. Muntz, described as "an artist of great talent," is placed at the head of his brief list and merits the longest paragraph. Johnston characterizes her as an introspective painter who was preoccupied with the "inner feeling and moving forces" of her subjects.[31]

Newton MacTavish's ambitious *The Fine Arts in Canada* (1925) was the first text to attempt a comprehensive history of Canadian art.[32] An important art critic and a thoughtful and knowledgeable writer, MacTavish recognized the professional standing of the female artists whose work he described and illustrated. Each profile begins with a professional biography which outlines artistic education and exhibitions and continues with the particular strengths that each painter possessed. MacTavish had championed Laura Muntz's work earlier in the century, and his discussion of Muntz which begins the chapter on women painters is a summary of a substantially longer article published in 1911.[33] Even after her death, when she was scarcely remembered by other critics, MacTavish devoted a large portion of a separate chapter to her in his *Ars Longa* (1938), a narrative, anecdotal account of many well-known Canadian artists.[34] Titled "Laura Muntz and Others," the chapter discusses among other things the injustice of the fact that Canadian paintings were less valued by the art market than foreign ones. It is also noteworthy that MacTavish compares the work of women (Muntz, Laura Knight)

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[31] E. F. B. Johnston, "Painting and Sculpture in Canada," *Canada and its Provinces, a History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions by One Hundred Associates*, Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., (Toronto: T. & A. Constable, 1913) 625. I discuss Johnston's comments in greater detail in Chapter 1, "Gender and Style."

[32] Newton MacTavish, *The Fine Arts in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1925).

[33] Newton MacTavish, "Laura Muntz and Her Art," *The Canadian Magazine* 37, no. 5 (September 1911): 419-426. The article is discussed extensively throughout this thesis.

[34] Newton MacTavish, *Ars Longa* (Toronto: The Ontario Publishing Co., 1938).

alongside that of male artists, without gender bias.[35] As he had done in his previous analyses of Muntz's work, MacTavish emphasized the artist's "extraordinary facility, sympathy and understanding" toward her portrait sitters, particularly children.[36]

M. O. Hammond's *Painting and Sculpture in Canada* (1930) inaugurates the perfunctory mention of women artists typical of later histories. Qualified at its beginning by the disclaimer that "it may be more convenient than discrete to segregate the women painters of Canada," the chapter on women artists is just two pages in length.[37] Hammond encapsulates Muntz's career in one brief sentence: "Laura Muntz Lyall endows childhood with romance in pleasant portraits."[38] Published in the year of Muntz's death, Hammond's perception of the artist's work reflects the relative obscurity into which she had fallen after her marriage, when most of her artistic output consisted of commissioned portraiture.

Graham McInnes' *A Short History of Canadian Art* (1939) does not provide in-depth discussions of either male or female artists, but it does depart from Hammond's model in the inclusion of a substantial percentage of work by women. This fact is more notable still when compared with the relative exclusion of women in the histories written in the 1970s, which still serve as texts in most classrooms today. Although McInnes singles out only Florence Carlyle to join the company of 80 historical male artists, the list of artists living at the time of the book's publication names 34 women to 95 men. Evidently the author considered Carlyle to be the only worthy representative of the older generation of female artists, since he stated that she was "the first woman painter whose

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[35] MacTavish, *Ars Longa* 171-72.

[36] MacTavish, *Ars Longa* 170. MacTavish also admired the work of Florence Carlyle, to whom he as well devotes a chapter in *Ars Longa*.

[37] M. O. Hammond, *Painting and Sculpture in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1930) 53.

work had in it more than the adventitious charm that accompanies dabbling." [66] With this one unfounded comment, McInnes dismissed all the talented, professional women (including Laura Muntz) who were Carlyle's contemporaries and who had received a significant amount of recognition before the First World War.

William Colgate (1943, 1967) mentions Muntz's name once, in a list of participants in the second exhibition of the Canadian Art Club, and does not even bring attention to the fact that she was the only woman invited to contribute her work.[39] Donald Buchanan's *Canadian Painters from Paul Kane to the Group of Seven* (1945) suggests by its title alone the nationalistic and masculinist nature of its focus and makes no reference to Muntz nor to any other female artist, an omission repeated in his *The Growth of Canadian Painting* (1950).

The two most recent surveys of Canadian painting, J. Russel Harper's *Painting in Canada: a history* (1966, 1977) and Dennis Reid's *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (1973, 1988) follow the models of the 1940s and 50s which identified the indigenous landscape tradition as a marker of nationalism, and privileged male artists to a remarkable degree.[40] The statistics of Harper's section on artists' biographies tell the tale: of well over 300 entries, only 20 are women, a percentage hardly altered in Reid's book. Harper illustrates the work of only two artists, Emily Carr and Charlotte Schreiber, and with the exception of Carr (associated as she was with the work of the Group of Seven) he speaks of other female artists merely in passing. For example, Harper deals with the women of the Beaver Hall Group in just three sentences, reeling off the names of Prudence Heward, Mabel May, Sarah Robinson, Ann Savage and Lilias

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[38] Hammond 55.

[39] William Colgate, *Canadian Art: Its Origin and Development* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1967) 74.

Torrance Newton [297], while he devotes an entire long paragraph to the career of William Wood, a relatively unknown associate of the same Group.[298] About Emily Carr Harper is effusive, stating that "only a woman of character, determination, and an almost superhumanly powerful vision could have survived the [artistic] trials she faced." [290] His praise of a woman for her virility (here served by the designation of "superhuman" power) echoes the age-old trope of the "unnatural" woman possessed of masculine talent. She is the "miracolo di natura" described so many centuries ago by Giorgio Vasari -- a categorization which simultaneously reinforces the essential masculinity of great art and dismisses the rest of the female gender as inherently inadequate.

Harper acknowledges Laura Muntz with only one backhanded compliment: "Laura Muntz Lyall likewise failed to accomplish all that her Parisian study promised, but her early mother and child compositions went beyond mere narrative in their unsurpassed subtleties and freedom of brushwork."[41] My discussion of the two paintings which serve as case studies in this thesis, both completed well after Muntz's return from Paris, dispel this unfounded criticism.

Dennis Reid all but ignores female painters, including Muntz and Carlyle, and, like Harper, illustrates the work of only two women, Emily Carr and Joyce Wieland. Like Harper again, he reserves most of the space and praise for the "giant, striving personality" of Emily Carr.[42] However, in a more recent essay on Canadian Impressionism, Reid reproduces a painting by Helen McNicoll and acknowledges that

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[40] J. Russel Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

[41] Harper 232. Harper's harsh judgement of Muntz's post-Parisian work affected later critical opinion: in 1980 Paul Robinson reiterated Harper's uninformed statement in saying that "Mrs. Lyall seemed to have lost her ambitions as she returned to Canada." Paul C.H. Robinson, "Impressionism in Canada" *The Canadian Art Investors' Guide* 6, no.3 (1980): 36.

some of the most progressive artists in Toronto at the beginning of the twentieth century were women.[43]

Another account of the same subject is Paul Duval's *Canadian Impressionism* (1990) which reproduces two of Muntz's paintings in colour.[44] Duval's book offers the reader both perceptive comments on Muntz's work and a fairly comprehensive biography. In the informative introductory essay the author describes the chauvinistic atmosphere faced by the Canadian women who travelled to the ateliers of Europe in search of an artistic education, and concludes that "it is not surprising that the women artists sought out the companionship of fellow women artists for friendship and mutual support."[45] He mentions Helen McNicoll's friendship with the British painter Dorothea Sharp, and Muntz's close association with the American Wilhelmina Hawley.

Seminal studies such as Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj's exhibition and publication *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (1975) initiated the revival of historical Canadian women artists (Laura Muntz among them) in the same way that Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin's *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (1976) advanced the study of American and European women. The recovery of forgotten names, biographical information and images that these exhibitions and catalogues provided established the much-needed foundation for a more theoretical consideration of historical women's participation in visual culture. But the work of the many professional

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[42] Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) 160.

[43] Reid mentions Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles, Mary Hiester Reid, Sidney Strickland Tully and Clara Hagarty. "Impressionism in Canada," *World Impressionism: The International Movement, 1860-1920*. Norma Broude, ed. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990) 111.

[44] The paintings reproduced are *The Children's Hour*, c. 1897 and *The Pink Dress*, 1897. Paul Duval, *Canadian Impressionism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990) 50-53. An earlier exhibition and publication which dealt with Canadian Impressionists is Joan Murray's *Impressionism in Canada 1895-1935* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1973). Murray reproduces one of Muntz's Parisian canvases in colour -- *Girl in Sunlight* -- which is the same painting that Paul Duval (who owns the painting) retitled *The Pink Dress*, and a lesser-known work in black and white, the Edmonton Art Gallery's *Mother and Child*, c.1895.

artists who practiced in Canada during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, brought to public attention by projects such as Farr and Luckyj's, has yet to be re-examined from a contemporary, theoretical perspective. This thesis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the work of one artist of the period and help to dispel two common perceptions: that women's artistic production is always rooted in autobiography (the image as a "diary in paint"), and that historical women artists, particularly those from the relatively unsophisticated cultural milieu of nineteenth-century Canada, simply reproduced the environment that was deemed their proper "sphere" without engaging with deeper issues.

Issues, Aims and Method

Twentieth-century histories of Canadian art have maintained the traditional art-historical model which privileges biography, stylistic analysis, an "explanatory" historical background and a determinant masculine perspective. If more wide-ranging and inclusive models of writing about the visual arts are to emerge, the historian should consider the interconnections of categories such as gender, class, race and colour as integral aspects of the politics of artistic production. To this end, I have taken into account various social and cultural discourses at play in English Canada, the United States and France (specifically in Ontario, Boston and Paris) in the last decades of the nineteenth century, which in my view situated Laura Muntz's work in a significant context. Although current theories of gender form the framework of my analyses, throughout my discussion I have remained close to the image. It must be stressed,

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[45] Duval 9.

however, that although the seemingly trivial formal detail can signal a more complex direction of study, as indeed is the case in my examination of Muntz's *Madonna and Child*, an analysis of form and style is only the starting point to a meaningful interpretation.

In a recent publication on the various representations of women in nineteenth-century French art, Linda Nochlin reminds us once again that each particular art-historical investigation demands a "different set of strategies." Nochlin stresses the need for a flexible approach to each specific problem or situation, and recommends a method of procedure in the spirit of Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of "bricolage" or Clifford Geertz's expressive term "zigging and zagging."[46] These notions are similar to Rosi Braidotti's idea of "nomadic subjectivity" which encourages the practice of a fluid, figurative way of thinking, and resists conventional systems of analysis which pursue definitive explanations and are thereby inclined to value exclusivity and closure. In my own work on Laura Muntz I have tried to mobilize theoretical approaches such as Braidotti's, in large part because of my conviction that women's participation in the artistic discourses of the day was negotiated through an intricate network of both material and psychological causes, and consequently requires similarly multi-faceted types of inquiry. Images and their makers contain contradictory meanings, just as the ideologies from which they arise are conflicted and unstable.

Although poststructuralist ideas involve diverse theories produced by very different personalities, they nevertheless have certain characteristics in common, which may be related to the methodological approaches outlined above. It can be suggested that a poststructuralist perspective attempts to discredit the idea of progress born of

Enlightenment philosophy, and that it is wary of universalism in any guise -- as Jane Flax describes it, poststructuralism is "skeptical about the ideas concerning truth, knowledge, power, history, self, and language that are often taken for granted [...] and serve as legitimations for contemporary Western culture."[47] Marsha Meskimmon's wide-ranging analysis of women's self-portraiture in the twentieth century, itself indebted to Braidotti's writings on female subjectivity, coincides with my own perceptions regarding the nature of Laura Muntz's engagement with her art. Like Meskimmon, I have approached my material from a poststructuralist position which "seeks models of subjectivity which permit contradiction and tension within individuals. [Poststructuralism] anticipates that individuals shift between positions and provides a means by which these fluid identities can still be examined critically."[48]

Chapter 1 deals with Laura Muntz's family background, as well as her studies in Toronto and abroad. Within the parameters of the years bounded by her first art lessons in Hamilton and her return to Toronto after almost a decade in Paris, I present relevant biographical data, and discuss a variety of themes that have as their common focus a rejection of, in Rosi Braidotti's words, "both the traditional vision of the subject as universal, neutral, or gender-free and the binary logic that sustains it."[49] An analysis of Muntz's early copy-work demonstrates the ways in which she significantly altered her models (in particular those of Lucius R. O'Brien, one of her first teachers) and, in the process, undermined conventional views of femininity. An examination of the practice of copying, in the nineteenth century strongly gendered as feminine, introduces my

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[46] Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999) 10.

[47] Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 29.

[48] Meskimmon 13.

contention that from the very beginning of her artistic exploration, Muntz reworked pictorial conventions in order to subvert restrictive masculine representations of women's roles. This chapter also considers Muntz's art education in Toronto, her extended studies at the Académie Colarossi in Paris, her close friendship and artistic collaboration with the American painter Wilhelmina Douglas Hawley, and the strategies for social and economic survival that were necessary for the woman artist who wished to remain independent. An important section of this chapter addresses the implications of gender in the critical reception of work by women, and, centred around the reception of Muntz's paintings, investigates the different ways in which this discursive formation was articulated both in France and in Canada.

Chapter 2 examines the contemporary discourses which contoured the category of motherhood in Canada at the end of the century. My argument centres around one of Muntz's paintings, *Madonna and Child*, which, despite its title, should be understood as representing neither a purely Christian theme nor as being exclusively concerned with the related subject of maternity. I suggest that the image can be taken as a symptom of the ambiguity and contradiction which characterized the *fin-de-siècle*, and may more aptly be re-titled *Madonna/Mother/Death and Child.* Through a discussion which weaves in the discourses of hereditarianism and the social purity movement, both of which posited motherhood as crucial to their success, I demonstrate how Muntz's image can be read as a problematization of the ideas of comfort, stability, and "salvation" associated with the secular mother. Drawing on theories of femininity by writers such as Rosi Braidotti, Elisabeth Bronfen and Julia Kristeva, I also trace the associations of

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[49] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 174.

femininity with death. I examine the concept of death as an unrepresentable notion and a disruption of rational thought, and through a location of it in the work which serves as my case study. I show that artistic products are not simply reflections of discursive historical contexts, but are organically constituted through a web of psychological and material interactions. Guided by Braidotti's insight into the links between the female (and especially the maternal) body and the nineteenth-century "science" of teratology, Kristeva's notion of abjection, and Bronfen's thesis that both death and femininity were perceived as sites of instability and ambivalence, I argue that Muntz pictured maternity as ambiguous and multiple, thereby challenging the contemporary perception of the "natural" wholeness of the mother and child unit. The discursive positioning of women as tenuous and borderline and a deviation from the male norm leads me to examine multiple expressions of femininity imbedded in Muntz's depictions of motherhood -- from the ideal selfless mother promoted by eugenics to woman as the predatory sexual vampire.

Chapter 3 explores the threads which connect *Protection*, one of Laura Muntz's self-proclaimed "symbolic subjects," to both European Symbolism and its American manifestations. Several themes then current in American artistic culture, particularly in the Boston School of painters, are examined for their influence on constructions of art and gender in the decades around the turn of the century. These issues include the feminization of American culture; capitalism and the notion of conspicuous consumption; formulations of bourgeois femininity as passive, decorative, and idle; the paradoxical yet simultaneous antimaterialist strain which ran through aesthetic discourses of the period; women viewed as signifiers of culture and positioned as an

antidote to the harsh masculine world of commerce and competitiveness; and the equivalence of beauty, purity and femininity as a meaningful New World contrast to the darker notions of femininity expressed in European Symbolist art.

The role of the mother in *Protection* is conflated with that of the protective angel, but again Muntz's particular expression does not permit a conventional or one-dimensional reading of the figure. Pictured as an intensely embodied female characterized by lushness and passion, the winged figure undermines the expectations of ethereal womanhood in the tradition of the Victorian "angel in the house." She averts her eyes from the death-like pallor of the children she cradles, a powerful referent to the urgent problem of infant mortality, and leads the viewer away from the comfort of the maternal gaze and into the unsettling and mysterious realms of the Symbolist imagination. I outline the affinities which this image has with the work of the Boston School of artists, in particular George Fuller and Abbott Thayer, and situate Muntz (who is known to have exhibited her work in New York) as conversant with the social and artistic discourses of not only France, where she completed the better part of her artistic education, but of North America as well. In both chapters 2 and 3, an important aim has been to show how the symbolic images of women and children, specifically in *Madonna and Child* and *Protection*, disrupt the accepted boundaries of the domestic and the maternal and allow the inconsistencies of prescribed femininity, always already present in any social constructions, to emerge through the image.

The conclusion restates the relevance of Laura Muntz's complex and alternative perceptions of femininity to the history of Canadian art, and suggests future directions for study. I offer guidelines for an examination of the links between Muntz's portrait and

symbolic subjects and the pictorialist photographers who practiced in Canada, Europe, and the United States. Pictorialist images favoured the subjects that also consistently reappeared in Muntz's work -- mothers, children, madonnas, angels, wistful moods and symbolic references. A particularly promising topic of research presents itself in the investigation of the close personal and artistic relationship which Muntz maintained with the Canadian pictorialist photographer and writer on the arts, Harold Mortimer Lamb.

Muntz had, as well, an enduring interest in Dutch life and Dutch subjects, having taught art to Canadian students in Holland over several summers. The North American public had a singular enthusiasm for Dutch art of both the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, and patrons in Montreal and Toronto were notably avid collectors of Dutch subjects. Women's art associations held exhibits of Dutch paintings produced by both European and Canadian artists, which, because of their natural and innocent themes, were thought to be particularly appealing to the female viewers of the time. These bucolic images of virtue and domestic contentment served a nostalgia for the perceived innocence of a pre-industrial past and coincided with the values of the middle-class homes for which they were largely intended.

Domesticity, virtue and femininity were coterminous notions within the prevailing constructions of femininity at the turn of the century, and were played out in various ways in contemporary discourses. Laura Muntz's understanding of female subjectivity was formulated by the tensions between her own independent, professional life and the imposed, restrictive definitions of womanhood current in her time. The monumental figures of women in the Symbolist paintings examined in this thesis suggest, to the viewer at the end of the twentieth century, the difficulty of formulating a

female subjective position at all, in a world constructed as masculine -- as Marsha Meskimmon expresses it, "in trying to speak with a woman's voice in a male language."[50]

[50] Meskimmon 7.

CHAPTER ONE

BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS 1860-1898

Family and Early Years (1860 - 1880)

Laura Muntz was born 18 June 1860 near the village of Radford Semele, Warwickshire, England, the second child and first daughter of Eugene Gustavus Muntz (1836-1911) and Emma Louise Muntz (1837-1920), who were first cousins. She was baptized 29 November 1860 and although the record shows "Adelaide" as her second Christian name, most other sources, including her will, indicate that her name was Laura Adeline.[51] The family included two other daughters and three sons: Herbert Adolphe (b. 1859), Eugenie Beatrice (b.1861, Montreux, Switzerland), Rupert Gustavus (b. 1863), Mina Ida (b.1865), and George Harold (b.1866), all but Eugenie born at Radford Semele. The youngest child was baptized in 1867 in Holy Trinity Church, Paddington, London and it is probable that the family had been living in London while preparing to emigrate. In later years the artist recalled her first memories of London, recounting how at six years of age she loved to draw the children she had met in Hyde Park.[52] At fifty years of age, Muntz stated that her fondest remembrance of England was the outing that she made with her mother to a painting exhibition at the Crystal Palace: "She could not be dragged away. That visit shaped the course of her life. Thenceforth her one thought and ambition was to paint pictures."[53]

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[51] On Muntz's marriage certificate, however, the name "Adelaide" falsely reappears.

[52] Marjory MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day is the Delight of Miss Muntz," *Toronto Star* (11 July 1914).

[53] M. J. Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work," *The Canadian Century* (June 1910): 13.

The Muntzes were wealthy Anglicans whose ancestry traced back to Poland and Georges Louis Muntz, who in 1584 married the Lithuanian Fredericka von Hohenhausen Starost. Political circumstances forced the Muntzes out of Poland at the end of the sixteenth century and, with their property confiscated, they took refuge first in Saxony and then in Alsace, which at that time was a department of France. It can be assumed that eventually the Muntz family regained some of its former wealth and status, since seven generations later, in 1806, Jean Georges Guillaume Muntz was guillotined as a Royalist. His younger brother, Philippe Frederic, managed to escape, first, it is said, to Amsterdam, and eventually to England where he married Catherine Purden, heiress of Robert Purden of Radford Semele.[54]

In England, the Muntz men acquired land and wealth, and both of Laura's grandfathers appeared in *Burke's Landed Gentry*. Philippe Frederic, the artist's great-grandfather, owned a factory at Birmingham during the Industrial Revolution and profited from the manufacture of metals.[55] His eldest son, George Frederick Muntz, acquired a 1100 acre estate named "Umberslade Hall," was made a baronet and served as the Liberal Member of Parliament for his riding.[56] Philip Albert Muntz, a younger brother of Laura Muntz's father, also received a baronetcy in 1902, in recognition of his service to agriculture, and in the same year was re-elected to Parliament as a Conservative.

George Frederick died in 1857, and, as custom and law demanded, left his seat in Warwickshire to his eldest son. Since Eugene Gustavus (Laura's father, the sixth of eight

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[54] Madelein Muntz believes that Philippe Frederic came to England, via Amsterdam, as early as 1783.

[55] He developed an alloy of copper and zinc (still known as Muntz's Metal) which could withstand the corrosion of sea water, and which consequently was used as sheathing on wooden sailing ships, including the *Cutty Sark*.

children) was a younger son he did not inherit the family estate, and although he must have led a life of relative ease as a gentleman farmer, like many Englishmen of the upper classes who were not in a direct line of inheritance, he decided to emigrate. Eugene Gustavus most likely took advantage of the various land grant schemes available in the colonies, becoming what was known as a "remittance man". This term signified the acquisition of land with financial assistance from family in the old country, and indeed Laura's father is described as "Funded Proprietor" in the Land Registry office in Bracebridge, Ontario. The family first settled on the shore of Lake Simcoe in Orillia Township, where they remained from c. 1870-72, after which time they moved to the Muskoka region of Ontario. By 1876 they were the owners of a large parcel of land, measuring more than 657 acres, called "Maple Grove Farm." The property, about ten miles from the town of Bracebridge, included fields, woods, a lake, and an extensive shoreline at the mouth of the Muskoka river. The area was known as Alport, named after the New Zealand emigrant from whom the Muntzes had bought the property. In Augustus James Alport's hands the farm had been known as the best in Muskoka, but it did not continue to profit during ownership by the Muntzes. Eugene Gustavus was not suited to, and evidently had no interest in, the rigorous labour that nineteenth-century Ontario farming required. A newspaper article about Laura Muntz, dated 1914, refers to her father's unsuitability for settlement life.

> Like many other Englishmen of his class, Miss Muntz' father came to Canada meaning to farm somewhat in the same fashion as a country squire does in England. There would be hunting and fishing, and riding, and the rich farmland would, somehow, look after itself [...] What a disillusionment farming life in

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[56] Family history records that George Frederick had another claim to fame -- he is said to have invented the perforated postage stamp.

> Muskoka must have been to these people who knew only the orderly, easy, agreeable aspects of country life in England [57]

The article includes many other details of Laura Muntz's life, which at this date could only have been known through conversation with the artist herself. One can only guess whether the undertone of sarcasm which accompanies the journalist's comment about Eugene Gustavus' genteel ways was also Muntz's tone when recounting her father's attitudes. That Eugene Muntz retained the look of a European gentleman is confirmed by a portrait of him painted by his daughter.[58]

It appears as if the Muntzes were in general unwilling to abandon old-world ways. Their farmhouse in Muskoka is said to have had French doors, totally unsuitable to the climate, and a descendant of the family still owns a French pink-and-white porcelain and ormolu clock, with two matching compote dishes, supposed to have been saved from the fire which destroyed the main house at Alport in c. 1883. This unfortunate event caused Laura's parents to return to England for two years (c. 1883-85), after which time they returned to Canada to settle in the more compatible milieu of Toronto.[59]

The boys in the family were educated at Upper Canada College, Toronto's most prestigious school: Herbert, the eldest, from 1873-74, Rupert from 1876-78, and Harold, the youngest son, from 1880-84. It should be noted that at a time when most children, boys as well as girls, left school at a relatively early age, two of the Muntz boys

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[57] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[58] I am conjecturing that this painting, reproduced without title in Toronto's *Saturday Night*, 13, no. 19 (24 March 1900): 9, is a portrait of Eugene Gustavus Muntz. A typed sheet (unsigned and undated) listing the paintings by Laura Muntz which at one time belonged to family members Laura Muntz Barton and Muriel Muntz is in the Muntz file at the Hamilton Gallery of Art. The second entry on this list identifies a "Portrait of Eugene Muntz, Laura Muntz's father, not signed. Oil, with dog beside man. Measurement without frame: 26" x 26"." The proportions correspond to the reproduced painting.

[59] The farm, minus 100 acres, was sold soon afterwards to the Beaumont family, also English emigrants, whose descendants have continued to run it successfully to the present day. The Muntz's eldest son, Herbert Adolphe, had been given 100 acres of the property upon his twenty-first birthday, which he subdivided and sold as lots c. 1890. He

continued their schooling until fifteen years of age, and the third to eighteen. As late as 1919, between 80 and 90 percent of girls stopped their schooling at fourteen, and the percentage for boys, employable outside the home, was even higher.[60] Evidently the Muntzes valued an academic education for their sons, surely being aware that attending the "right" school facilitated entry into the dominant circles of society. Like many others of their time and social class, the Muntz girls were presumably instructed by tutors, although the Simcoe County census records of 1871 and 1881 do not show any tutors living with the family. Sometime between 1879 and 1880 Laura Muntz met William Charles Forster (1816-1902), a drawing master for the Hamilton Public Schools, from which he retired in 1901.[61] Forster had emigrated from Dublin with his wife and family in 1868, after having trained under his father as a lithographer and gem engraver. He took up his post in the Hamilton Schools almost immediately after his arrival, and a landscape dating from that time shows a competent, though stiff and meticulous, style.[62] Forster is said to have noticed Muntz while she was out sketching in a canoe on the Muskoka River, and, recognizing her potential, encouraged her to come to Hamilton to further her studies under his instruction. This she did from 1881 until the autumn of 1882.[63]

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remained on the land after the fire, and stayed on for a further two or three years after the sale, before leaving Ontario to settle as a rancher in Alberta.

[60] Marjorie MacMurchy, "Women of To-day and To-morrow," *The Canadian Magazine* 53, no. 2 (June 1919): 157.

[61] Several sources have mistakenly cited J. W. L. Forster (1850 - 1938) as Muntz's teacher, for example Dorothy Farr and Natalie Luckyj, *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada* (Kingston: Queen's University, 1975) 28. The error is understandable since he was a slightly older contemporary of Muntz's and a prominent Toronto portrait painter.

[62] *The Hamilton Spectator*, 7 December 1967: 96.

[63] References to Forster's "discovery" of Muntz are found in: M. J. Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work" (1910); MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day" (1914); Irene B. Hare, "Close-ups of Toronto's Women Artists," *Sunday World* (13 July 1924).
Most sources, including the record left by Marie Douglas, Forster's granddaughter and lifelong friend of Laura Muntz, state that Muntz's first lessons in art were with Forster, c. 1881. Mrs. Peter Douglas (Marie Douglas), Laura Muntz Lyall file, Hamilton Public Library Archives. The date of 1881-82 is also cited in Margaret Fallis, *Laura Muntz Lyall A.R.C.A.*

Hamilton and Toronto (1881 - 1891)

Muntz's decision to leave home in order to study painting met with parental opposition. This attitude was the socially conventional one, since as a rule women were expected to marry and raise a family. There were few professions open to women at this time, in part as a consequence of early nineteenth-century social constructions of middle-class femininity which positioned women as being naturally unsuited to sustained physical or mental activity. Although art had always been appreciated as a feminine accomplishment, it was considered neither a socially proper nor a financially secure choice of profession for a daughter of a bourgeois family. Nevertheless, middle-class women did pursue artistic careers, often out of economic necessity, either when a father was unable to support the family or in cases where the woman remained unmarried. From the mid-century on, feminist discourses provided some resistance to the exclusion of women from professional practice, and although it was mostly in the case of artist-families that women's careers were actively encouraged, nevertheless "daughters of merchants, manufacturers, lawyers, civil servants, doctors, bankers, writers and politicians became artists."[64] In the later decades of the century certain professions, such as teaching, were deemed socially acceptable since they were seen as an extension of woman's maternal role.

The Canadian photographer and writer on the arts Harold Mortimer Lamb (1872-1970), a devoted friend of Muntz's for much of her life, referred to her parents' wariness

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1860-1930, Masters Thesis, Ottawa: Carleton University, 1985: 19. Only Madelein Muntz believes that Muntz did not study in Hamilton until in 1884, after attending the Ontario School of Art and Design in Toronto.

[64] Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (Routledge: London, 1993) 26.

of her early passion for drawing. In his column in the British art magazine *The Studio* he narrated these events in a romantic tone.

> Miss Laura Muntz was brought up on a Muskoka farm, far away from civilisation and artistic influences. Her childhood and youth were passed in the patient performances of the daily routine and drudgery which fall to the lot of a farmer's daughter in unsettled districts, and her wild desires to express her poetical thoughts and imaginings, her inclinations to draw or sketch in or out of season, were regarded by her relatives with disquiet, as indicating traits of character requiring discipline or correction.[65]

Marjorie MacMurchy's article of 1914, ostensibly written in conversation with the artist, tells a similar tale.

> She [Muntz] says herself, that it seemed to her a queer muddle of a world, full of grown-up people who could paint all day, but did not, a neglect of a heaven-sent opportunity which was absolutely incomprehensible to the child who wanted to paint all day and was not allowed.[66]

The typology of the "misunderstood artist" is a familiar one, and one should not be too hasty in imagining a young life characterized by hardship. Another contemporary account, which also quotes the artist's own words, interprets Muntz's childhood environment in a positive light, and suggests a more prosaic reason for her parents' curtailment of at least her very early artistic efforts.

> Luckily, Miss Muntz's father did not bring his family into the trim ugliness of town. He took up a farm in the beautiful wilds of Muskoka... Miss Muntz cannot remember a time when she could not draw. She laughingly states that her first style was an unconventional frescoing of the walls and the furniture of her home. I am afraid the artistic development was not much encouraged in that direction.[67]

The contemporary press uniformly characterized Muntz as an independent-minded woman intent on achieving her goals. It is not known whether Muntz's family

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[65] Harold Mortimer Lamb, "Studio-Talk," 161. Mortimer Lamb chose Laura Muntz as the subject for this his first column that he wrote for *The Studio*. He continued to send reviews of Canadian exhibitions and his comments on Canadian painters to *The Studio* until 1920.
My thanks to Ariane Isler-de Jongh (Victoria, B.C.) for providing me with a copy of her unpublished biography of Mortimer Lamb.

[66] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[67] Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work."

were unable to finance her studies, or whether they were simply unwilling to do so, but in either circumstance she remained undeterred. A modern author believes that Eugene and Emma Muntz did indeed oppose their daughter's ambition, but "luckily [they] failed to reform her and, after coming of age, she said goodbye to the farm and moved to Hamilton."[68] Marjorie MacMurchy's account supports the probability that Muntz could only leave home when Forster offered to teach her without payment, and it is likely that Muntz resided with the Forsters at least during the early days of her stay in Hamilton. Yet MacMurchy's article also emphasizes Muntz's determination to pay her own way, and communicates the young artist's resolve to forge both an independent life and a professional career.

> He [Forster] offered to give her tuition if she would come to his classes in Hamilton. Miss Muntz, however, has always possessed marked independence of character. The hazard of fortunes in Canada, perhaps, had convinced her that it was the duty of everyone to be self-supporting. She attended Mr. Forster's classes, and after a short period, began to teach pupils herself. Her disposition is eager, impetuous, and expressive. She is naturally inclined to share with others her own ideas of the art which she loves so entirely. Those who have heard her teach a class must have noticed how clear, definite, and authoritative are her explanations. Her habit of mind is to be certain rather than in doubt, and this in itself is part of the equipment of a teacher. It is not to be wondered at that Miss Muntz began to teach when she was very young.[69]

Muntz's early years of study and teaching in Ontario are poorly documented. The exact length of her apprenticeship with Forster is unknown, and is further complicated by the fact that she moved repeatedly between Hamilton and Toronto until her first trip to Paris in 1891. Several members of her family resided in Toronto, and she must have

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[68] Stuart MacCuaig, *Climbing the Cold White Peaks: A Survey of Artists in and from Hamilton, 1910-1950* (Hamilton: The Hamilton Artists' Inc., 1986) 42. Sources vary as to the exact date of Muntz's first meeting with Forster. If the year was 1879 or 1880 (Fallis, 19), then MacCuaig's view that Muntz had to wait until 1881 and legal adulthood is plausible. Marie Douglas records that teacher and pupil met only in 1881.

[69] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

spent a significant amount of time with them.[70] Marie Douglas, Forster's granddaughter, locates the artist with the Forsters throughout 1881-83, and records that Muntz later spent several winters living in the home of Douglas' mother, Forster's daughter.[71] By c. 1883, Muntz was studying by day and teaching art classes in the evenings.[72] By 1888 she had opened her own studio in Hamilton, above Thompson's Artists' Emporium on King Street overlooking Gore Park, where she continued to give lessons.[73]

Almost no work remains from Muntz's first years in Hamilton. Some quaint examples that have survived are the miniatures she painted for an elaborately furnished doll's house belonging to the Forsters.[74] The doll's house contained portraits of five generations of the family, one of which boasts having been painted by Charles Grey, court painter to Queen Victoria. Forster himself painted a self-portrait as well as likenesses of his wife and three children, while Laura Muntz contributed a kitten's head for the upstairs hall, and a child's portrait which hung in the doll house dining room.[75]

Children formed the subject of Muntz's work throughout her career -- from her first memories of sketching in England, to the last summer of her life, when she wrote to a friend about the hard luck of having missed three commissioned children's portraits

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[70] Muntz's parents returned to Toronto from abroad in 1886, taking up residence with her brother Harold at 28 Cecil Street. In 1884 her sister Ida married Charles William Bayley Lyall, and the couple lived in Toronto as well. 1888 saw Muntz's parents and brothers Harold and Rupert resident at 211 Beverley Street, and the Toronto City Census of 1891 shows the family's move to 235 Beverley Street, where they remained until Eugene Gustavus' death in 1911. The 1891 census lists Laura Muntz as a resident of that address, along with her parents, one sister and one brother. Information courtesy of Madelein Muntz.

[71] Muntz was in Hamilton 1881-83; 1886 in Toronto with her family; July and August 1888 in Owen Sound with the Douglas (Forster's daughter) family; July 1889 in Toronto, with the Forster family November 1889, and again in 1890 until the fall of 1891. Laura Muntz Lyall file, Hamilton Public Library Archives, notes compiled by Marie Douglas, 1961

[72] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day." Also Marie Douglas notes, Hamilton Public Library.

[73] MacCuaig 42; Fallis 15.

[74] The Forster doll house formed part of the exhibition "Hamilton Collects," Art Gallery of Hamilton, 1962.

[75] Art Gallery of Hamilton Scrapbook of Clippings, vol. 2 1956-67. 218. Hamilton Public Library, Reference Collection. There exist two other miniatures by Muntz -- oval, oil-on-ivory portraits of Emma Louise and George Frederick, Muntz's mother and brother. Laura Muntz Lyall file, Art Gallery of Hamilton, unsigned, undated list of works belonging to Laura Muntz Barton and Muriel Muntz, nos. 11 and 20. In my possession is a photograph of the miniature of Muntz's mother. The image of the bust-length portrait of a smiling woman wearing a white headdress falling over one shoulder is grainy and unclear, but it looks to be an early work, most likely dating to the 1880's.

because of her ill health.[76] One of the earliest examples of Muntz's work, a watercolour signed and dated 19 October 1882, shows the heads of two young girls looking over a fence (Fig. 1.1). MacMurchy's article of 1914 describes it as a painting "done by Miss Muntz, when she was very young, before she had any instruction." This observation is substantiated by Muntz's thick application of the watercolours, resulting in an opacity associated more with oils than with the natural transparency of the medium, although the degree of finish and relative competence of handling shows her to have been a skilled amateur. The intention of the image of "two little girls, as sweet as flowers"[77] was to represent "Happy Childhood," the title with which it was later reproduced in a magazine.[78] MacMurchy also informed the reader that the identity of the little girls was that of the artist herself and her sister Eugenie, and that "this early example of Miss Muntz' genius for painting pictures of childhood is treasured by her mother."[79] It is possible that Muntz may have been inspired at this early age by the work of the British children's book illustrator, Kate Greenaway (1846-1901). Greenaway's drawings of innocent and charming children had appeared in magazines such as *Cassells* and the *Illustrated London News* throughout the 1870s, and along with her designs for greeting cards and coloured plates for the children's books which were widely distributed by the

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[76] Letter to Marie Douglas, 24 September 1930. Muntz Collection, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dorset County Museum, England.

[77] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[78] Newspaper or magazine clipping, in colour, source and date unknown, but dating after 1915, since the artist is given as Laura Muntz Lyall. (Metro Toronto Library, Artist file for Laura Muntz Lyall) Below the image is written "Courtesy of the T. Eaton Co. Ltd. Fine Art Galleries, College Street," which suggests that it was part of an exhibition there, but was not in the possession of the company. The watercolour had remained in the family, first with Muntz's mother, then passing to Anita Lyall, Muntz's niece and stepdaughter. Art Gallery of Hamilton, Muntz file, "Pictures of Laura Muntz belonging to Mrs. R.P. Wright, nee Anita Lyall," no. 11. The compilation of the lists of Muntz's paintings was done in the 1960's, at a time when the Hamilton librarian Freda F. Waldon was gathering information for a book on Laura Muntz. No publication resulted.

[79] The painting was exhibited with the title *Laura and Eugenie Muntz* in the Art Gallery of Ontario (The Grange) Exhibition of Laura Muntz's portraits, *Toronto Children at the Turn of the Century*, 15 March - 25 April, 1976.

end of the decade, they may very well have had an impact on the young Canadian artist.[80]

With encouragement from Forster, the next stage of Muntz's education took place at the newly re-opened Ontario School of Art in Toronto, where she studied during the fall of 1882 and winter of 1883.[81] The establishment of a school of art in Toronto had been an objective of the Ontario Society of Artists from the very foundation of their group in 1872. On 30 October 1876, they opened the doors of the first Ontario School of Art, situated on the skylit second floor of a building at 14 King Street West. The school followed the curriculum of the South Kensington School of Art and Design in London, which was known for its emphasis on the practical application of art.

On 10 October 1882, the Ontario School of Art moved its location from King Street to the larger premises of the Education Department Buildings (known also as the Toronto Normal School) on St. James Square. It continued to be directed by a committee from the Ontario Society of Artists, with the inclusion of one representative from the Ontario Department of Education. The curriculum of the new school gave priority to drawing in its various forms, to industrial design, as well as to teacher training.[82] It is at the School's new buildings that Laura Muntz took drawing classes with William Cruikshank (1849-1922), who had studied at the Royal Scottish Academy, the Royal Academy in London under Leighton and Millais, and at the Paris academy of a painter of historical subjects. He was an extremely skilled draughtsman and a demanding

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[80] For an informative introduction to Kate Greenaway's work, see Kristina Huneault in Delia Gaze, ed., *Dictionary of Women Artists* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997) vol. 1, 610-13.

[81] Marie Fleming and John R. Taylor, *Ontario College of Art: 100 Years' Evolution of the Ontario College of Art* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1976) 70.

[82] Fleming 11.

teacher, and his instruction must have been an exciting challenge to Muntz after the comparatively limited abilities of W. C. Forster.

A small graphite drawing dated 8 July 1884, inscribed in Muntz's own hand with the title *Little Em'ly and David Copperfield* (Fig. 1.2), shows that she had progressed from the very simple composition and rigid draughtsmanship of *Happy Childhood*. She continues to choose childish innocence as her theme, foregoing the more melodramatic possibilities of Charles Dickens' tale, to describe a quiet scene of a shy and still-virtuous Em'ly as the object of David's affection. Muntz seems to concentrate her efforts on setting the subjects in an atmospheric background, and although the rendering of the figures still demonstrates a certain awkwardness, the interior of the room is handled in a much more confident and sketchy style. Cruikshank had been a prolific illustrator for magazines such as *Cassells*, the *London Graphic* and *Scribner's*,[83] and his work was highly valued by the commercial markets. The Toronto periodical *The Week* stated in 1891 that "the value of Cruikshank's illustration does not decrease. At a recent sale in London a copy of Carey's "Life in Paris," with 20 coloured plates (one having been torn out) and 22 woodcuts from Cruikshank's designs, was sold for nearly $45."[84] Although he was best known at the Ontario School of Art as a teacher of drawing from antique objects, his proficiency in illustration most likely informed his teaching method. In general, most artists in the young Dominion included illustration in their production, both as a way of augmenting their income, and as a means of presenting their art to a

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[83] Russel Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1977) 216. Harper considered Cruikshank to be "one of the greatest yet least appreciated nineteenth-century painters in Canada."
[84] "Art Notes," *The Week* 8, no.46 (16 October 1891): 738.

wider public.[85] The Ontario School of Art's stress on the practical applications of art further encouraged such interests, and the roots of Muntz's recurrent references to the styles of contemporary illustration may be traced to this time. Her drawing based on an episode from *David Copperfield* is, after all, an illustration itself. Dickens was a particular favourite of illustrators at the end of the century and continued to be so into the next. In 1913 the publication in England of a new portfolio merited a short article of its own in Toronto's *Saturday Night* magazine: "Pictures of famous characters from the novels of Charles Dickens are always popular...Dickens has from the very first been fortunate in his illustrators."[86]

Muntz allied art and popular literature once again in her painting *In the Wide, Wide World* (image and location unknown), which she exhibited with the Ontario Society of Artists in 1891.[87] *In the Wide, Wide World* was also the title of the first of the many best-selling domestic novels of the nineteenth century aimed specifically towards a female audience. Written by the New York author Sylvia Warner in 1850, it remained popular throughout the century.[88] The story recounts the trials that Ellen Montgomery, an innocent child, is forced to undergo "in the wide, wide world" of the contemporary urban and aggressive American way of life. Warner's narrative explores the interaction of the themes of gender, religion and the new materialism, but it is likely that Muntz's image coincided with the contemporary understanding and appeal of the story, and, at least on the surface, concentrated on the dramatic possibilities of the little girl's plight. It

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[85] One of the best known illustrators in Toronto was Lucius O'Brien, whose major commission in the years 1880-1884 was the illustration of the American publication *Picturesque Canada*. It was in fact the financial success of this project that finally decided O'Brien, at the age of fifty, to devote himself full-time to a career in art. Dennis Reid, *Lucius R. O'Brien: Visions of Victorian Canada* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1990) 53.

[86] "Illustrations of Dickens," *Saturday Night* (21 June 1913): 11.

[87] The Saturday Art Supplement to the *Mail*, 1, no. 5, 1893.

should be noted, as well, that with the exception of the portrait commissions (of boys as well as girls) from the very beginning of her studies to the end of her career Muntz's work centered almost exclusively around a female subject.

The Fairy Tale (Fig. 1.3), painted in the second year of Muntz's Parisian study, is a much more accomplished example of her early work, but it still bears references to contemporary book and magazine illustration. The narrative subject shows a group of children seated on the floor of an attic, engrossed in the story that one of them reads aloud. The picture's charm lies in the almost clandestine atmosphere of the innocent pastime, and in the artist's subtle communication of the enchanted world that children so easily inhabit. A gentle humour is added in the portrayal of the young reader in a parental role. The fact that it is a mother-figure, and not a father, that functions as the core of this representation illustrates Muntz's continued preference for childhood themes that centred on a female subject. *The Fairy Tale* was the first painting that Muntz showed with the Royal Canadian Academy, in the Annual Exhibition of 1893, and it was subsequently chosen to form part of the Canadian section at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in the same year. Shortly thereafter it appeared as an engraving in the art supplement to the Toronto *Mail* (1893) and it can be argued that *The Fairy Tale's* broad popular appeal was rooted in its reference to the accessible and familiar genre of illustration.

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[88] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) 62. I discuss this story in greater

The Significance of Copies

An article in *The Canadian Century*, dated 1910, mentions Muntz's studies with a very well known Toronto artist: "After exhausting the art instruction possibilities of Hamilton, she went to Toronto to take lessons from L. Richard O'Brien at the old School of Arts in King street."[89] O'Brien had been a major figure in the Toronto art world in the second half of the nineteenth century. In his political role he was active in the promotion of art and art education, and served as the president of the Ontario Society of Artists from 1874 until 1880, at which time he was appointed as first president of the R.C.A. As a painter, O'Brien produced poetic scenes of nature that made reference both to the British landscape tradition and to the American Hudson River and Luminist models.[90]

The Ontario School of Art had moved from its old location on King Street West in 1882;[91] Laura Muntz, who had stayed with the Forsters in Hamilton throughout the summer of 1882, enrolled at the new Ontario School of Art in October of the same year. Therefore it is possible that, as the article states, O'Brien had been one of her earliest teachers, with whom she studied at the same time that she took lessons with Forster. Another possibility, however, is that the article may be mistaken in its reference to the Old School on King Street, and Muntz in fact studied with both O'Brien and Cruikshank in the new buildings in 1882-83. In any event, O'Brien's work had made an impact on the young artist, since a watercolour landscape very much in O'Brien's style is dated 1886 and is signed "L. Muntz/copy" (Fig. 1.4). Although all three of Laura Muntz's first

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detail in Chapter 3.

[89] Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work."

[90] I discuss the formative influences of O'Brien's early work in *Lucius R. O'Brien: A Victorian in North America*, Masters Thesis, Montreal, Concordia University, 1991.

[91] O'Brien continued to teach in the new premises, but resigned from his post in February1884, in protest against the

teachers had been steeped in the British tradition, it is O'Brien's name that presents itself as the most likely model for the copy. Using O'Brien's preferred medium, Muntz captures the hazy, sunlit atmosphere and delicate foliage characteristic of his work; also typical of O'Brien's sensibility is the tamed, Ruskinian view of nature, a Canadian forest turned into a parkland, its Northern location suggested only by the fallen log in the foreground. The figures in the landscape are of secondary importance, a practice consistently adopted by O'Brien, indeed when he included figures at all.

However, because there is not a single example of a major O'Brien oil or watercolour in which a woman or girl is portrayed and, conversely, because the inclusion of a human presence -- especially a female one -- is consistent with Muntz's practice, I suggest that her painting is a partial copy only, and that the bridge and the two women on it are Muntz's own additions to the scene. The surrounding view of nature in this *Landscape with a Bridge* is very much in the style of, for example, O'Brien's *Lords of the Forest* (1874, Art Gallery of Ontario). Although neither O'Brien's nor Muntz's forest is depicted as being particularly threatening, it is meant to evoke the vastness and majesty of wild nature. The theme of the grandness of nature was traditionally a masculine one and the settings employed to evoke it did not generally include women, who tended to be shown in more domestic surroundings. This gendered understanding of natural spaces was adhered to by the great majority of both male and female artists of the nineteenth century, and Muntz's painting is highly unusual in its representation of women who appear quite comfortable even though they are dwarfed by the looming forest which surrounds them. Perched high up on the suspended bridge, they do not

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excessive interference of the Department of Education in the school's curriculum. Soon after O'Brien's departure, the Ontario Society of Artists disassociated itself from the Ontario School of Art. Fleming 12.

shrink away from its edge; one woman leans on her elbows for a better view, while her friend contemplates the vastness from the other direction. To have placed only one female figure on the bridge would have altered the mood of the piece entirely, conjuring up associations of loneliness or danger. A single man in this setting, by contrast, would conventionally have been taken to symbolize philosophical themes of the grandeur of nature and man's place in it.[92] Since a solitary woman could not be substituted for the man without entirely altering the heroic associations of the theme, Muntz seems to comply with the prevailing discourses of femininity and places two female figures in the setting, with the result that, although their situation is still unusual, their combined presence serves to temper the grand associations and change them into something more benign.

The conventional social perceptions of female friendship situated it firmly in the "women's sphere" of the domestic, but it can be argued that by placing the companions in monumental natural surroundings, Muntz spoke of a specifically female experience of friendship, one which facilitated nineteenth-century women's negotiations of the restrictions placed upon them by dominant beliefs. By positioning her subjects in this particular landscape Muntz opens up the limits of the concept of "lady friends" to suggest that a sisterhood of friends allows women entry into a location normally reserved for men. Many nineteenth-century women artists depicted the theme of supportive female friendship, which served to "recast the sign woman in the exchanges

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[92] Descended from Romantic, iconic images such as Caspar David Friedrich's *The Wanderer Above the Mists* (c.1817-1818), the solitary man looking down upon the vastness before him symbolized the visionary, or the man yearning for the unattainable goal. In instances when two men were pictured above a precipice, as in the American artist Asher B. Durand's *Kindred Spirits* of 1849 (or indeed Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon*, 1819) the message is of man communing with man, but the transcendental aspects of the scene are not compromised.

and meanings of women's networks, rituals and pleasures."[93] Such representations usually pictured women indoors, in appropriately domestic spaces, but Muntz chooses to show them in a particularly heroic outdoor setting, thus further expanding the context in which femininity could be viewed.

A watercolour painted in the following year, signed and dated but with no inscription identifying it as a copy, shows a similar reconstruction of an original model. The landscape of a haymaking scene (Fig. 1.5) maintains the picturesqueness, detailed technique and atmospheric mood reminiscent of O'Brien, but Muntz uses it merely as a frame for the prominent figure of the farm girl at its centre. Although the landscape is executed in a confident and painterly way, the young woman is drawn with a less sure hand, likely because it was not a subject in which Muntz had been given much practice by her teachers. Interesting as well, is the inclusion of a second woman worker in the middle ground of the haymaking scene. The composition is so strongly focused on the principal figure who forms the subject of the painting, that the sketchily delineated form of her co-worker seems like an afterthought, as if Muntz were loath to represent a woman without a female companion, just as she had in the *Landscape with a Bridge* of the previous year.

Another pictorial source that suggests itself in the doll-like face and stilted pose of the young woman raking hay is magazine illustration. For most of the nineteenth century, illustrated periodicals had been one of the most popular sources of information for many Canadians. Although most publications originated in England and the United

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[93] Cherry 137. The subject of women's friendships is dealt with from different standpoints in many publications by feminist historians; see especially Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Carol Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985); Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage*

States, from the mid-century on the illustrated periodicals published in Canada also enjoyed a wide readership.[94] From the late 1870s on, new photomechanical printing technology allowed for less expensive reproductions of finer quality. The lavishly illustrated family, home and women's magazines, both foreign and domestic, were one of the richest sources for art-related information and images, and almost all of the literally hundreds of women's magazines which had wide circulation toward the end of the century reproduced costume and fashion plates. A particularly popular magazine with Ontario women was *Godey's Ladies Book*, published in New York. *Godey's* plates included hand-coloured steel and copper engravings or colour lithographs, and although Canadian magazines could not as a rule afford such expensive techniques, they reproduced the costume illustrations in simpler form.[95] These magazines provided the woman artist with an accessible source for the depiction of the female figure, appropriately and picturesquely clothed. Prim and lady-like, Muntz's genteel field worker is far removed from either the labouring harvest-women made popular by the French painter Jean-François Millet, or their Canadian counterparts such as Wyatt Eaton's iconic earth-mother in *The Harvest Field* of 1884 (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts). Although neither Millet's nor Eaton's constructions of women are meant to signify only the toil of peasant life, Muntz's figure is not intended to convey the idea of labour at all. Rather, she is designed to represent the freshness and charm of feminine

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Campaign, 1907-1914 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Sexuality and the Early Feminists* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

[94] Even the agricultural periodicals which were the first family magazines in Ontario were avidly read, and appreciated by women and children for their "pretty pictures." Karen McKenzie and Mary F. Williamson, *The Art and Pictorial Press in Canada: Two Centuries of Art Magazines* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1979) 12.

[95] McKenzie 15.

youth, and even the clouds part to reveal a patch of clear blue sky just above her head.[96] The effect is that of a paper doll, a modern fashion cut-out pasted onto an "artistic" background.[97]

Although copy-work had been an established part of artistic training for both sexes before the nineteenth century, the practice became more feminised and marginalised after the mid-century.[98] Modernist stress on the traditional notion of the creative male genius perpetuated the belief that originality was not the natural province of women, who were associated, rather, with the concept of reproduction, both biological and cultural. Based on the notion that reproduction was the defining characteristic of the female sex, nineteenth- and early-twentieth century writers on art promoted women as innately suited for copy work. The art historian R. H. Wilenski stated that "Women painters as everyone knows always imitate the work of some men."[99] Such overarching statements are typical of canonical art history's devaluation of women's artistic production, and as Griselda Pollock points out, even the broad notion of "influence" has always worked to women's detriment.[100] Instead of dismissing copies as unoriginal and therefore unimportant, one can recognize in them a valuable source for examining the various ways in which women participated in the artistic discourses of their time. A study of Laura Muntz's copies, and specifically her strategic manipulation

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[96] The representation also feeds into the contemporary preoccupation with nationalism and the distinction of North-American ideas from Old World ways. This issue will be discussed further in the text.

[97] It is possible that the landscape is a copy of a painting by O'Brien, since there are several extant examples done in a similar style which Muntz identified as copies.

[98] An informative summary of the practice and cultural perceptions of copies is provided in Gaze, vol. 1, "Academies of Art" 56.

[99] R. H. Wilensky, *An Introduction to Dutch Art* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1929) 93, quoted in Sarah Hyde, *Exhibiting Gender* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 78.

[100] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999) 120.

of them, can illuminate the procedure by which a young artist was exploring particular interests at the beginning of her career.

At the Ontario School of Art, students drew from still-life objects, from antique casts, and by copying old master paintings. It should be noted, as well, that copies were particularly valued in a country that had neither an established artistic tradition nor significant public art collections of its own, and consequently students often managed to make a good income by selling their copies to the public.[101] Although Muntz did produce exact copies during her years of study,[102] she also experimented with partial copies, quoting some elements from her models while rejecting others, freely altering the image and its meaning by her substitutions. Her copy (c. 1890, Fig. 1.6) of *The Signal* (Fig. 1.7) by the French artist Georges Haquette (1854-1906)[103] illustrates the significance of her choices. In Haquette's episode, a young mother attempts to signal a ship which is struggling to safety in rough weather; the drama of the narrative centres on the uncertain outcome of the woman's effort. The tense atmosphere is heightened by the little girl who clutches her mother's skirt and turns her imploring face to the viewer. Furthermore, the highly emotional state of the group on the dock indicates that it is the father of the family who is on board. The enactment of this drama implies the familiar nineteenth-century melodrama to come: destitute wife and fatherless children. Muntz systematically dismantles these Victorian myths of helpless femininity. Every object

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[101] Christine Boyanoski, *Sympathetic Realism: George A. Reid and the Academic Tradition* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1986) 13.

[102] The Lyall family own an oil copy by Laura Muntz of Titian's *Man With A Glove*. In the nineteenth century, the museums of Europe were filled with copyists, many of whom were women. Since women were discouraged from drawing from the live model, this was a necessary and valuable practice both for students and for those who earned their living from selling their copies to private collectors and to public institutions. Gaze, vol. 1, "Academies of Art," 59.

[103] Haquette had been a student of Millet and Cabanel in Paris, and afterwards a teacher of decorative arts at the *Manufacture de Sevres*. After his move to Dieppe in the 1880s he became known for his favourite subjects of seascapes and genre scenes of sailors and fishing life. Haquette's *The Signal* was reproduced in *The Canadian Magazine* 6, no.6 (April 1896).

which represented vulnerability in the former, is replaced by a symbol of potential in the latter. The menacing backdrop is now a luminous O'Brienesque scene of calm seas and limpid sky. The daughter, who, being both female and a child functioned as the sign of ultimate vulnerability in contemporary society, has been exchanged for a son. He holds his toy sailboat, the model of his future self-sufficiency and the symbol of his place in the male lineage of the family. He stands with feet planted firmly on the ground as he looks out into the world beyond. In contrast, the little girl in Haquette's image faces inward to clutch her mother's body and, because she already knows that her mother is equally helpless, turns her supplicating gaze toward the (male) viewer. The youngest child in this mother's arms merely adds to the weight of her burden, while Muntz in her version simply eliminates the babe in arms, the sign of nineteenth-century woman's dependency and domesticity, and instead makes an astonishing substitution. The young mother now holds a large fishing net and slings a basket for her catch over her shoulder. The artist has equipped her to be self-sufficient, and although her immediate future is not even threatened by a husband's death, Muntz conveys the message that this woman and her son are capable of fending for themselves.

My aim in uncovering these differences is to suggest that from the beginning of her professional life Muntz reworked pictorial conventions and subverted restrictive masculine representations of women's roles. In the case studies to follow, which closely analyze the various discourses imbedded in two of Muntz's images of maternity, I propose that the artist's work continued to express a complexified interpretation of conventional views of femininity.

England and Toronto (1887-1891)

In either 1887 or 1889 Laura Muntz spent three months in England, financed by the evening art classes which she had been teaching in Hamilton, as well as by the proceeds from the sale of her first portrait in oils.[104] Although most sources state that she studied at the South Kensington School of Art, her close friend Harold Mortimer Lamb wrote in 1908 that the study took place "in a studio in St. John's Wood."[105] It is more likely, however, that she had attended the St. John's Wood School of Art, rather than taking lessons in a private studio.[106] St. John's was a private drawing academy which offered various courses of study to both men and women, but it was known primarily for the preparatory curriculum which facilitated entrance into the prestigious Royal Academy School. A pupil attending the school at precisely the time that Muntz would have been there as well, described the rigorous and painstaking routine of art training in England in the late 1880s.

> A fortnight was spent imitating the light and shade of a cup and ball, followed by a cast of an ornament in high relief. Next came six outline and one finished drawing of the features [of the face of Michelangelo's *David*]. After that, drawings of hands and feet, a mask, the head and bust, and finally, a cast of the whole figure.[107]

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[104] Mortimer Lamb, "Studio-Talk", 161. The exact date of Muntz's stay in London is not known. Mortimer Lamb states in this article that she did not go to Paris until three years after her visit to England, which makes the date of 1887 more plausible; none of the sources date it to 1888. Colin MacDonald, *Dictionary of Canadian Artists*, Vol. 4 (Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1974) 935, and J. Russell Harper, *Early Painters and Engravers in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) 203, both date the visit to 1887, while the year 1889 is cited in *Art Gallery of Ontario: The Canadian Collection*, (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1970) 262. Mortimer Lamb also specified in the same publication that Muntz had had to return to Canada after her brief period in England because of an illness in the family, and not for lack of funds. Madelein Muntz agrees, although she clarifies that it was a death in the family, and not an illness, which forced her return. She has also suggested that Laura Muntz stayed on in England in the winter of 1889, following the death of her maternal grandfather on Christmas Day, 1888.

[105] Mortimer Lamb, "Studio-Talk", 161. The earliest mention of South Kensington, although no date is mentioned , is in Henry J. Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time - A Handbook of Canadian Biography of Living Characters*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912) 836.

[106] Paul Duval, *Canadian Impressionism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990) 52.

[107] J. Diane Radycki, "The Life of Lady Art Students: Changing Art Education at the Turn of the Century," *Art Journal* 42, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 11.

St. John's Wood was an area of London which had housed the studios of the most prosperous and fashionable Academicians, Edwin Landseer for example, since the second quarter of the nineteenth century. When John William Waterhouse (1849-1917), whose paintings of the 1890s demonstrate some similarities with Muntz's own later work, moved there in 1901, the district was still known as a place where the eminent artist would be assured to move in the right circles.[108] In the late 1880's Waterhouse had been living in Primrose Hill Studios, a quadrangle of twelve dwellings designed in 1880 specifically for tenants connected with the arts.[109] Among the community of artists living in Primrose Hill in the 1880s was Maurice Greiffenhagen (1862-1931) and the two men became lifelong friends.[110]

Muntz owned an unframed drawing by Greiffenhagen (Fig. 1.8, signed but undated) showing a woman and a young boy, presumably a mother and son, which she kept all her life in a portfolio among her own drawings and oil sketches.[111] This quick drawing in red conte crayon concentrates on the lines and shadows of the young woman's head, and merely sketches in the outline of her figure and that of her son beside her. The woman's right arm emerges awkwardly out of a more carefully delineated sleeve, and Greiffenhagen seems to concentrate just as much on describing the particularities of the fashionable hairstyle and design of her elegant dress, as he does on the representation of the idea of motherhood. Above all, the drawing has the look of an illustration, of a Gibson girl, who, although she is a maternal figure, also represents

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[108] There is a similarity between, for example, Waterhouse's *Hylas and the Nymphs* (1896, Manchester City Art Gallery) and Muntz's *Madonna With Angels* (1912, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), particularly in the facial features and the melancholy characterization of the nymphs and the Madonna.

[109] Anthony Hobson, *The Art and Life of J. W. Waterhouse RA* (London: Cassel, 1980) 37.

[110] Waterhouse moved to St. John's Wood at least partly because Greiffenhagen had been living there since 1895. Hobson, 110.

[111] The portfolio has been kept by the Lyall family as it had been left at Muntz's death.

strong, modern womanhood. It is these particular and somewhat incongruous characteristics of the drawing, I believe, that struck a chord with Muntz's own tendencies, both in style and in signification.[112] Greiffenhagen was admired for his fluid draughtsmanship and for his harmonious use of colour, qualities which contributed to his success as an illustrator of books and magazines.[113] Although Muntz did not produce illustrations as such, much of her work maintained references to contemporary illustration, just as her earliest efforts had done. As a portraitist, his particular ability to capture the subtleties of his sitter's character coincided with Muntz's own deep interests, and, like her, he specialized in representations of women and children.[114]

In c. 1888, after her brief stay in London, Muntz opened her first studio in the city where she had begun her studies. She was beginning to be recognized in Hamilton, both through her association with Forster and as a result of the evening art classes which she had given in the mid 1880's. With the opening of her own studio on King Street came her first portrait commissions.

In 1890, at thirty years of age, Muntz returned to Toronto to study at the newly reorganized and renamed Central Ontario School of Art and Design. She lived with her family for most of the year (the Toronto city census lists her as residing with her parents, one brother and one sister at 235 Beverley Street), but she did spend at least her

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[112] All the unframed artwork that Laura Muntz had kept until her death was contained in the same portfolio as Greiffenhagen's sketch. Among the forty or so works in the portfolio were an oil sketch by her friend and travel companion Wilhelmina Hawley, dated 1896; an academic life study of a male model, probably also from her Paris days; watercolours of women and children in Dutch dress; several portrait studies of children in pencil, chalk, or oil; an unfinished kitchen still-life in gouache; a red wash illustration of an episode from Goethe's tale *The Erl King*, and a watercolour sketch showing Jesus bending down toward a group of children. The sheer variety of subjects suggests that much of the portfolio represented the production of her student days in Europe, the period from 1891 - 1898. That Muntz kept Greiffenhagen's drawing in her "European" portfolio further strengthens the hypothesis that she had acquired it during that decade. Greiffenhagen's drawing had been reproduced in *The Studio* magazine in January 1897, when it almost surely was still in the artist's own possession. It is likely, then, that Muntz obtained it between 1897 and 1898, the year that she returned to settle in Toronto.

[113] J. Stanley Little, "Maurice Greiffenhagen and his Work," *The Studio* 9, no.46 (January 1897): 236.

[114] Thieme-Becker vol. 14: 584

summers in Hamilton.[115] The following year she was elected member of the Ontario Society of Artists and participated in her first exhibition with the O.S.A., showing four paintings: *Portrait* (sold); *In the Avenue, Toronto; In The Wide, Wide World*; and *A Bit of Hamilton*.[116] Although the whereabouts of these works are unknown today, three other oil paintings dating to 1891 -- *The Only Son of His Mother, and She was a Widow* (Fig. 1.9) *In the Park* (Fig. 1.10) and *Portrait of W. C. Forster* (Fig. 1.11) -- show the change in Muntz's style and give a clue to the kind of subject matter that she was exploring at the time.

The marked change between Muntz's earlier work and *The Only Son of His Mother, and She Was a Widow* [117] may be traced directly to the beginning of her studies with George Agnew Reid (1860-1947). Reid had been hired as painting instructor at the Central Ontario School of Art and Design in the summer of 1890, to take the place of Robert Harris who was retiring from the post. Since Muntz was in the habit of spending the summers at her own studio in Hamilton, where she received local portrait commissions in her own studio, it is likely that she began her studies with Reid in the fall. The summer of 1891 found her again in Hamilton,[118] and in the autumn of the same year she left for Paris for the first time. Therefore, her instruction with Reid dated to the several months between the autumn of 1890 and the spring of 1891. It was not a long apprenticeship, but it had an immediate effect on Muntz's mode of painting.

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[115] Notes compiled by Forster's granddaughter in the 1960s state that Muntz had painted Forster's daughter in the summer of 1890. 1891 had her "at Dr. Leslie's in Hamilton, working on a picture in summer. In fall in Paris." Muntz file, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

[116] Fallis 22.

[117] This painting is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of Hamilton under the title *Mother and Son*.

[118] Marie Douglas notes, Muntz file, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

Reid had acquired an eclectic and rigorous art training in Toronto, Philadelphia and Paris.[119] He returned to Canada in 1889, and had an immediate success with the large scale, narrative, moralistic paintings which he had been producing since the mid-1880s. *Mortgaging the Homestead*, 1890 (Fig. 1.12), his diploma work for the Royal Canadian Academy, exemplifies the *juste milieu* approach favoured by the scores of North American students who filled the French ateliers of painters such as Thomas Couture and Jules Bastien-Lepage in the last decades of the nineteenth century. *Juste milieu* painters were seen as the "modernizers of tradition," neither dangerously innovative in their style, like the Impressionists, nor mired in the academic tradition. They wished also to counter what they perceived as the triviality of the Impressionist devotion to naturalistic effects by retaining art's traditional role as a conveyor of meaning. Reid's partly autobiographical tale of the hardships faced by the early homesteaders surely did not participate in the modernist "art for art's sake" approach; quite to the contrary, in his retirement speech given at the Ontario College of Art in 1929, Reid affirmed his belief in "art for life's sake," stating that "In the early nineties, I met the great furor that greeted the doctrine Art for Art's Sake, and denied its validity."[120] Although not a modernist work, the naturalistic style of *Mortgaging the Homestead* and the social significance of the subject matter positioned it within current trends. Reid's striking use of the effects of light and shade, and a highly naturalistic, though not coldly academic, rendering of the figures, lent European, hence cultural, authenticity to the domestic subject. But while Reid's articulation of the "trials and

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[119] Reid studied in Toronto with Robert Harris, one of the first-wave Canadian artists to have studied in France, as well as with more traditionally-inclined landscape artists such as Lucius O'Brien, John Fraser and Charlotte Schreiber. During his three years in Philadelphia he studied primarily anatomy and life drawing with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and his year in Paris was spent at the Julian and Colarossi academies, with Benjamin Constant, Jean-Paul Laurens, Jules Lefebvre and William Adolphe Bouguereau.

vicissitudes of Canadian agricultural life"[121] was much admired for being "a painful subject, but truly represented,"[122] some Canadian critics thought the style of the painting not "European" enough, and found fault with Reid's calculated *juste milieu* approach: "The style is somewhat commonplace and, perhaps, hardly worth the skill of the artist."[123] Another writer on the arts suggested that Reid's tendency to cater to popular taste conditioned the entire effect of the painting.

> The "Foreclosure of the Mortgage" was exhibited here last year. It is a style that always has numerous admirers among spectators. We must confess that such a mournful tale has little charm for us. The sentiment in a subject of that kind should be suggestive, rather than forced on the mind by cumulated appropriateness of detail.[124]

A well-known contemporary to *Mortgaging the Homestead* is the American painter Thomas Hovenden's (1840-1895) *Breaking Home Ties* (Fig. 1.13), also produced in 1890. Although it bears a strong resemblance to Reid's painting, it was not exhibited until 1891, and consequently cannot be presumed as its model. Hovenden's scene shows a teenaged boy forced to leave the security of home and mother in order to seek work in the factories, and represents the alienating, modern urban reality which threatened to destroy the American dream of self-sufficiency and traditional family values. A similar sentiment is at the heart of Reid's tale, and both artists construct a theatrical stage-set in which the actors play out the drama (though Hovenden's script borders on melodrama) of the ills wrought by modern ways.

Upon his return from France, Hovenden, like Reid, had wanted to produce pictures that had particular relevance to his own society, a North American parallel, as it

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[120] Miller 153.

[121] Miller 58.

[122] *Arcadia* (15 February 1893): 430.

[123] Author cited as "B", "Art in Toronto," *Arcadia* 1, no. 20 (15 February 1893): 430.

were, to traditional European history painting.[125] But since the New World had no remote past to enshrine and analogize to the present, artists such as Hovenden and Reid ennobled contemporary social events in images designed both to convey a meaningful reference to lived reality, and to play upon the collective desire to sanctify domesticity with a nostalgia for an imagined, idyllic past. On the one hand, then, Hovenden and Reid were motivated to experiment with subjects that had specific relevance to North American life, but on the other, they did not neglect the demands of the popular market. Christine Boyanoski believes that in the 1880s and early 1890s, Reid "produced works specifically for acceptance in the salons and for sale soon after."[126]

Narrative realism may have been popular with the general public, but it was not a sufficiently progressive style for some Canadian critics, who suggested that "after truth we want to see vigour and freedom of treatment."[127] This type of observation may have in part affected Reid's decision to employ a markedly different style in the companion piece to *Mortgaging the Homestead*, painted in 1892 and titled *The Foreclosure of the Mortgage*. The intense oppositions of light and shade still remained, but its extremely sketch-like technique and powerful emotional atmosphere were the antithesis to the dispassionate realism of the earlier picture. It is as if Reid had set out to prove his ability to handle paint freely, while still keeping the subject matter rooted in contemporary issues. It would not necessarily be fair, however, to propose that Reid's approach was only calculated to please. His stated belief was that "the idea and the expression be

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[124] "Exhibition at the Art Gallery," *Arcadia* 1, no. 21 (1 March 1893): 449.

[125] Lee M. Edwards, "Noble Domesticity: The Paintings of Thomas Hovenden," *The American Art Journal* 19, no. 1 (1987): 25.

[126] Boyanoski 9.

[127] Henry Carter, "How To Know Something About Pictures," *Arcadia* 1, no. 18 (16 January 1893): 372.

adequate to each other,"[128] that is, that the style must suit the idea to be expressed. The consistently Impressionistic brushwork of *The Foreclosure of the Mortgage* suggests rather than states, and corresponds to the psychological intensity of the scene, geared to evoke the sympathy of the viewer. Moreover, Reid had been committed to portraying Canadian subjects even during his trips abroad,[129] and his paintings of the 1890s can be taken as a particular example of the tension between Canadian esteem for European stylistic methods and the desire to express indigenous themes. This condition persisted into the twentieth century, and was perceived to have been resolved only with the emergence of the Group of Seven and their celebration of the Northern Canadian landscape.

How, then, did Laura Muntz respond to Reid's choice of themes and his varied stylistic interests? At the time that Reid joined the faculty, the Central Ontario School of Art and Design had instituted a new program for the training of art teachers, added to the established instruction for artists and architects. With this new objective, the school introduced formal lectures into the curriculum. Consequently, along with his classes in painting from the model, Reid was now charged with lecturing on perspective, composition, and the history of art.[130] In all probability Muntz took advantage of the teacher training, since she had already given some classes in Hamilton, and was as well a single woman obliged to earn her own living. *The Only Son of His Mother and She Was a Widow* shows Muntz's first efforts to incorporate all that she had been learning in Reid's classes. It is clearly the work of a student and it is evident that Muntz was grappling with stylistic problems as much as with an unfamiliar type of subject. Reid's

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[128] Boyanoski 35.
[129] Harper 215.

influence can be observed in the plastically-rendered monumental figures, so different from the almost two-dimensional forms of her earlier watercolour studies reminiscent of Lucius O'Brien's work. The young boy who leans his head pensively on his hand has some reference to the solitary reader in Reid's *Forbidden Fruit* of 1889 (Art Gallery of Ontario), and although Muntz's scene clearly intends to tell a story (the title alone conveys this), like Reid's painting it has an element of stillness, of a tableau to be contemplated as well as a narrative to be deciphered. The moralistic content, however, is purely Victorian, and shares little of Reid's concern for present-day themes. Muntz attempts to communicate the pathos of her story by a too-careful modulation of only dark tones, resulting in a muddy, mid-Victorian type of image that has none of the confident draughtsmanship and varied light effects that lent her teacher's paintings their contemporary feel.

Muntz's young widow sits resolutely in her chair, her blank gaze directed into the space beyond the picture plane. The massive columns to her left and the large flagstones beneath her feet suggest that the setting is a public building, perhaps a workhouse, since the pair have evidently fallen on hard times. A small child peeking out between the columns may signal the possibility that the location is an orphanage. This scenario could account both for the mother's numb expression, a result of her desperate decision to abandon a child for whom she cannot provide, and for the son's wistful sadness. She relinquishes her child's care to God, her hands no longer on the boy but on the open Bible in her lap, while in vain he seeks his mother's comforting touch by placing a small hand in her lap. Despite the melodramatic content and rather awkward

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[130] Muriel Miller , *George Reid: A Biography* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1987) 61.

technique, Muntz's painting was well received by the contemporary public and sold at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition for the respectable sum of $200.

In this scene of a mother and child, just as in another of the three paintings dating to 1891, there is no central male presence. *In the Park*,[131] shows three generations of a family, but again the only male in the scene is a young boy. The exclusion of men in representations of mothers and children was by no means confined to Laura Muntz's work; Julia Gualtieri has noted that in all the Royal Canadian Academy exhibitions between the years 1890-1930, not one in the scores of Canadian paintings which dealt with the subject of motherhood, whether painted by men or by women, included a father in the representation.[132] A central concern of this thesis is the elucidation of precisely that question: how was the concept of motherhood entwined with the various notions of woman's role at the end of the nineteenth century in Canada, and how did these social perceptions of femininity manifest themselves in visual culture? These issues shall be explored within the context of Muntz's *Madonna and Child* and *Protection*, but it is important even at this point in the analysis to bring attention to the fact that the dominant ideology of the time, both in Europe and in North America, conceptualized the idea of family in overwhelmingly feminine terms.

In the Park, then, shows a family parented by two women. The group is enveloped in a melancholy twilight, and the mournful expressions on the faces of the women once more imply unfortunate circumstances. The aged mother and her daughter

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[131] The Muntz file in the Art Gallery of Hamilton includes a list of paintings and their owners in the 1960s. The list was compiled by Muntz family members and by Marie Douglas. The entry for what is surely this painting reads: "Oil painting, signed and dated 1891, title: *Reflections in the Park* (Scene of Branksome Hall and surrounding grounds showing small figures)." The present title is one by which it was listed at auction some time later. The unidentified, undated page from an auction catalogue is in the Laura Muntz Lyall file (artists' files) at the Metropolitan Toronto Library.

[132] Julia Gualtieri, *The Woman as Artist and as Subject in Canadian Painting (1890-1930): Florence Carlyle, Laura Muntz Lyall, Helen McNicoll*, Masters Thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, 1989, 141.

do not face each other, but rather commune in silence, their eyes cast down and fixed on the empty space between them. Two of the three children who surround the young mother amuse themselves on the bench beside her, while the baby sleeps contentedly in her arms; they transmit the message that the safeguarding of the innocence of childhood falls naturally to women, as do the burdens that this responsibility entails. But despite the moral message imbedded in this rather Victorian painting, the atmosphere may be described as poignant rather than melodramatic. *In the Park* is a more complex image which permits alternative interpretations, while *The Only Son of His Mother* does not. The latter painting invites the viewer to decode the clues given here and there, and to put the pieces of the puzzle together for a satisfying "read": the rough hands on the open Bible, the maternal lap illuminated by a divine light -- these leave little room for a complexified interpretation. *In the Park* dispenses both with the claustrophobic setting and the attendant restricted meaning. Although Muntz directs the content of the image towards melancholy, she leaves a space for the viewer's own contextualisation of the mood. Thus the scene may bring to mind associations between twilight and the end of life, embodied in the depiction of youth and old age; it may refer to the widowed state which binds the two women; or it may intimate a more existential type of loneliness, as each woman is lost in her own separate thoughts. An even more abstract reading may perceive in this image an allusion to the complex nature of female subjectivity in a particular time and place. Such an interpretation would not be at odds with Muntz's consistent practice of picturing women's experience, nor indeed with the choices that she had made in her own life.

Reid continued to paint the figure throughout the 1890s, despite the fact that the Canadian landscape, rather than figural genre painting, was becoming increasingly acknowledged as a metaphor for nationalism. He had represented mother and child subjects from 1892 on[133], and the painting which he completed in time for the Paris Salon exhibition of 1893 combined the theme of motherhood, popular both in North America and in Europe, with the Canadian content popular at home. Reid's *A Modern Madonna* united a reference to the Christian Madonna with a representation of a typical pioneer wife in her well-kept home. Muntz was studying in Paris at the time Reid's picture was completed and it is likely that she had seen it during its exhibition in that city. The painting illustrates once again Reid's eclectic combination of European and North American references, as well as his continued preference for figural genre subjects, practices which were carried on by Muntz well into the twentieth century.

Muntz's portrait of William Charles Forster is the most technically accomplished of the three paintings dating to 1891. She had had more experience in portrait painting than in genre subjects, and as a result is more successful in integrating the general characteristics of Reid's early style (although Reid's style was at its most eclectic in the early 1890s) with a sensibility that was expressly her own. Like Reid, she exploits the dramatic potential of light contrasts, and changes her brushstroke according to her needs -- precise on the hair of moustache and head, but extremely loose and broad in the area around the eyes. Here, a rough, gestural stroke and bold shadows give a sense of immediacy and the impression of a living presence. Muntz knew her sitter well, and one senses her eagerness to capture the complexity of his character. This early portrait shows

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[133] The painting which he sent to the 1892 Salon was titled *Lullaby*. Miller 62.

her effort to convey depth of personality, and signals her later intention to suggest the universal in the particular.

Newton MacTavish alluded to Muntz's desire to express deeper issues in her painting when he stated that "her art is indebted most of all to broad human sympathy and natural liberality," and that her art was characterized by "bigness of conception."[134] In her genre paintings as in her portraits, it was Muntz's intention to endow the everyday with a deeper meaning; it is the constant thread in all her work, and it was recognized more easily in her own time than it is in ours. Maria Tippett's very brief mention of Laura Muntz in her survey of Canadian women painters, published in 1993, typifies only the limited modern perception of her work. Tippett chooses to reproduce only one painting, *A Daffodil* (c. 1890, Fig. 1.14), and says that it "may seem saccharine to a modern viewer [but] to the late nineteenth-century public its lack of detail, its seemingly unfinished surface and its placement of the figure in the immediate foreground of the canvas were considered daring."[135] She gleans this information from MacTavish's article of 1911, and quotes his description of Muntz's stylistic innovations -- her "fine symphony of colours," "satisfactory composition" and "brisk virile treatment" -- to support her thesis that this was what the nineteenth century valued in Muntz's work.[136] Tippett translates MacTavish's words to suggest that it was Muntz's technical mastery that rescued her work from superficiality, whereas my understanding is that MacTavish was saying quite the opposite. He followed his description of Muntz's painting technique with the following sentence:

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[134] Newton MacTavish, "Laura Muntz and Her Art," *The Canadian Magazine* 37, no. 5 (September 1911): 426.
[135] Tippett 33.
[136] Tippett 33.

> But it [*The Daffodil*] suggests something more than these superficialities [he refers here to Muntz's bold painting technique], and, apart altogether from the flower and the flesh and the environment, we feel a heart beating and realise that here is a personality that, even though so young and innocent, has experienced some of the inevitable pathos of humanity.[137]

In 1938, MacTavish returned to a discussion of this painting, further elucidating Muntz's psychological involvement in her work.

> The girl is holding a daffodil and gazing wistfully into space, the greens in the composition providing a true background for the flower. "I always like that study," said the painter to me as I was admiring it in the Beaver Hall studio, "because it has more of me than if it were a strait [sic] portrait. But that is as I think it should be: every painting should contain more of the painter than of the subject."[138]

In 1897, the author of an article on Maurice Greiffenhagen expressed his opinion about the pitfalls of portrait painting.

> Portraiture can be, and commonly is, the lowest form of art; it is as a rule "pot-boiling", naked and unashamed. But for all that, it can and does take its place with the highest, when the portrait painter possesses the power to make the subject subserve the requirements of a fine scheme, evolved in the mind of the artist.

MacTavish echoed the sentiment in a discussion regarding Laura Muntz's intention to imbue even the portrait with a deeper meaning: "If a painting is a portrait and only that, it is valuable only to that extent, to the sitter's friends; but if it should be a work of art, it is valuable to everybody and for all time."[139]

The association between Greiffenhagen's work and Laura Muntz's has already been noted; the quotations recorded above further emphasize the affinity between Muntz's artistic philosophy and the Aesthetic sensibility. It was an orientation to which the artist returned even after her extended studies in Paris. *Oriental Poppies* (c. 1915,

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137 MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 424.

138 Newton MacTavish, *Ars Longa* (Toronto: The Ontario Publishing Co., 1938) 171.

139 MacTavish, *Ars Longa* 171.

Fig. 1.15) for example, shows the sketchy, impressionistic technique that she had perfected in France, yet the moody, poetic atmosphere relates to British Aestheticism and to American Symbolist-inspired paintings more than to the Parisian artists of her day.

A particularly sensitive discussion of Muntz's work appeared in a Canadian newspaper several years later, c. 1900.[140] The author does not mention any painting by name, but rather speaks generally about the artist's unique method of fusing an advanced stylistic mode with a more familiar symbolic content. Although it was written in the earlier years of Muntz's career, the analysis of her artistic philosophy presented therein remains relevant, I believe, to the work of her later years.

The article begins with the statement that Muntz "stands at the head of the most progressive and advanced type of art in Canada...conventionality has no place in her canvases." The author continues to explain that

> form is material and most important in her pictures, but it is not the form of the academic. Line has its value but she prefers to envelop the line rather than accentuate it. Thought and feeling dominate. Drawing, colour and composition do not entirely constitute her pictures -- they are merely the medium through which she seeks to convey thought and sympathy. Her work strikes one by the force of its expression, and it is very far removed from the realistic. There are many idealized passages and beneath the broad and vigorous technique there are to be found notes of extreme delicacy.

The text continues to examine the "peculiar charm" of Muntz's work, and concludes that no other Canadian artist succeeds in the "happy combination of realism and delicate feeling which marks the production of those who seek to express truth with

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[140] This newspaper clipping is in the possession of Peter Douglas, W. C. Forster's grandson-in-law. The name of the newspaper, the author and the date do not appear in the clipping. Since the article discusses work that Muntz had done in Holland, and mentions that she was at present working in her studio, the date of it would have to be between 1898, the year of her return from Europe and the opening of her Yonge Street Arcade studio, and 1906, when she left Toronto for Montreal. From other comments made in the text, I would situate the date to c. 1900.

simplicity [and] want to unite idealism and force, while steering clear of the reefs which beset each class separately."

The early portrait of W.C. Forster already showed Muntz's use of disparate stylistic traditions to effect a balance between progressive technique and symbolic expression. The hand and the sleeve from which it emerges is done with such extreme freedom of handling that they can be experienced as just paint, as an assertion of the modernist belief in truth to materials. In contrast, the more carefully modulated tones of the head, and the different textures of hair and skin, mimic reality more closely. The result of these two modes of picturing, intentional or not, is that the very generalized treatment of the hand serves to emphasize the individuality of the sitter's head, represented as if in sharper focus. The viewer is thus guided to contemplate the expressive face on the canvas, and is reminded at the same time of the boldness of the artist's technique.

As this portrait demonstrates, and even before being directly exposed to the avant-garde styles of the Continental ateliers, Muntz was drawn to progressive methods of painting. She explored this type of vigorous, sketchy manner throughout her career, at the same time that she continued to imbue her subjects with a symbolic meaning. The conjunction of an advanced technique with a more conventional content can be said to characterize much of Laura Muntz's art. Just as it applied to Reid, her teacher, the label of *juste milieu* can be used to define some aspects of Muntz's work, but each painting that she produced had its own particular balance between "the old and the new," and this interesting and individual way of picturing will be explored further in the following pages.

Paris and the Colarossi (1891-1898)

In the fall of 1891 Laura Muntz made the decision that many other Canadian artists had made before her, and sailed for Paris. She was 31 years of age, unmarried, not wealthy, and yet evidently prepared to follow the unconventional path that she had chosen in life. It is not my intention to "explain" Muntz's work through an analysis of her character, yet some knowledge of her personal life can serve to illuminate how she negotiated her way, as did many other women artists, in an artistic culture defined as masculine. The fact that Muntz was a single woman travelling to Europe unchaperoned was in itself exceptional. Although in the early 1890s Sarah Grand could write in her "New Woman" novels that "thinking for herself, the modern girl knows that a woman's life is no longer considered a failure simply because she does not marry," and contrary to Maria Tippett's claim that it was common for women to travel unaccompanied, an unmarried women travelling alone was still an uncommon occurrence.[141] Muntz's compatriot Florence Carlyle, a working woman by the time of her departure for Paris, nevertheless felt it proper to make the voyage accompanied by Paul Peel and his older sister, the sculptor Mildred Peel. Susan Butlin specifies that "the presence of [...] Mildred Peel, aged thirty-four, in the year 1890, fulfilled the requirements of respectability for both women."[142]

Paris had attracted North American art students from the 1850s until after the turn of the century. From the 1880s on, it was the undisputed first choice of foreigners,

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[141] Sarah Grand, *The Young Girl* (1898-99), quoted in Lucy Bland, "The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s, Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 145. Maria Tippett has said that it was socially acceptable by the 1890s for women to travel with a female companion, but that "if none was available, even alone." 43.

[142] Butlin 69.

and especially of women, who wished to study art. Canadian women were no exception, and although some did elect to study in Britain (notably, Helen McNicoll, Emily Carr, Sidney Strickland Tully,[143] and briefly Muntz herself) most chose the academies of Paris. Among these were Tully, who proceeded to Paris after her study at the Slade School of Art in London, Florence Carlyle, Mary Alexandra Eastlake, and Mary Hiester Reid.[144]

Perhaps one small reason for this preference was the fact that the elegance and refinement of the French capital codified it as feminine in the contemporary mind, in contrast to either London or Munich, which had also been popular with North American students who wished to train abroad.

> London is a male, a great, gloomy being, sitting up on his island, rough, unshaven, besmeared with cinders and smut, and glowering across at the courtesan Paris, for she graciously smiles back at him with every wile. For Paris is a woman.[145]

In 1903, Clive Holland offered the readers of *The Studio* a more practical explanation:

> Paris has for many years been the Mecca of art students of both sexes. The reason for this is not far to seek. English schools of painting (with few exceptions) do not appear to encourage individuality, and more particularly the individuality of women, in art, however good the technical instruction given may be.[146]

An American woman who had spent a year in Paris, albeit eight years earlier than Holland, presented a less enthusiastic view of the experience of a female art student in France.

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[143] Butlin 66.

[144] Farr and Luckyj.

[145] The nineteenth-century artist Edward Simmons, quoted in Bailey Van Hook, *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996) 22.

[146] Clive Holland, "Lady Art Students' Life in Paris," *The Studio* 30, no. 127 (1903): 225.

> Woman's share in France in all the opportunities for art study is trifling. The government has done nothing for women artists, and until the rise of Julian's [Academy], their schools were all of the amateur, fine-lady order. But Monsieur Julian poses as a liberal patron, and offers them unparalleled advantages. By paying him twice as much money as do the men students, they are allowed to stumble on with one-half of the instruction that the men receive, and never a criticism of the figure, although it is by their knowledge of the figure that men are judged. What can be expected from such unequal advantages.[147]

Though there must have been some validity to this opinion, Deborah Cherry describes the general atmosphere in late nineteenth-century Paris, the undisputed centre of modernity, as being particularly supportive towards women artists.

> It was this modernity with its facilities for independence along with access to life-drawing in the ateliers which attracted women artists. From the 1880s art periodicals and women's magazines featured art training in the French capital, recommending *pensions*, apartments, *quartiers*, restaurants, and the club for British women artists. Often written by spinsters, these articles advocated self-sufficiency, determination and serious study.[148]

Nevertheless, it was not until c. 1900 that Paris truly became the most advantageous place in Europe for the female art student. Until the late 1890s, the only state-funded art school for women in Paris was the Ecole Nationale pour les Jeunes Filles, which encouraged the study of decorative and applied art.[149] The Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the national art school for the fine arts, provided the most prestigious academic training, and consequently the best career opportunities, but it did not accept women students until 1897.[150] Women who wished to study the fine arts were compelled to attend the expensive private academies, such as the Académie Julian and the Académie Colarossi. Moreover, the popularity of private academies such as these,

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[147] J. Sutherland, "An Art Amateur's Year in Paris: Woman's Restricted Opportunities for Art Study," *The Art Amateur* 32, no. 4 (March 1895): 108.

[148] Cherry 63. Even Clive Holland's general article gives a quite detailed description of the best hotels and *pensions* for women students. "Lady Art Students," 232-33.

[149] Perry 16.

[150] For an illuminating discussion of the convoluted reasons given by the art establishment to justify the exclusion of women from a co-educational and state-funded art education, see Tamar Garb, "The Forbidden Gaze: Women Artists

especially with the foreign students who thronged Paris, caused many of the best-known artists in the city to close their ateliers to women, since it was easier, and lucrative enough, to make a twice-weekly morning visit to the institution than to teach women independently. Writing in 1890, American art student Marie Belloc felt that this development put her female contemporaries at a disadvantage even to women art students of the past, since at the academies "the lady art student is obliged willy-nilly to go through the mill, and cannot give herself up for study under any one master."[151]

The practices of most private academies discriminated against women both financially and in the quality of their instruction, despite the fact that a large percentage of their students were female. This was possible because women had no alternatives to a private academy education, while men always had the option of the tuition-free Ecole des Beaux-Arts.[152] And although by 1889 Julian's had reserved three of its nine studios for women,[153] teachers visited them only once a week instead of the twice-weekly calls that they paid to the men's class. Moreover, women were obliged to pay 100 francs per month versus the 50 required of men.[154] The exception to the rule was the Académie Colarossi, which had studios in several convenient right- and left-bank locations.

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and the Male Nude in Late Nineteenth-Century France", *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture Since the Renaissance*, Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 33-42.

[151] Marie Adelaide Belloc, "Lady Artists in Paris," *Murray's Magazine* 8, no. 1 (September 1890): 382. It should be noted that some well-known artists, such as Thomas Couture, William Bouguereau, Charles Chaplin and Emile Carolus-Duran continued to accept women pupils. Nancy Mowll Mathews "Training and Professionalism, France, Nineteenth Century," in Gaze, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, vol. 1, 91.

[152] Another rationale for charging women double the rate was that "many of the [women] students are not studying professionally and consequently instruction as a luxury is put at a higher price." An American art student in Paris, 1887, quoted in Jo Ann Wein, "The Parisian Training of American Women Artists," *Woman's Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1981): 42.

[153] J. Sutherland, "An Art Student's Year in Paris: Women's Classes at Julian's School," *The Art Amateur* 32, no. 2 (January 1895): 52. The dates given for the segregation of the women's classes from the men's vary from source to source. Jo Ann Wein, for example, states that ateliers were separated in 1879. "The Parisian Training of American Women Artists," *Woman's Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1981): 42. Deborah Cherry (63) cites 1868-1879 as the dates for mixed classes and agrees with Wein on 1879 as the date classes were separated.

[154] Lois Marie Fink, *American Art at the Nineteenth-Century Paris Salons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 136. Belloc's article of 1890 gives a different view of the situation. She says that at that time Julian's had seventeen studios in Paris, seven of which were for women only, and that the painting masters visited them "for a couple of hours" twice a week. Belloc 374-75.

Colarossi's had extremely flexible admission arrangements, by which students could enrol for periods as short as one week. It was the least expensive of the academies, and the only school to have a policy of tuition parity, with both men and women paying 40 francs for a month of half-day attendance.[155] Furthermore, from 1896 on, men and women shared the atelier space, which gave the female students the advantage of equal critique time by the painting master, as well as, some women thought, "the influence of strong co-workers, and through them a higher daily standard of excellence."[156] J. Sutherland, a woman evidently familiar with the atmosphere of the coeducational Parisian atelier, summed up the pros and cons of the system.

> It is not to be wondered at that some women lay aside convention and enter the studios for both sexes, where daily life is quite another thing -- less law and order, and cleanliness, and decorum, but better artistic conditions, and twice the instruction for less than half the cost [...] Yet great as may be a woman's love for art, earnest her purpose, and deep her consciousness of latent power, she must understand what she is doing and reflect twice before she chooses this condemned mode of study. A mixed school is no place for an amateur. Only the utmost seriousness of purpose can excuse this departure from established customs.[157]

It was at the Académie Colarossi that Laura Muntz spent most of her seven years' study in Paris. This was a particularly long, but not altogether unusual, time to have spent in any one art institution.[158] When Muntz arrived at Colarossi's in the fall of 1891, coeducational ateliers were not yet established. Although J. Sutherland had described the conditions of a mixed atelier in 1895, the "invasion of the men's class of

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[155] Barbara H. Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and Their French Teachers*. (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) 226.

[156] Sutherland, March 1895, 108.

[157] Sutherland, March 1895, 108. The Académie Julian had begun as a mixed school in 1868, but the habitual harassment of the women students by the men in their classes led Rodolphe Julian to establish separate women's ateliers ten years later, a solution approved of by the great majority of his female students.

[158] Most contemporary sources give the duration of Muntz's stay as seven years; for example Estelle Kerr, "The Artist," *Saturday Night* (7 June 1913): 29. The Montreal artist William Brymner was a student at the Académie Julian in Paris for the same number of years, 1878-85. Robert and Elizabeth Kashey, *The Julian Academy, Paris 1868-1939* (New York: Shepherd Gallery, 1989) Appendix, List of Students.

Colarossi's" occurred only a year later, and was due to the determined efforts of Virginie Demont-Breton, the painter Jules Breton's daughter, who was president of the French Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs.[159]

Muntz financed her departure from Canada with her own savings, a small loan from her grandmother, and a legacy left to her by another member of the family.[160] All these sources still did not add up to a large sum, and a Toronto journal reported that Muntz's money began to dwindle after about three months, but "fortune favoured her," and she was not forced to return home.[161] One wonders if the very brief period of three months was indeed based in fact, or whether it was a dramatic device chosen by the writer to reflect conventional preconceptions which foresaw hardship for the woman who ventured out of her prescribed sphere. In a similar way, Margaret Bell fabricates a small but significant comment about Laura Muntz.[162] The entire contents of Bell's article has been appropriated from earlier publications, and no new information is offered at all, although Bell retells the story in extremely romantic language -- "On a little farm in the Muskoka district, a child sat dabbing different coloured paints on a board[...]A strange child, people said." Of Muntz's Parisian years she says: "Hard work and persistency kept her there for seven years. She had labored under difficulties, financial difficulties, and her health was not good." This last phrase is Bell's own, and is designed to balance in the reader's mind the quality of determined ambition, perceived to be masculine, with a delicate constitution, considered acceptably feminine.

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[159] The Union was founded in 1881 by the sculptor Mme. Léon Bertaux. Under Demont-Breton's leadership, women gained the right to attend the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1897, but women did not actually enter the ateliers until 1900 (Perry, 17) and eventually, in 1910, the freedom to compete for the coveted Prix de Rome. Radycki, 10.

[160] This information was communicated to me in a letter from Muntz's stepson, Edward Lyall.

[161] Hare, "Close-Ups of Toronto's Women Artists."

[162] Margaret Bell, "Women and Art in Canada," *Everywoman's World* (June 1914).

It is true, however, that Muntz was fortunate in having been given several opportunities to augment her finances and to allow her to remain in Paris much longer than her initial budget would have permitted. She was invited to work on the staff of the *Quartier Latin*, a monthly journal published by the Canadian and American expatriate community of art students in Paris, which had been founded in part by J.S. Gordon, an artist originally from Hamilton.[163] Muntz also taught art privately,[164] and, in addition, the "ancient and honourable Académie Colarossi" offered Muntz free tuition because she "has had the honour of forming the first life class for women alone, in Paris."[165] This event probably took place in the later years of Muntz's residence in Paris, but much earlier on she had been given the job of *massière* at the Colarossi in exchange for free tuition.[166] To receive the post of *massière* was an honour, since the candidate was "always the recognized prize pupil of the atelier," appointed by the head of the academy.[167] The *massière* (or *massier* in the men's group) was in charge of the finances and discipline of the "masses," that is, of the student body. She was responsible for engaging and posing the weekly model, looking after the new students, and translating the master's instructions into English. Marie Belloc described the *massière* as a respected " kind of artistic pupil teacher,"[168] while J. Sutherland portrayed her as "an elder sister, counselling, chiding, comparing, encouraging."[169]

Even all these different occupations, however, could not have supported Muntz for her entire seven years abroad. As a source of additional income, she regularly sent

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[163] MacCuaig 42. Also Hare, "Close-ups of Toronto's Women Artists."

[164] Letter from Edward Lyall to the author, in which he states that Muntz had told him this herself.

[165] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 12, no. 6 (24 December 1898): 15.

[166] For example, Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work." Also in a letter from H. Mortimer Lamb to F. Waldon, dated 4 November 1964. Laura Muntz file, Hamilton Gallery of Art.

[167] Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Art."

paintings back for exhibition in Canada; some, like *The Fairy Tale* (1893), sold for the considerable sum of five hundred dollars.[170] During several summers (1896, 1898 and 1899) she and her friend and colleague, the American painter Wilhelmina Douglas Hawley (1860-1927) took pupils to paint in Holland, where they rented a house in the popular American art colony of Rijsoord.[171] As well, she made working trips back to Toronto, again probably in the summers, for example in 1893 and 1895, when she gave lessons in George Reid's private studio.[172] And finally, the extensive publicity that Muntz received after winning an honourable mention in the 1895 Paris Salon no doubt also brought her some commissions in France.

This brief account of Muntz's methods of earning her own living bears witness to the industriousness and perseverance necessary for a woman who wished to succeed in the art world of the late nineteenth century. Deborah Cherry has clarified that while both male and female artists were compelled to augment their income through various means -- by writing articles, producing illustrations for magazine or book publishers, or by working as teachers -- "women artists were positioned asymmetrically and unequally in relation to income levels, profits, supplementary earnings and finance capital."[173] A foreign woman, especially, needed considerable ingenuity and strength of character in order to make her own way in the European art world, and Muntz's accomplishment in

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168 Belloc 375.

169 Sutherland, January 1895, 52.

170 Fallis 22.

171 Marie Douglas notes, Muntz file, Art Gallery of Hamilton. Mrs. Douglas mentions only the years 1896 and 1898, but says that Muntz took pupils there for three summers. Wilhelmina Hawley returned to Rijsoord in 1894, 1898, 1899, 1900 and 1901. Muntz may also have joined her there in 1894, and surely in 1898 and 1899. Annette Stott, *American Painters Who Worked in the Netherlands, 1880-1914*. Ph.D. Diss., Boston: University of Boston, 1986. 248. Toronto's *Saturday Night* 12, no. 38 (5 August 1899): 9, mentions that the two women had returned to Holland during the summer of 1899.

172 Fallis, 5. Mary Wrinch recalled in 1969 that she had studied with Muntz in 1893, at the Central Ontario School of Art, but it is more likely that the lessons took place at George Reid's private studio, since there is no record of Muntz having taught at the School. Mary Wrinch became George Reid's second wife after the death of Mary Hiester. Joan Murray, "Mary Wrinch, Canadian Artist," *Canadian Antiques Collector* 4, no. 9 (September 1969): 18.

doing so is corroborated by the Canadian artist and illustrator Estelle Kerr (1879-1971) in the following excerpt from an article in *Saturday Night* magazine.

> In Paris it is extremely difficult for a student to earn a little extra money, which can so easily be done in this country by teaching, by getting an occasional portrait order, or by working at some form of commercial art. Laura Muntz is the only person I know who entirely supported herself in Paris, and she did so for seven years.[174]

At the Académie Colarossi Muntz studied with Gustave Courtois (1853-1923), Joseph Paul Blanc (1846-1904), Pierre Fritel (1853-1920), and Eugène Giradôt (1853-1907).[175] The curriculum was similar to art schools in England and in North America, "from elementary drawing and classical antiques to the living model," with the exception that "for the study of anatomy and drawing from the living model the opportunities provided are far greater than in the average English Art schools." Along with classes in drawing and painting from the living model, the offering included "sculpture, *cours* of costume and water-colours, sketching, black-and-white drawing, and decorative composition."[176] A pencil and charcoal drawing of a male model (Fig. 1.16), which Muntz had kept in her "European" portfolio, has all the characteristics of an art student's life study. It is a competent work, but the erasures around the right arm and hand, as well as the inaccurate delineation and length of the left arm suggest that this drawing is representative of Muntz's work in her first years at the Colarossi. Another figure study in oils (Fig. 1.17) shows much greater skill and confidence and almost certainly dates to a later time. This deeply atmospheric back view of a nude female figure is modelled with a sure hand and is distinguished by a bold use of colour and light contrasts. Muntz

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[173] Cherry 96.

[174] Kerr 29.

[175] The Canadian print media gave varied spellings for these names, e.g. Tintel for Fritel, Girardet for Giradôt. I cite them as they appeared in Muntz's own handwriting on an information form "For the purpose of making a record of Canadian painters and their work." Laura Muntz file, Art Gallery of Ontario.

applies the paint with great freedom, for example on the shadowy left arm, which she convincingly suggests by a mere slash of paint. The extreme closeness of the body represented on the canvas affords the viewer an opportunity to observe the artist's energetic technique, while at the same time communicating the experience of female flesh as flesh. It does so, however, without making the female body available to what Laura Mulvey has termed "to-be-looked-at-ness," which denotes a masculine method of representation "coded for strong visual and erotic impact."[177]

A very similar study by G. A. Reid, inscribed "Paris, 1896" (*Nude Study*, Fig. 1.18) provides an enlightening comparison to Muntz's painting. Circumstances suggest that perhaps the two artists indeed were sitting side by side, drawing the same model from a common viewpoint. Reid and Mary Hiester Reid had visited Paris for a period of two months in the spring of 1896 following their excursion to Spain to view the paintings of Velazquez in the Prado Museum.[178] Although Reid had been Laura Muntz's teacher they were the same age, and he and his wife maintained a friendship with the former pupil. As has been mentioned, just the previous year Muntz had taught in Toronto with Reid, most likely at her teacher's own studio rather than at the Central Ontario School of Art, where she does not appear on the list of faculty. While the Reids were in Paris, they enrolled in a class at the academies (he at Julian's, where he had previously studied in 1877-78, and which in general tended to be frequented more by men than by women,[179] and she at Colarossi's) in order to "get first hand knowledge of

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[176] Holland, "Lady Art Students" 229.

[177] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 19.

[178] Miller 79-80.

[179] E. L. Good, "American Artists in Paris," *Catholic World* 66, no. 1 (January 1898): 454.

the new 'impressionist' method of painting coming into vogue at this time.[180] It is not unlikely, therefore, that Muntz and Reid found themselves in the same studio for an evening, especially since mixed classes were first instituted at the Colarossi precisely in that year. The date of 1896 also seems appropriate for Muntz's accomplished oil sketch, and the two works do share precise details such as the distribution of shadows on the woman's back and arms. My intention, however, is to point out their many differences despite the surface similarity, and to draw attention to the particulars of each artist's response to the subject of the female nude.

Reid's purpose in this Parisian study was, as he said, to renew his acquaintance with the vigorous method of painting associated with the Impressionists. The result, however, is closer to his familiar *juste milieu* style than to an exploration of immediacy and impression. Although the paint is fairly loosely applied in places, for example on the hair, the tones of the body are carefully modulated and even the darkest shadows on the arms and buttocks are precisely outlined against the light. Compared to Muntz's rapid passages from line to patches of colour, Reid's painting, though identified as a study, gives the impression of a work perhaps conceived from a preliminary life study, but finished in the studio.

There is a marked contrast, as well, between Muntz's pragmatic observation of the model and Reid's interpretation of the female body as an indicator of something more than just corporeality. Reid's frame of reference depends upon and propagates a traditional view of femininity, grounded in the discourses of Victorian sexuality and high art. He fashions the contours of the body into one crisply outlined smooth form, but

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[180] Miller, 80. A record of Reid's attendance at the Académie Julian, both in the 1870s and in 1896, is given in Kashey, Appendix, List of Students.

provides no experience of real flesh. The hips are positioned in a delicate contrapposto, balanced on one side by the graceful line of the arm, outstretched in order to direct the viewer's gaze to the curved forms of the woman's figure. The right arm, partially obscured from view, is turned into the front of the body, perhaps resting on the back of a chair, but also in an implied gesture of modesty. Reid facilitates a sexualized reading of the nude female body precisely because he negates it at the same time: while the darkened background which she faces does not suggest the presence of an observer, the woman nevertheless covers her nakedness and turns her head aside, eyes lowered, as an additional signal of chasteness. Seen from the perspective of the observer on the other side of the canvas, she is placed far enough into the picture plane to be psychologically distanced from the (male) viewer, who is thus comfortably situated to contemplate her vulnerable nudity. Yet she is at the same time depicted closely (and sexually) enough to justify her self-conscious stance.

Reid's interpretation pictures a conventional relationship, which can be classified as masculine, between the artist/viewer and the model positioned as a sign of femininity. Muntz represents the woman's body in a way that communicates another understanding of the situation: she shows a body that is displayed in the art studio, for the purpose of being observed, but without being "owned" or "used". The model assumes a neutral pose, with both her arms hanging straight down from heavy shoulders. Reid translates his subject according to the conventions of the language of "high art", while Muntz treats her study as if preliminary to that process. He understands the body as an object of male desire, while she observes the model without a possessing gaze.

Muntz emphasizes the model's hips and buttocks by placing them at the extreme front of the picture plane; by the use of the clearest yellow and pink tones; and by cropping the image sharply just at the upper thighs. She does not shy away from this intimate depiction of the female body, indeed she centres the entire representation on the interplay of light, shadow and shape on the broad surfaces of the flesh. She divides the body analytically into separate parts according to the fluctuations of light and shadow, thereby creating an abstracted pattern of darks and lights that progress from the top of the head and the vividly illuminated shoulders, to the scumbled dark tones of the lower buttocks and thighs. The left arm is almost completely lost in the murky background, and although it is just a wedge of colour, it succeeds perhaps most convincingly in transmitting the material reality of flesh.

Like Muntz, Reid encircles the body dramatically in darkness, but he does not allow the deep shadows to encroach onto the flood-lit expanse of the back, with the result that the spectator's gaze is drawn to the body just as the eye would be drawn to the centre of a target. Where Muntz integrates the darkened figure logically into its background, Reid contrives to unify the length of the body with an even light, strategically employed in order to give unrestricted visual access to the feminine silhouette.[181] Compared to Reid's unexceptional painting technique and conventional understanding of the female body as a symbol of desire, Muntz's approach is both modern in method and detached in her relationship to the subject. Her brushwork indicates the impressionistic lack of "finish" that characterized her work during her years in Paris, and she does not encourage the viewer to act as voyeur. Muntz takes control of

the symbolic language of visual representation and produces an image of the nude female body that challenges the authority of the male gaze.

Laura Muntz's resolve to remain in Paris despite the difficulties that she faced is indicative of her purposeful nature; it is true, however, that Paris in the last decade of the nineteenth century was a city which provided women artists with more opportunities than any other. The official Salon had allowed women's participation since the end of the eighteenth century, but the 1890s also saw the emergence of various women's societies which gave female artists particular advantages: a forum for open discussions of subjects which specifically concerned them; an organization which furthered their causes, such as acceptance into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts; and the opportunity to exhibit in spaces reserved for women alone.[182] But it should also be made clear that although the changing conditions encouraged women to take their ambitions seriously, institutionalized sexual differences continued to limit women's status as artists. It was rare for a woman to achieve critical acclaim comparable to her male colleagues, and women had far fewer opportunities to market their work. Art as a profession was still considered unsuitable, and women artists continued to face obstacles in their professional activities and in their private lives.

Women's self-portraits around the turn of the century provide a revealing document of the changing social and cultural conditions. The American photographer Frances Benjamin Johnson (1864-1952), who had studied painting at the Académie

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[181] Reid's strategy of highlighting and erasing all the shadows from the trunk of the body while leaving the limbs and head quite dark is even more clearly visible in his *Seated Nude Study* of 1898 now in the London (Ontario) Regional Art Gallery. Reproduced in Boyanoski 83.

[182] Some of the women's organizations were the Société des Femmes Artistes, the Association des Femmes Américaines, and the Femmes Pastellistes. Women could also exhibit alongside men at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, and at the annual exhibitions of the Indépendants, which did not have a system of jury selection. Gaze, 92.

Julian in the 1880s, encapsulated the emancipated woman's new-found image in her self-portrait of c. 1896 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). But the representation does not just simply allude to the independent "New Woman" of the 1890s, skirt hiked up, legs purposefully crossed, a cigarette in one hand and a beer in the other. The photograph can be taken as a mark of the complexity and ambiguity that characterized the *fin-de-siècle*, and in like manner can support multiple readings: a satire of the popular conception of the "mannish" New Woman; a feminist lampoon of the self-important men lined up on the mantelpiece; a self-conscious exploration of gender roles and sexuality, expressed in terms of the masquerade; a flaunting of convention by a woman of independent means; or a privileged, bourgeois woman playing at being "bohemian."

The "naturalist painter, feminist sympathiser, art critic, sculptor, amateur musician and renowned diarist"[183] Marie Bashkirtseff's (1860-1884) *Self-Portrait with Palette* (c.1880, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nice) shows the ambivalence that women of that time still felt in asserting their professional identity. Bashkirtseff introduces herself to the viewer only in part as a professional artist, and although music was in fact an important aspect of her life, both she and the contemporary spectator understood the inclusion of the harp in the background as a reference to the traditional accomplishments of the cultured and "feminine" woman. Her direct gaze communicates her seriousness of purpose, but it too is quickly tempered by the delicate flounces of the white jabot that frames her face. At the end of the decade and into the 1890s, women's self-portraits, like

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[183] Tamar Garb, "Marie Bashkirtseff," Gaze, ed., vol. 1, 222. In a more developed essay on Bashkirtseff, Garb situates the Russian artist's conscious display of femininity within Luce Irigaray's theory of "mimetism". Of this stance, Garb says: "It is a form of subversion, or a place of writing the 'feminine' whether consciously adopted or not, in which the inadequacy and limitations of the binary oppositions of phallogocentric discourse are exposed, not through standing outside them, which is impossible, but through imitation, almost pastiche, which thereby reveals a gap between the

the example of Johnson's photograph, exhibited little of the reticence that their predecessors understood to be a necessary aspect of women's negotiations of "masculine spheres". Laura Muntz's self-portrait (Fig. 1.19) is typically forthright and indicative of the general change in women's self-perception in an age when the woman artist no longer felt compelled to mitigate her professional role.

The painting is not dated, but the style of the work places it in the earlier part of the 1890s, in Paris. The face on the canvas is that of a mature woman, perhaps two or three years younger than a photograph that identifies her as an exhibitor in the Salon of 1896, when the artist was thirty-six years old (Fig. 1.20). The simple hairstyle, candid gaze and determined set of the features are the same in both images, and suggest a purposeful and strong-willed character. Muntz's painting participates in the conventions of the contemporary self-portrait, in which women artists intended, very specifically, to convey their professionalism. This type of self-portrait normally showed the artist at the very front of the composition, sensibly dressed in a smock, brushes and palette in hand, and with an expression of concentration on her face (Figs. 1.21, 1.22).[184] The unwavering gaze was understood to be focused on the work before the artist, but more often than not, the easel was not pictured; consequently, the viewer took the place of the presumed painting, and thus also became the object of the artist's scrutiny. In the context of dominant perceptions of women's proper roles at the end of the nineteenth century, one can then imagine the unconventional woman/artist inspecting the viewer

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writing subject and the clothing of sexed identity." "'Unpicking the Seams of Her Disguise': Self-representation in the Case of Marie Bashkirtseff," *The Block Reader in Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996) 116.

[184] Fig. 1.21, Thérèse Schwartze, *Self-Portrait*, 1888 (Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence). The reference to Joshua Reynolds' well-known self-portrait shielding his eyes (c.1747, National Portrait Gallery, London) was no doubt intended by Schwartze as a historical reference to support her self-image as an artist and an intellectual. Fig. 1.22, Milly Childers, *Self-Portrait*, 1889 (City Art Gallery, Leeds).

unequivocally, as her gaze met and challenged the look of the beholder at the moment that it traversed the space from outside to inside the image.

Muntz pictures herself in just that way. Dressed in the simplest of garments, her expression steadfast, she fills the space of the frame with her body and with the palette which she holds out in front of her, as if it were a shield. She uses the same limited range of shades for both her figure and the background, with the result that the eye is drawn to two focal points: the face, marked by the thick line of the black bow beneath it, and the dark palette, the only other strong horizontal in the sparse composition. She positions herself in front of a curtain, which in the studio is a space normally reserved for the model; with this motif Muntz establishes an additional reference to the New Woman -- she is no longer just the model reproduced on the canvas, but is the producer as well.

Character and Correspondence

Throughout the ages, the overwhelming majority of women who wished to be involved in the arts at more than an amateur level were dependent on the support of their fathers, brothers and husbands. It was in the workshops of the male members of the family that a woman learned the necessary skills that could lead to an independent career. At the end of the nineteenth century the conditions were available for women to pursue these skills on their own, but the young woman who chose the unorthodox life of an artist found the prospect very difficult to realize without relying on the financial support of relations, on family connections, or on social position. The financial and emotional support of, for example, Mary Cassatt's family, contributed a great deal to her

success.[185] Muntz had little help in either of these ways. She had to depend on her own resourcefulness for all her financial needs, and although she did have a relative in Paris who was a distinguished and influential figure in the art world, she did not, in fact, ever meet him.[186] This distant relative was Eugène Muntz, an art historian who wrote on many subjects, but was especially respected for his work on Leonardo and Raphael. He also served as librarian at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in the 1890s.[187] The sculptor Elizabeth Muntz, Laura Muntz's niece, has written that her aunt had never met "the great man," but that when she herself visited France in 1914 and talked with Eugène Muntz's brother and cousin, they relayed to her "of what high esteem the Aunt's work was held when she was in Paris" and that Eugène himself "admired her work and talked of it."[188] Elizabeth Muntz was devoted to her "Aunt Lolly," as she called her aunt: "She was one of the most important influences in my whole life, as a child I worshipped her and no other word describes my feeling for her and her work."[189] For her part, Laura Muntz's words of advice to her niece were gained through hard experience, and underscore the perseverance, single-mindedness, and the real cost, of a life devoted to art. "It [art] is

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[185] Although at times Cassatt considered her family's presence in Paris after 1877 to be a hindrance to her work, since she cared for both her ailing parents and a sister, Mara Witzling has called attention to the fact that Cassatt's productivity increased after her family's arrival. She suggests this was partly because it allowed the unmarried artist the supportive emotional environment of a close household, "without the pressure's of a wife's responsibilities." *Mary Cassatt: A Private World* (New York: Universe, 1991) 13.

[186] MacMurchy does report, however, that "during the time when Miss Muntz studied in Paris she was taken to the house where [her great-grandfather] used to live." The house was probably in Alsace -- the great-grandfather was "a Polish count who came to Alsace" -- but the comment leads one to assume that Muntz was taken there by French relatives, and therefore must have had at least some contact with her family living abroad. MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[187] Diane Radycki quotes Eugène Muntz's perception of why the men students of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts protested violently against women's admission to the institution. It was, he said, "the fear of seeing women take their share of the prize money [the Prix de Rome], scholarships and other rewards with which the school is richly endowed." Radycki 10.

[188] Letter from Elizabeth Muntz (Dorset, England) to Muriel Muntz, dated 11 April 1964. Laura Muntz File, Hamilton Gallery of Art.

[189] Letter to Muriel Muntz, 11 April 1964. Laura Muntz File, Hamilton Gallery of Art.

such a hard life for any woman, and I wanted you to marry and have children, but you can't do both -- don't try to do both."[190]

The friends and acquaintances who have left accounts of Muntz's personality mention her dedication to her work, but just as often it is her kind nature that is stressed. In his late years Harold Mortimer Lamb described her personality as "characterized by breadth of outlook, wide sympathies, generosity and kindness," adding that "She was a great and loyal friend. It was a privilege to have known her."[191] Another friend remembered her as a "warm-hearted lovely person; unassuming, talented, and beloved by her family and all her friends."[192] Following an interview with the artist, a journalist disclosed to her readers that "She is handicapped by a certain diffidence and nervousness upon first acquaintance. This soon passes away and a delightful and unconventional conversationalist is revealed."[193] Newton MacTavish saw her as "almost nervously energetic, and never happy apart from her work."[194] In Muntz's case this phrase was more than just a cliché, for even towards the end of her life, and already seriously ill, Muntz confided to Marie Douglas that "the more work to do the better I seem to be in health."[195] Marjorie MacMurchy's article stressed Muntz's self-assured manner, which no doubt she had acquired through necessity during her years in Europe.

> Her disposition is eager, impetuous and expressive. She is naturally inclined to share with others her own ideas of the art which she loves so entirely. Those who have heard her teach a class must have noticed how clear, definite and authoritative are her explanations. Her habit of mind is to be certain rather than

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[190] Letter from Laura Muntz to Elizabeth Muntz, quoted in Duval, 50. Elizabeth Muntz never married.

[191] Harold Mortimer Lamb, letter to F. Waldon, 4 November 1964. Laura Muntz File, Hamilton Gallery of Art.

[192] Short biography of Muntz by E. F. Foot, perhaps a distant family member; Muntz's brother Herbert married Helen C Foot. Toronto City Archives, Papers of the Heliconian Club, MU 8092.

[193] Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work."

[194] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 426.

[195] Letter to Marie Douglas, 27 February 1928. Muntz Collection, Dorset County Museum, England.

> in doubt, and this in itself, is part of the equipment of a teacher. It is not to be wondered at that Miss Muntz began to teach when very young.[196]

MacMurchy ended her feature on Laura Muntz by praising her "great capacity for labour and concentration", to which Muntz is reported to have casually replied "I've always wanted to paint, and still wish to paint -- all day -- quite simple, isn't it?"[197]

Muntz's letters to Harold Mortimer Lamb do not contribute a great deal to the understanding of her work, but they do provide a rare and candid instance of the artist's own voice. Muntz had known Mortimer Lamb before her move from Toronto to Montreal in 1906, and her stepson believed that she had gone there at least partly in order to be near Mortimer Lamb and his wife.[198] He became Muntz's closest friend and confidant after her European companion Wilhelmina Hawley's marriage and permanent move to Holland in 1901. Only five letters remain today, dating from 1919 to 1928, although it may be assumed that the two had corresponded for many years before this time.[199] The letters contain Muntz's thoughts and opinions on various topics; in one, she congratulates Mortimer Lamb on his article on Tom Thomson, and reminisces about Montreal and "the Mountain and the nice times I had sketching there" (7 May 1928). In another she makes a candid remark about Toronto painter Henrietta Shore, who had been a former pupil and a friend: "Poor Etta Shore has not been able to make good in New York and has gone out to Los Angeles, Cal. & opened, of all horrors, a tea & gift shop -- Ye Gods, I would rather scrub floors." (3 January 1926) Muntz had stayed with Henrietta Shore while on a visit to New York the previous year, and wrote to Marie Douglas that Shore was "a very clever artist and a very clever woman," and perhaps the

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[196] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[197] MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day."

[198] Letter from Edward Lyall to the author.

tea-and-gift-shop situation seemed to her all the more prosaic if run by a talented and clever woman.[200] Clearly she could not imagine herself undertaking such a conventional and "feminine" occupation. In 1919, she writes about her husband and a stepson: "Charles and Edward are both well -- and I am really a very happy person -- more so than I deserve no doubt," but a letter dated 7 May 1928 adopts a wearier tone:

> My husband is a very nice chap & we do have some things in common though it is not art so that a great part of me is always and everlastingly dumb. It isn't that he does not sympathise or go to Art Exhibitions with me but how can you talk about pictures or artists to someone it bores stiff. As for my stepson (the one at home now) he stands by the Gallery door looking as if he had swallowed a dose of poison. Isn't the world a funny place? Or the people in it rather?

In the same letter Muntz informed Mortimer Lamb that she was sending him an English translation of Gustave Flaubert's novel Madame Bovary. Muntz had always been an avid reader (as MacMurchy had noted in her article) and she stated that, having first read it in French, she found the English version

> much more bald & naked than the "involved" French -- perhaps the word obscure would better express my meaning -- anyway it is most enthralling & though I had read the book before, I could not lay it down until I finished it -- it may help a few hours to pass away.

On the occasion of Mortimer Lamb's fifty-third birthday, Muntz again sent her friend the gift of a book, this time "Russian stories -- Pushkin & Gorky -- names to reckon with though some of the stories gave me the blues, yet they are wonderful and soul-gripping in their own way." (17 April 1925) In her sixty-fifth year, and in poor health, she mused about the passing of the years, and conveyed her feelings of physical and spiritual weariness.

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[199] The letters are in the British Columbia Provincial Archives, Harold Mortimer Lamb Files, MS 2834, v.1, f.15.

[200] Letter to Marie Douglas, 21 October 1925. Muntz Collection, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dorset County Museum, England. The influence of Muntz's sensibility on her pupil is suggested in Newton MacTavish's description of Shore's work as characterized by "mysterious symbolical realms, where it is difficult for the average mind to follow." MacTavish, *The Fine Arts in Canada* 144.

> In this world we all change so much. It is one of the sad things in life, this "growing away." Lately I have been rereading books I read twenty years ago & it is curious to me to find how much I have changed -- sometimes I hope I have improved and then comes an awful slump & I am so disgusted with myself, that I even understand why people commit suicide -- & I am supposed to be one of those sensible level-headed people.

These few surviving letters reveal an introspective and intelligent woman, well-read and possessed of an original and often humorous turn of phrase.

> I am longing to get away to the country -- all on my own, to do some work outdoors -- only those hellish mosquitoes always love me so much I have no peace. I have a thousand of them biting, while Charles sits serenely untouched -- it is enough to make a cat swear. (7 May 1928)

Woman Friend and Colleague

In Paris Muntz met the New York artist Wilhelmina Douglas Hawley, who had been teaching watercolour painting at the Colarossi. Both women were in their early thirties and single -- spinsters in the terminology of the time.[201] As Muntz had suggested in her opinion that marriage and a career in art were incompatible, spinsterhood was the consciously chosen state of many professional women in the late nineteenth century. Spinsters had provided the backbone of the feminist movement of the time, and "spinsterhood, celibacy and women-partnerships were positive identities for middle-class women."[202] There is a long history of friendships between women artists in Europe and in North America; the Canadian Helen McNicoll formed a life-long friendship with the British painter Dorothea Sharpe, and Florence Carlyle moved to England after the

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[201] In the earlier decades of the century unmarried middle-class women were called "surplus" women, and their imposed idle existence was one of the first problems that the feminists of the 1850s and 1860s had tried to resolve in ways which served women's interests. Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985) 87.

[202] Cherry 45.

death of her parents in order to live with her friend Juliet Hastings.[203] Women's friendships facilitated their access to the streets and cafés of urban centres, lessened their financial burdens through shared accommodation, and provided satisfying emotional and intellectual companionship. Deborah Cherry describes the life of a typical foreign art student in Paris toward the end of the century, quoting the words of one such female student who stressed that it was "necessary to break with the conventions of bourgeois femininity when establishing an independent working life."

> The young women, she wrote, 'did not look particularly tidy, having on their working clothes -- an apron and sleeves grimed with chalk, charcoal and paint -- but all looked intelligent, busy and happy.' The women shared aspirations to exhibit in the Salon as much as they shared walks, talks and teas; they modelled for each other and gave constructive criticism of work in hand. As one of them affirmed, 'companionship is one of the pleasantest bits of our student life.'[204]

A photograph of Muntz and Wilhelmina Hawley shows them on the balcony of their shared living quarters, with the roofs of Paris behind them (Fig. 1.23). They stand close together. Muntz the taller and less animated of the two, while Hawley, hand on hip, turns her head to smile at her companion. It is a picture of just the kind of friendship described above -- one which evolved into a close working partnership which lasted until Hawley's marriage in 1901.

Hawley had received fairly extensive art training in the United States before arriving in Paris in 1892 with another American art student, Nannie Homans.[205] She had studied at the Cooper Union Art School, and at the Art Students' League of New York with, among others, William Merritt Chase. In the 1880s Hawley was an active member

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[203] Gualtieri 152, 163.

[204] Cherry 49. Florence Carlyle also has left a record of her experience in the studios of Paris in the early 1890s, dramatically communicating the atmosphere of shared purpose between women working together in a life drawing class. "Oh, the thrill of those silent hours, standing shoulder to shoulder in the army of ardent, splendid, hard working women." Butlin 75.

[205] Biographical information on Wilhelmina Hawley may be found in Stott 247-250.

and the first vice-president of the ASL, as well as one of the original founders of the New York Watercolour Society, and in 1889 she opened her own studio specializing in children's portraits.[206] In Paris she studied at the Académie Julian before going on to the Colarossi, where she filled the post of water-colour teacher until 1899, and where, like Laura Muntz, she was awarded a silver medal for her work.[207] In 1894, Hawley was residing in the rue Notre Dame des Champs, 111; the entry in the exhibition books of the *Salon des Champs-Elysées* for 1895 lists this same address for Hawley and for Laura Muntz. The two women shared living quarters again in 1897 and 1898, at 9, rue des Fourneaux.[208] From the mid-1890s to the end of the decade, Hawley and Muntz spent several summers together in the village of Rijsoord in Northern Holland, painting the local women and children, as well as earning their living by giving classes to Canadian and American students.[209] The women formed a close friendship and professional collaboration, so much so that *Saturday Night* magazine wrote in 1899

> Miss Muntz has returned from Holland...She has come back minus her "wife," from whom she has separated for a season, not on the ground of that subtle ethical idea, or ideas, which our divorce courts pronounce "incompatibility of temper," but because Miss Hawley's Paris friends wished her with them for a season.[210]

Wilhelmina Hawley joined Muntz upon her permanent return to Canada in 1898, and the two artists opened a studio together in the Yonge Street Arcade, in the same building as George Reid. "A very interesting life class is that of Miss Muntz and Miss Hawley, conducted at their studio[...]Miss Muntz conducted the work in oils, Miss

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[206] Stott 248. Mention of Hawley's vice-presidency of the ASL and her involvement in the Watercolour Society is given in: Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 12, no. 6 (24 December 1898): 15.

[207] "Studio-Talk," *The Studio* 17, no. 5 (June 1899): 62.

[208] A record of Hawleys' and Muntz's addresses are given in : Dumas, F. G., *Explication des ouvrages de peinture, sculpture et architecture, gravure et lithographie des artistes vivants exposés au palais des Champs-Elysées* (Paris: Paul Duport, 1895) This publication was repeated yearly, with each Salon.

Hawley in water colors."[211] Muntz and Hawley maintained their close working relationship until 1901, when Hawley left for Holland to marry a man from Rijsoord named Bas de Koning, whom she had hired the previous summer to row her about while she painted. Hawley was forty-one at the time of the marriage, and, like Muntz after her own late marriage, she decreased her artistic activity immediately and drastically, to the point that in 1903 the municipal records at Rijsoord, where Hawley remained for the rest of her life, indicated that she had no profession.[212]

Muntz and Hawley had very similar artistic interests, both in the dynamic brushstroke of their technique, and in their choice of women and children as their primary subjects. At the end of the nineteenth century, the representation of motherhood was an extremely popular and meaning-laden theme for artists working in wide varieties of style on both sides of the ocean. In Paris, the two best-known representatives of *maternité*, or the theme of motherhood, were the American artist Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) and the French painter Eugène Carrière (1849-1906).[213] In 1893, the Durand-Ruel Gallery held a one-woman exhibition of Cassatt's motherhood subjects, which Muntz and Hawley would surely have had the occasion to see. But without direct evidence it is difficult to isolate a specific "influence" and, conversely, the artist's own testament can direct us to models we would otherwise have thought unlikely. Two of Muntz's paintings of 1897, which are among the work most admired today, had just such an indirect example.

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[209] Just a few days after Hawley and Nannie Homans arrived in Paris, they travelled to Rijsoord where they spent the summer. Stott 248.

[210] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 12, no.46 (30 September 1899): 9.

[211] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 12, no. 19 (25 March 1899): 9.

[212] Stott 249.

[213] Carrière's style had more impact on the Symbolist-inspired works that Muntz painted after her return to Canada, than on the sunlit canvases of her Paris years.

The Pink Dress (Fig. 1.24) and *The Children's Hour* (Fig. 1.25) show only children, without any reference to the world of adults. Muntz had travelled to Rome in June of that year, and her letter to a friend in Canada was reproduced with her permission in a Toronto magazine. It describes the striking impression that Renaissance representations of children had made upon her, particularly two by Michelangelo.

> One thing among all the decorations found at Pompeii, and amongst all the sculpture here impressed me very much [was] the way they draw children, using them so often as little statues, holding jars for fountains, and as cupids flying, running, sleeping, always in motion, alive, and, what is more, childish. In the Sistine chapel two small marble figures (children) by Michael Angelo are especially remarkable...and the beautifully modelled little faces are just as childish as anyone could wish.[214]

She continues to describe several more examples, always stressing their "charmingly childlike" aspect, and although the modern viewer would not think to suggest Michelangelo as a source for Muntz's interpretations of child-life in 1897, it seems nevertheless to have been the case. The images which Muntz painted in that year communicate the particular energy and unselfconscious freedom of childhood which she had admired in the Renaissance examples, and which she expressed through a contemporary impressionistic style: the typical slumped poses of the brother and sister immersed in their picture-book, or the blonde girl in her pink dress, running almost out of the picture, hair flying, convincingly evoke the charmed world of children engrossed in their pleasures. It should also be noted that Wilhelmina Hawley had specialized in children's portraiture before her arrival in France, an interest which must have supported Muntz's own enthusiasm for an already-beloved subject. As the following quote attests, she continued to express the correlation between children and innocence after her return to Canada.

> Miss Muntz has taken a popular and surely most desirable field in her baby land, for to these "new-born denizens of life's great city" we may always turn for truth, for love, for freshness, for innocence, when it seems apart from them these virtues have fled the earth.[215]

In matters of style, Berthe Morisot's (1841-1985) extremely sketch-like impressionist aesthetic could have provided a model, but Muntz may have had another valuable influence closer to home. Although the long artistic association between Muntz and Hawley was based on a mutual exploration and collaboration of ideas, it is likely that at the beginning of the 1890s it was Hawley's extensive experience in watercolours that encouraged Muntz to develop her distinctive fluid and rapid method of working in oils. Hawley's watercolour technique closely approximated the method that Muntz employed in her impressionistic paintings of 1897.

> [Hawley] obscured outlines to make the images indistinct...she worked with wet colors allowing them to mix and blend in the shadows and background and in the flesh tones, yet maintaining a brilliance and freshness of colour. She alternated drawing in transparent blue and graphite, and the drawing sometimes shows through the finished work.[216]

In *The Children's Hour* Muntz's goal seems to be to convey the naturalness of children's experience by the use of an equally animated and immediate method of painting. The girl's dress is described by a few swift sweeps of the brush dipped in white and ochre pigment. Her hand is just the merest suggestion of a small fist clutching a book; her face is essentially featureless, the details washed out by the reflected light of the sun that pours through the windowpanes behind her, and illuminates the brilliant white page of the picture book. On her left shoulder Muntz has drawn a thick line of luminous white to mark the place where the sun touches her figure directly. The boy is

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[214] Initials L.C.D., "Studio and Gallery", *Saturday Night* 10, no. 30 (12 June 1897): 9.
[215] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 13, no. 5 (16 December 1899): 15.
[216] Stott 249.

represented in greater detail, although his clothing is still very loosely described. The darker tones are enlivened by a single line drawn with the tip of a brush dipped in white, which stands for the thick cotton collar of his dusky-purple sailor jacket. The lilac and peach-coloured cover of the book adds a contrasting note to the essentially cool tones of the painting, warmed also by the orange stripes of the sofa into which the pair are comfortably nestled. Throughout, Muntz evokes the feeling of comfort and freshness, of children well cared-for and content in the moment. She succeeds in conveying the sensuous pleasures of childhood without either eroticizing the young bodies or enveloping them in saccharine sweetness.

Such a convincing characterization must have originated in a direct observation of her models, perhaps a friend's or a neighbour's children. One cannot say the same for a very similar subject, painted in 1898, which shows essentially the same setting, the same children, (although younger-looking despite the passing of a year) and the same book being read. This painting was first called "The Favourite Book," but it was acquired by the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1901 under the title *Interesting Story* (Fig. 1.26). The subject evidently proved interesting enough for Muntz to have painted it twice, and although *Interesting Story* is probably the most popular of Muntz's paintings today, it is a much less vital work than *The Children's Hour*. The daring and spontaneous technique of the latter is replaced by a studied nonchalance, as in, for example, the night-dress of the little boy, which spreads across his lap like so much stiffly whipped cream. Although there are some finely painted areas (the misty Parisian rooftops, the books on the window seat, the suggestion of pattern on the large cushions) the effect of the entire representation is conditioned by the doll-like faces of the two

children, reminiscent of Muntz's earlier references to popular illustration or to contemporary advertisements: "Healthy, Happy, Hearty -- Nestlé's Food Babies."

Two paintings, both Dutch subjects, one by Muntz and one by Hawley, were reproduced in the 1899 issue of *The Studio*. A comparison of these works illustrates the stylistic techniques which they shared, though one is painted in oils and the other in watercolours, but it also underscores the differences in their artistic sensibilities and consequently their divergent approach to a similar subject. Muntz's *Mother and Child* (Fig. 1.27) shows the solid figures of a young woman and a fat baby bundled in thick clothes; they express the theme of simple, familial country life, characterized in the pragmatic attitude of the mother who cradles her child in her lap while she goes about the task of peeling an apple. Muntz lays down flat, broad planes of colour, and pays particular attention to the modulations of light and shadow which lend the work its characteristic solidity. As with much of her work in later years, Muntz succeeds in suggesting the temporal (the baby holds a munched-on biscuit) with the universal -- the mother and child form one organic unit, symbolic of the indissoluble mother-child bond. The maternal subject is depicted through a balanced, pyramidal composition that calls to mind traditional representations of the Virgin and Child. The downcast eyes and gentle smile of the Dutch mother suggest a humbleness and a sense of voluntary self-sacrifice that links ordinary motherhood with the saintly humility of the Madonna. After her return to Canada, Muntz developed this theme in much greater depth. The fusion of domestic references with more philosophic concerns, an approach which characterized much of her later work, is explored in the chapter *Madonna Mother Death and Child* further in this thesis.

Hawley's *Scouring* (Fig. 1.28) shows a solitary woman clothed in the traditional white lace veil still worn by the women of Rijsoord, who cleans an oversized pot tilted on its side. Her technique is light and quick, and she leaves large areas in extraordinarily sketch-like form. The head-dress which frames her face against the background wall is barely suggested by one sweep of the brush, and the face itself is essentially featureless. Hawley's draughtsmanship is as sure as Muntz's, but the intended immediacy of the composition is effected through the distinctive transparency and delicacy of the watercolour technique The characteristic lines of white, created by leaving areas of the paper untouched, are strategically dispersed over the entire surface to indicate reflections and to enliven and energize the composition. They are reminiscent of seventeenth-century Dutch artists' experimentation with the camera obscura, which resulted in a similarly arbitrary distribution of white markings, caused by the halation of light. A watercolour painting by Muntz showing another Dutch subject (Fig. 1.29)[217] disposes these white areas in a manner identical to Hawley's. It is very different from the way that Muntz applied watercolours under O'Brien's direction, and her use of the medium -- extremely fluid, worked wet on wet -- closely resembles Hawley's signature way of handling watercolour, and can be recognized once again in the way that Muntz manipulated oil paint in her canvases of 1897.[218] How the two women treat the like subject of Dutch rural life, however, has very different results.

In *Scouring*, Hawley allots an equal amount of space to the descriptive surroundings and to the figure, and the enormous pot attracts as much attention as the

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[217] *Girl Raking Hay, Holland*; unsigned watercolour reproduced in Sotheby's (Canada), November 1989, no. 65. Sotheby's has included the information that "This work dates to 1891," however Muntz first arrived in France in the fall of 1891 and it is not likely that she spent her limited funds on trips outside of Paris. I believe that the watercolour dates to a later time, after the mid-1890s, and certainly after Muntz's acquaintanceship with Hawley.

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woman who reaches inside it with her white cloth. The theme of the scouring of the pot, however, has another (surely unintended) connotation, apart from the association with cleanliness and honest labour which Hawley was attempting to describe. In seventeenth-century Dutch genre pictures, an empty pot turned conspicuously towards the viewer, and with a female hand inserted into its opening, had well-known sexual allusions.[219] In these scenes of broad and vulgar humour, which were repeated with variations over and over again throughout the century, an aproned maid scrubbed the pot while grinning brazenly at the viewer; sometimes a leering man looked on, laughing and gesturing suggestively. One important exception to these pervasively salacious images were the engravings of Geertruydt Roghman, dating to the mid-seventeenth century. In a series of five prints she pictured women's labour without the sexual innuendo common to the genre.[220] The working woman in Roghman's representation naturalistically turns her broad back to the viewer as she bends over a sink full of pots. Since Hawley's modestly attired model also leans over her work with no concern for the viewer, the sexual associations are mitigated, and yet the immensity of the open pot still echoes with the gross humour that was such a large part of seventeenth-century Dutch genre imagery. All these factors combine to create an effect very different from Muntz's mother and child. Yet a contemporary critic stressed the similarities of the two works, which to him were best expressed in terms of a style perceived to be masculine, as he likened the

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[219] See for example, Jochen Becker, "Are These Girls Really So Neat?" *Art in history, History in art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture*, David Freedberg and Jan de Vries, eds., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 139-173.

[220] Martha Moffitt Peacock, "Geertruydt Roghman and the Female Perspective in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Genre Imagery," *Woman's Art Journal* (Fall 1993/Winter 1994): 3-10.

"virile drawing" of Hawley's painting to Muntz's "confidence and freedom in handling not usually met with in feminine work." [221]

One should mention, as well, the importance of the aesthetics of the sketch to late nineteenth-century French art.[222] Since the third decade of the century, the "sketch-finish" conflict had been a topic of fierce debate. An appreciation of the sketch aesthetic had existed before this time -- Diderot had said "passion makes only sketches" -- therefore by the nineteenth century the battle centred not so much on whether the sketch was an acceptable work of art, but rather on whether it should be accorded equal place with the "finished" painting representative of Academic standards. From the mid-century on, the sketch was perceived as an artwork which permitted the viewer to experience the excitement of the creator's *première pensée*, or initial inspiration.[223] By 1878, the critic Jules-Antoine Castagnary could say:

> Why do people talk about finishing and improving pictures? When the painter has rendered his impression and said what he had to say, the painting is finished and it would spoil it to add anything.[224]

Castagnary's comment did not even refer to one of the radical Impressionists, but rather to a *juste milieu* painter, which should not suggest, however, that conservative French criticism accepted an extreme sketch-like approach outright. Mary Cassatt's experimentation with the light palette and rapid, spontaneous style of the Impressionists resulted in the rejection of her work in the Salons of 1875, 1876, and 1877.[225] Twenty

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[221] *The Studio* (June 1899). The distinctions between "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics in art are discussed in the "Gender and Style" section of this chapter.

[222] A thorough discussion of the various issues surrounding the aesthetics of the sketch are provided by Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, (London: Phaidon, 1971).

[223] Boime, *The Academy* 88.

[224] Boime, *The Academy* 101.

[225] Nancy Mowll Mathews, "Mary Cassatt" in Gaze, ed., vol. 1, 367.

years later, however, when Muntz painted *The Children's Hour*, such an approach would not have been considered unusual.

As Laura Muntz's Dutch *Mother and Child* illustrates, by 1898-1899 the artist had returned to a more measured and substantial way of setting down her figures, while Hawley continued in the light and sketchy style which was her trademark.[226] Muntz's paintings of 1897 seem to reflect her close association with Wilhelmina Hawley both in her exclusive concentration on children and in technique. Although these qualities were not anomalous to the general tendencies of her art production, the vigour and immediacy of *The Pink Dress* and *The Children's Hour* was rarely matched again in a finished work in oils.

Gender and Style

Muntz's *Mother and Child* of c. 1898 (Fig. 1.30) indicates one way in which her treatment of the maternal theme differed from that of Mary Cassatt. As demonstrated by Griselda Pollock in her essay "Modernity and the spaces of femininity," Cassatt's project, stated in general terms, was to record the places and experiences available to women in Paris, as governed by the contemporary restrictions of class and gender.[227] Although Pollock's important contribution to the study of nineteenth-century women

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[226] A large oil painting by Hawley shows two young girls in school uniform holding bunches of daffodils and laughingly throwing the flowers at each other. It is an extremely lighthearted scene of the kind that Muntz would not have chosen, and it is painted with the same fluidity and washy use of pigment that Hawley consistently used in her watercolours. Two even more marked examples of Hawley's spontaneous technique are an unframed sketched oil portrait of a blond woman (signed and dated Paris 1899), which Muntz kept in an art folder along with her own work, and a watercolour of a woman in Dutch dress, holding a very large open umbrella. Hawley does not set the figure against a painted background, but she nevertheless very deliberately suggests the rainy setting by her skilful use of the watercolour medium, boldly dissolving the contours of figure and umbrella into one washy form. (All works in private collection, Toronto).

[227] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988).

artists has been complexified and expanded since its publication,[228] her foregrounding of Cassatt's interest in documenting her surroundings remains relevant, and can serve as a point of contrast to Muntz's understanding of domestic or maternal scenes. In the great majority, if not all, of the maternal subjects that Muntz painted until the end of her life, just as it is in this *Mother and Child*, the background is merely hinted at, described as simply being "outside" or "inside." Whereas Cassatt felt that in the interest of modernism women's fashion should be described "as accurately and as much in detail as possible,"[229] Muntz foregrounded the timeless and universal qualities of motherhood through a deliberate generalization of women's dress.

Cassatt's depiction of the women's world around her, so contemporary and full of realistic detail, was nevertheless considered by the French art-critical establishment as not indicative enough of a specifically feminine artistic sensibility. Berthe Morisot's paintings, on the other hand, classed as Impressionistic, were believed by them to be quintessentially feminine. The subject of a distinct female method of art-making, and its relation to style, was a much-debated topic in the French cultural world of the late nineteenth century, and is an important issue to consider when examining the reception of Muntz's work both in France and in Canada.[230] Both the male critics and the *Union des femmes artistes et sculpteurs* attempted to define this elusive feminine manner, although they did not agree on several major points. Formed in 1881 by the sculptor Mme León Bertaux, who also served as its first president, the *Union* campaigned for

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[228] For example, in Gill Perry's study of the work of the French painter Emilie Charmy (1878-1974). Perry, "Women Artists."

[229] Mathews 87.

[230] The most comprehensive discussion of this subject has been provided by Tamar Garb, in abbreviated form in "'L'Art Feminin': The Formation of a Critical Category in late Nineteenth-Century France," *Art History* 12, no.1 (March 1989): 39-65, and expanded in her book *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.)

women's entry into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Without access to the respected academic style, women could not participate in the traditional genres of "high" art. For the *Union* and its supporters, *l'art féminin* was characterised by a continuance of tradition, to which were added certain qualities perceived to be natural to women.

> Women's innate capacity for sentiment, their imaginations, their aspirations toward the ideal and their instinctive wish to conserve that which was valuable, were produced as the corrective cry to *'il faut être de son temps'*, characterised as mere opportunism, passing fashion or ignorance.[231]

The attack on modernity was linked to more than just aesthetic concerns -- the *Union* envisaged women as the saviours of morality in an increasingly corrupt world. *L'art féminin* was, in the words of Mme Bertaux, "a truly feminine mission", with all the implications of biology, religion, philanthropy, domesticity and maternity that the phrase had carried since the mid-nineteenth century. As Tamar Garb explains, the *Union's* formulation of *l'art féminin*

> could only make sense in the context of the naturalised gender assumptions of the culture. In addition to their fertile imaginations, their intense emotions necessary to their social roles as mothers and nurturers, and untainted idealism, women were thought to be capable of profound intuitive understanding, and, importantly, to possess an innate conservatism necessary to the survival of the species.[232]

Although the *Union* called for women's participation in *le grand art*, the genres associated with men and intellect (academic figures, history painting, landscape) were in fact not common in the exhibitions of the *Salon des femmes*, sponsored by the *Union*. The majority of the artists who participated in the exhibitions chose to represent genres traditionally associated with women (still life, domestic interior, portrait) or, if bold

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[231] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 160.
[232] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 161.

enough to show a nude (female) subject, its representation functioned, in Garb's words, "within the standard erotic economy of the time."[233] An exception to the rule was the *Union's* second president, Mme Virginie Demont-Breton, elected in 1894, in the same year that she was awarded the French Legion of Honour. Demont-Breton produced heroic subjects, which often represented powerful women or family groups, but which nevertheless were infused with "a special feminine tenderness and understanding."[234] The French brand of feminism that the women artists' union espoused was akin to the maternal feminism which was at the forefront of the women's movement in Canada.[235] The *Union's* campaign to enhance women's intellectual and artistic status was not intended to turn them away from their traditional domestic roles, but rather to train women to be more informed and influential wives and mothers, and thereby produce greater harmony in the home. On an even larger scale, women's sensibility as expressed through their art was intended to provide a moral example of purity and idealism which would preserve the health of the nation. According to the *Union des femmes artistes*, women's maternal and redemptive qualities, promoted as natural, were capable of saving traditional French culture from the threatening forces of modernity. As symbols for purity and spirituality, women were positioned as an antidote against the encroaching materialism and decadence of contemporary culture.

Male artists and critics, on the other hand, believed that since women were by nature incapable of *le grand art*, their attempts to appropriate the style and themes of academic tradition could only result in inconsequential copies and "vulgar pastiche."[236]

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[233] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 134.

[234] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 136.

[235] The characteristics of maternal feminism in Canada are discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[236] The critic L. Just, 1892, quoted in Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 132.

The corollary to this conviction was that true femininity resided in the expression of the superficial and emotional qualities which comprised woman's essential character. The art which best suited women was Impressionism, which they believed did not require the work of intellect or imagination, but simply a recording of nature.

> Men's genius provides them with a tendency to go beyond themselves[...]They suspect, outside of themselves, the existence of a world of forms and ideas which they are forced to apprehend and understand[...]It is not the same with women who never know anything but themselves, from their prejudices, from their impressions, from their hates, from their loves[...]They have no idea of logical order, of sequence[...]they recognise no value in events or ideas except in so far as they affect them: they are Impressionists, I tell you, in history, in morality, in literature, in grammar, in logical analysis, in mathematics, in chemistry, and, consequently, in painting.[237]

Impressionism, then, suited the woman artist in particular since "she alone can limit her efforts and translate her impressions and recompense the superficial by her incomparable charm, by her fine grace and sweetness."[238] Understandably, the *Union* did not concur with this characterization of femininity, and in addition felt that if Impressionism was not considered to be a meaningful style for men, then it was also not good enough for women. If women were to be the saviours of morality, their art had to refer to the respected tradition of the ideal and the spiritual, and not to the material world represented by the new school of Impressionism. Women were promoted as the custodians of the moral values of the past, and the *Union* felt that it was precisely in relation to tradition that women's true worth could be expressed. Mme Bertaux addressed her "sisters of the brush" in the terms familiar to maternal feminists on both sides of the ocean.

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[237] The critic H. Le Roux, 1888, quoted in Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 124.

[238] Parisian critic de Soissons, 1894, quoted in Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 124.

> Let us remain women in society, in the family; let us show that one can be an artist, and even a great artist, without ceasing to fulfil the sum of duties which is our glory and our honour.[239]

How, then, can the work that Laura Muntz produced in Paris be categorized according to the contemporary standards of gendered style? *Mother and Child* (c. 1898, Fig. 1.30) is informed by a strong Impressionist aesthetic. Its lack of traditional finish and immediacy of expression is perhaps even more pronounced than in the sketchy images of children painted in 1897. Her painting technique and choice of subject seems therefore to follow what the male establishment considered properly feminine practice, and is antithetical to the ideals set forward by the *Union des femmes peintres*. This is interesting in light of the fact that the painting which won Muntz an honourable mention in the *Salon des Champs-Elysées* in 1895 was singled out for praise by Mme Demont-Breton herself. A Canadian magazine recounted the particular success of *Dis-moi?* (*The Lesson*, Fig. 1.31).

> [Laura Muntz's] first success was scored at the Paris Salon of 1896 [sic] with "Dis-Moi," a woman and a child conning a book by firelight, the child's face raised in query to that of the woman. For this she was awarded an honourable mention, and the picture was snapped up when offered for sale. It was voted by the critics and the painters "un grand succès." Mme Dumont-Breton [sic] (herself a great artist), the daughter of the celebrated Jules Breton, wrote to Miss Muntz, commending the work in terms of unmeasured admiration.[240]

The painting, however, can be classified as *juste milieu* in style, rather than either impressionistic or academic. It is curious that both the critical establishment and the president of the *Union des femmes peintres* singled it out as a particular success. It seems that *Dis-Moi?* had something for everyone: Mme Demont-Breton must have

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[239] Garb, *Sisters of the Brush* 164.

[240] Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work." The description of this painting fits exactly the image and date of Muntz's *The Lesson*, now in the collection of the University of Lethbridge Gallery of Art. M.J. Mount's description differs only in stating that the face of the child is raised up to the woman's, but it is doubtful that the author actually saw the painting. The description of *Dis-Moi?* in the *The Quartier Latin* (1, no.1 (July 1896): 13), which does not specify the position of the

appreciated the solidly drawn figures and clear narrative, in which the moral lesson is enacted within a domestic space, and with a woman in a maternal teaching role. The illusionistic device of the red glow of firelight signalled technical skill and its striking effect made for a particularly noticeable entry on the walls of the Salon. One of Demont-Breton's own paintings (*L'Homme est en mer*, 1889, Walker Art Gallery, Minneapolis) pictures a monumentally proportioned woman in a similar setting. She sits holding a contentedly sleeping baby on her lap and directs a sadly pensive gaze toward the blazing flames which cast a warm glow on herself and her child. The pair is safe and comfortable, but the clearly communicated message is that woman's life is not complete without the presence of the man of the house. Although Demont-Breton did not intend that women artists limit their subjects to paintings of motherhood, she did not hesitate to pronounce maternity as woman's highest goal.

> Maternity is the most beautiful, healthiest glory of woman; it is a love dream in palpable form and comes smilingly to demand our tenderness and our kisses; it is the inexhaustible source whence feminine art draws its purest inspirations.[241]

Demont-Breton's traditional image of motherhood is heavy with the kind of moral baggage that women had been made to shoulder throughout the nineteenth century. Muntz's painting, by contrast, does not allude to the absent male presence, and although the principal interest is located in the pictorial effects, the viewer is also struck by the freshness and gentle sensibility of the representation. Despite the success of *Dis-Moi?* Muntz never exhibited at the *Salon des femmes*. Unlike *Dis-Moi?*, her strikingly impressionistic paintings of 1897 surely did not conform to the ideals of feminine art as defined by the *Union*, and the following year Muntz returned permanently to Canada.

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child's face, is the same. Although Mount does not include a question mark as part of the title, the exhibition catalogue for the 1895 Salon des Champs-Elysées does. Dumas, 1895, *Dis-Moi?*, no. 1416: 118.

As for the opinion of the male critics in France, it seems that, for them, the combination of Muntz's subjects and style resulted in a quintessentially "feminine" art. With reference to *Récréation des Enfants* (location unknown), which Muntz exhibited in the Salon of 1896, a French critic wrote:

> In the family parlour, dimly lighted, two pink-and-white, fair-haired babies are trying their first dancing steps. The two girlies, holding each other by the hands, are turning round and round, with exquisite awkwardness gliding across the wax-polished battens of the floor[...] In the perspective, the grandmother, in ecstatic admiration; at the piano, the mother, her hands lightly touching the keys, half turned round to contemplate the dancers. Such is the subject treated by Miss Laura Muntz, with consummate skill. She has the sense of the improved motions and the instinctive graces of childhood.[242]

His commentary begins with a foregrounding of the feminine qualities of the subject matter, and ends with a description of the impressionistic technique appropriate to female art-making.

> She translates them with an insight and a touch unspoiled by sentimental preciosity, relieved by the freshest of colouring, the freest, the most ethereal, and the most supple technique.

A writer for *The Quartier Latin*, the North American art students' journal in Paris, also praises Muntz's work in the terms reserved for the women's production. He introduces his subject with a general statement which encapsulates the male position regarding the nature of *l'art féminin*.

> Why do we talk of women in art and not of men? Because when we talk of men as a class, we simply talk of art, but when we talk of women in art, we talk of a phase of it[...]I believe there is a place for women in art, but it is hardly time yet for it to be fully discovered and generally understood even by themselves. We hear the remark sometimes that "there is no sex in art." I cannot understand it[...] If women would do anything significant in art, they must find, with no uncertain choice, what is distinctly the womanly thing to do.
> In the Salon des Champs-Elysées there is a picture by a young woman which fills this requirement. I refer to the children dancing, by Miss Laura A. Muntz. I think

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[241] Demont-Breton quoted in Susan Waller, "Virginie Demont-Breton," in Gaze, vol.1, 449.

[242] French critic Thiébault-Sisson, *Le Temps*, 23 May 1896, quoted in Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work."

> no one but a woman could have done this. The technique is free, graceful and untiring, but passing that, its human beauty, the woman's heart and the child nature in it are revealed in a way inexpressible by any other than pictorial means. Its winsomeness is like that of woman herself, and the children touch our deepest and best emotions. Perhaps it takes the masculine nature to appreciate its feminine quality, but a man never could have done it.[243]

Using the logic of "separate spheres," the critic for the *Quartier Latin* postulates a subject matter and style which he sees as uniquely feminine and valid, albeit segregated as woman's production. But like all attempts to secure definitions of gender, always socially constructed and hence constantly shifting and fluid, this one was fated to deconstruct itself. Following directly upon the last sentence quoted above, the writer discusses the work of Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942) whose work, he declares, is so accomplished that "it might so easily be taken for the work of a man." Yet since such a conclusion is not permissible within the framework of *l'art féminin*, the critic abandons this observation and falls back upon the platitudes and prejudice of imposed views of femininity.

> The splendid work of Cecilia Beaux in the Champ-de-Mars is justly looked upon as one of the chief successes of late for women in art. It might so easily be taken for the work of a man, that I confess it nearly spoils my argument. But I think such a view of it would be superficial. She has reached the top of good painting, and all that; just as gifted people have done before, and will continue to do; but her work contains what is of much more importance, a thing which she makes us feel the need of in art, the womanly sense of things.

The correlation of gender and style appears to have been different in Canada. The association of femininity with the preservation of cultural tradition was complicated by the fact that the young country was struggling to establish a tradition of its own, partly in opposition to old world culture. Moreover, although modernity had its opponents in the Canadian art establishment, it did not carry the same power to threaten

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243 "Thoughts on the Salons," *The Quartier Latin* 1, no. 1 (July 1896): 13.

the value of established institutions. Laura Muntz's participation in modern art practices was manifested, in the minds of Canadian critics, primarily in her style; forceful, abstracted, gestural work that was perceived to be aligned with the male avant-garde.

As mentioned, *The Studio* of 1899 had mentioned Muntz's "confidence and freedom of handling not usually met with in feminine work," while Newton MacTavish reported that the artist tended "to handle her medium with ruthless prodigality."[244] These statements made by Canadian male critics were not meant to categorize Muntz as a feminine, and therefore lesser, artist. She received straightforward praise for her vigorous and masculine approach. In the same vein, *Saturday Night's* Jean Grant declared that Muntz's "original and striking work has left many Canadians astonished, to say the least" and characterized it as being "confident, even daring in touch, broad in manner, and charming in harmonious colour, whether delicate or pronounced."[245] In the 1913 publication *Canada and Its Provinces, a History of the Canadian People and Their Institutions*, E.F.B. Johnston's chapter on the visual arts presented short biographies of the foremost artists of the day. The paragraph devoted to each person was a compilation of the general critical perception regarding the personality and work of the artist, and seems to have been gleaned from articles in the popular press. The accepted practice in art historical writing was to discuss the work of male and female painters separately, with the women following the men. Laura Muntz is the first woman to be mentioned in Johnston's section on painting, where she is described as

> an artist of great talent [whose] oils and water-colours possess breadth and freedom; and all her work has a character of its own, not only as a matter of mere

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[244] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 426.

[245] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 13, no. 5 (16 December 1899): 15.

painting, but as regards the inner feeling and moving forces of the subjects themselves.[246]

The author cites Muntz's broad, free technique and individual approach as being characteristic of the "matter of mere painting," that is, of her style. The qualities which he outlines were the ones which in France were labelled as feminine. In Canada, however, they were perceived to characterize masculine forthrightness. Muntz's bold approach distinguished her from other female artists, and thus placed her ahead of the other women artists in Johnston's list. He continued to emphasize her unfeminine approach by specifying that "as a flower painter she has achieved success, but wisely prefers the more serious subject -- portraiture."

Florence Carlyle was the second artist in Johnston's list, described as a " brilliant and facile painter." The author cites her use of rich colour and "long sweeping curvature" of line, and continues to say that "one always finds in her pictures combined decorative and pictorial elements [which although] they may not appeal to the critics as evincing any great subtlety or power to paint from the subjective point of view [nevertheless show] talent of a high order." Johnston then describes the work of Elizabeth Armstrong Forbes, whose figure painting "is full of action and has a delightful sense of rhythm," and Mrs. Charlotte Schreiber, whose "pictures of children and women, although not strong, are exceedingly graceful in arrangement." The entry for Mary Hiester Reid is almost entirely composed of descriptive words signifying the feminine -- exquisite (sense of colour and arrangement); refined; exceedingly delicate and beautiful; charming (used to describe her landscapes); delightful -- which are qualified by a "masculine" statement or two, intended to legitimize the artist's worth. "While there is a

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[246] Johnston in Shortt and Doughty 625.

refined sense of colour in her pictures, she rises far above the average painter of mere prettiness[...] Poetic and full of character, her landscapes [described as charming in the sentence before] are vigorous and her technical execution is firm and very excellent." While words such as "conviction" and "sincerity" were applied to the work of men far more often than they were to that of women, expressions such as "delicate" and "charming," designated as feminine, were not entirely absent from the biographies of male artists. It should be noted, however, that not a single "feminine" word was used in Muntz's entry, which also was twice as long as that of any other woman artist.

So it was the "masculinity" of Muntz's style, the vigorous "slap-and-dash" method admiringly described by Mary Wrinch,[247] that singled her out with the Canadian critics and, in their eyes, added value to her feminine choice of subject. Muntz's practice of combining "feminine" subject matter and "masculine" style, considered to be unusual, is recognized in this excerpt from a Canadian newspaper.

> Beneath the broad and vigorous technique there are to be found notes of extreme delicacy. In this respect her works possess a peculiar charm. There is no Canadian artist whose works combine in more marked degree than hers that happy combination of realism and delicate feeling.[248]

Whereas in France critics were preoccupied with defining a distinctively feminine subject matter and style, in part as a way to rationalize women's increasing participation in serious art production, in Canada it was the perceived masculine attributes of a work of art that contributed to its value. Muntz's "broad and vigorous technique" and her "realism" were the masculine component, contrasted with the feminine "notes of extreme delicacy" and overall "delicate feeling." While French discourses of art and

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[247] Murray, "Mary Wrinch" 18.

[248] "Some Art Notes," date, location, and author unknown, c. late 1890s.

gender associated breadth of handling with Impressionism and therefore classed these qualities as feminine, this was not the case in Canada.

In both discourses, however, the social constructions of gender underlying art-critical language were based on an unspoken assumption: that the categories of man and art were equivalent, and that masculinity was therefore the paradigmatic criterion of judgement. According to this logic, the combination of woman and art, being essentially anomalous, could only result in a product of secondary quality. Consequently, the latter had to be acknowledged via a separate and less valued system, guided by the criteria of femininity. In Canadian discourses, then, the granting of a term such as "virile" to a woman's artistic style was complimentary in that it implied that she had transcended the merely feminine; in France, where both male and female critics were trying to define a distinctly feminine perspective, the commendation of virility would have constituted a basic contradiction.

Laura Muntz's *Mother and Child* (Fig. 1.30) depicts the feminine maternal subject with extraordinary breadth of style. The whole scene is rapidly and boldly sketched into existence; the mother and child in particular are depicted by just a few broad planes of colour. The wide sleeve of the woman's dress is rendered in thick white pigment, and suggests the materials of the artist's craft rather than the feel of cotton or linen. In this respect, Muntz's work has more affinity with Berthe Morisot's rapid, hatched strokes of paint in the works of the late 1880s and the 1890s (for example *In the Dining Room*, 1886, National Gallery of Art, Washington) than with Cassatt's more linear and solid style of the early 1890s, and her continued interest in description of

costume.[249] Whether Muntz's work should technically be classed as a sketch rather than a "finished" painting is not a crucial distinction in the context of the sketch aesthetic current at the time; *The Children's Hour* was extremely sketchy as well, yet considered complete, and *Mother and Child* is signed by the artist "Paris/Laura Muntz," suggesting that it was painted not just as a preliminary study for a more finished work.

A similar heavy impasto and striking lack of detail reappeared in much of the work that Muntz produced after her European studies, and in her homeland her sketchy, vigorous manner was construed as evidence of the artist's attempt to express the universal. Her concern with philosophical issues placed her once again in the "masculine sphere," and one wonders whether this perception, added to her forceful style, was a factor in the Canadian art establishment's willingness to include her in their rank. Muntz was the only woman to serve on the Executive Council of the Ontario Society of Artists, from 1899 to 1903, and thus also the first woman in Canada to serve on the executive of a major art organization.[250] As well, she was the first woman asked to participate in an exhibition of the Canadian Art Club. This association of well-known painters was a private exhibition society formed in 1907 by seceding members of the Ontario Society of Artists, who had been dissatisfied with the nepotism and low artistic standards of the parent group. The first annual exhibition of the Club showed the work of members such as William Brymner, Maurice Cullen, Robert Harris, James Wilson Morrice and Horatio Walker, while Muntz was included among their number in their second exhibition in

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[249] It should be noted that neither Cassatt nor Morisot were considered appropriately feminine artists by the *Union des femmes artistes et sculpteurs* and consequently neither woman showed in the *Salon des femmes*. (Garb, *Sisters of the Brush*, 38.) Although their styles differed from one another, both artists were committed to the modernity which the *Union* understood to be a component of the era's moral degeneracy. Morisot was not politically involved with women's issues, and Cassatt's involvement did not take place on French soil. Moreover, Morisot was an independently wealthy woman who also exhibited regularly with the Impressionists, and by the 1880s both she and Cassatt held established connections with private dealers.

[250] Gualtieri 159.

1909.[251] The policy statement of the group specified that it would exhibit only those Canadian artists "whose work is recognized at home and abroad as possessing a distinction which makes it necessary to pay it special attention."[252] Although she did not join them again, Newton MacTavish recorded that "she had been repeatedly invited to contribute to the annual exhibitions of the Canadian Art Club."[253] Moreover, Muntz was one of only a few women in Ontario to add an extensive teaching career to her studio work.[254] Among her pupils were Estelle Kerr, Marion Long, Mary Wrinch, Henrietta Shore and Lillias Torrence Newton.[255]

In her study of the Canadian painter Florence Carlyle (1864-1923) Susan Butlin analyzes the ways in which Carlyle negotiated her professional identity, and outlines how "alternatives such as matriarchal circuits of support and friendships between women" were central to her art practice.[256] While it is undeniably true, as Butlin states, that women had to contend with patriarchal barriers at every stage of their attempts to forge a career in art, it should be pointed out that women's experiences in this, like in other areas, were not identical. Butlin writes that

> institutionalized sexual difference resulted in exclusion or separateness in such areas as professional associations, critical reception, and there were gendered power relations between critics, teachers, patrons and employers.[257]

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[251] Robert J. Lamb, *The Canadian Art Club, 1907-1915* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1988) 86.

[252] R. J. Lamb 34.

[253] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 422. Julia Gualtieri has written that "a major factor most likely in Lyall *(sic)* being chosen to exhibit with the male élite of the Canadian Art Club was her proximity to Maurice Cullen." (55). Although Muntz and Cullen were indeed neighbours at the Beaver Hall Square address in Montreal from 1906 to 1912, it is highly unlikely that it would have been a deciding factor for her inclusion, and moreover accepted as a viable reason by the other participants in the Club. No doubt the other members of the Club were well acquainted with women who were artists and yet no other woman was asked to exhibit with them.

[254] Florence Carlyle was also intensely involved in teaching, both private students and in institutions. *Making a Living: Florence Carlyle and the Negotiation of a Professional Artistic Identity.* Masters Thesis, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1995.

[255] Gualtieri 158.

[256] Butlin 97.

[257] Butlin 99.

Although it must again be stressed that these conditions were in general true, Laura Muntz was, in fact, included in male organizations where other Canadian women artists were not. Muntz was also the first Canadian woman artist to be recognized in France with her participation in 1894 in the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français,[258] and the first to win an honourable mention in the *Salon des Champs- Elysées* in 1895, a distinguished achievement for any foreigner, male or female.[259] This is not to say that Muntz did not participate in Canadian women's societies such as the Woman's Art Association of Canada (WAAC), or that she was not restricted to teaching in schools reserved for women, but rather that she seems to have veered somewhat from the norms of gender restrictions. She was not altogether conventional even in her friendships, choosing Harold Mortimer Lamb, a married man with a family, to be her closest confidant after Wilhelmina Hawley's marriage. It is possible that the relationship between Muntz and Mortimer Lamb was at one time more than platonic, but whatever the particular circumstances may have been, they remained friends for life.

Laura Muntz, then, was neither entirely excluded from the male art establishment nor should it be presumed that she was always assisted by the newly evolving professional women's groups. It is significant that Muntz was left conspicuously absent from Mary Dignam's section on Canadian women in the arts in the important publication which the National Council of Women of Canada prepared for distribution at the Paris International Exhibition of 1900.[260] Dignam was an artist and teacher in Ontario, and the founder, in 1887, of the Women's Art Club, which in 1890 became the Women's Art

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[258] She showed a painting titled *The Watcher*, Fallis 22.

[259] Dumas, Exhibition catalogue for 1895, Laura Muntz, *Dis-moi?*, no. 1416: 118.

[260] The National Council of Women of Canada, "Women of Canada; Their Life and Work," (Toronto, 1900). Dignam's section on art: 216-228.

Association (WAA). By 1900 Muntz was one of the best-known female artists in Toronto, with a private studio and a teaching practice. That same year, *Saturday Night* magazine's art critic Jean Grant criticized the Hamilton Art School for refusing to allow a nude model in the life drawing class. The class was to have been taught by Muntz, and Grant's indignance emerged clearly as she recounted Muntz's singular qualifications and successes.

> A Paris Salon hangs her work and gives her more, an "Honorable Mention." The most advanced art magazine of Britain reproduces her work, and, what is more, takes the trouble to ask for more. We have not heard of a similar request for the work of any other Canadian artist.[261]

Grant does not say *woman* artist, but Canadian artist -- man or woman; such praise could not have gone unnoticed by someone as involved in the arts as Dignam. Moreover, Muntz was associated with the WAA from 1898 to 1900,[262] and Dignam does in fact list Muntz's name four times in the NCWC publication -- as a member of the RCA, of the OSA (217), as the teacher of the life class at the Hamilton Art School (219) and as the drawing and painting instructor at St. Margaret's College in Toronto (220). It is all the more surprising, then, that Muntz is left out of the most prestigious section of the book, which was designed for international readership. Thirty-four Canadian women are given biographical entries (Mrs. Dignam's, written by herself, is twice as long as any other), some of whom clearly do not fit the title "Distinguished Professional Women Artists" which heads the section:

> Grey, Miss Ethel Wood, Quebec. Daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Frost Grey. Portraits; excels in depicting military uniform.

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[261] Jean Grant, "The Living Model in Art," *Saturday Night* (9 June 1900): 9.
[262] Gualtieri 159.

I have discussed Muntz's exclusion in some detail, in order to show that discrimination did not necessarily and always have a male face. Although the reason for Dignam's failure to include Muntz in the ranks of the pre-eminent Canadian women artists is not known, such an omission would surely have been a slight to her professional standing.

In *Mother and Child* (Fig. 1.30) Muntz positions her subjects in an interior, but the surroundings are of secondary importance. Unlike the representations of women and children by either Cassatt or Morisot, whose references to dress and domestic surroundings were sufficient to identify even their subjects' social class, Muntz's female world provides almost no particular information. Her aim is not to record modernity, but, on the contrary, to imply commonality and universality. In paintings with such disparate contexts as *Protection* (Fig. 1.32), *Admiration* (Fig. 1.33) and *The Japanese Kimono* (Fig. 1.34) as well as in the great majority of her Madonna and "Modern Madonna" subjects, the background is simply blocked out with colour. Muntz does not, like either Cassatt or Morisot, situate women within the female domain (the "spaces of femininity") and it can be suggested that she omits the boundaries and enclosures of the interior spaces associated with women in order to extend the interpretative possibilities of her theme.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the maternal body had a complex and often paradoxical ideological significance, a subject which will be examined in the case studies to follow, but it can be said that the (middle-class) female body weighted down by the child was in itself a strong cultural demarcation of restraint. The concepts of maternity and domesticity were constantly reproduced in a reciprocal discourse; just as

the domestic interior suggested a "natural" boundary for the maternal body, so motherhood was itself a signifier of domestic(ated) space. Laura Muntz subverts this interpretation which attempts to fix the meaning of maternity, by picturing the body in a bold and gestural style, unconfined by line, and decontextualised from the usual surroundings of home. In paintings such as *Mother and Child*, she dissolves the solidity of the maternal body, thereby disrupting femininity in its most corporeal state. At a time when traditional views of maternity were threatened by the emergence of the "New Woman," while simultaneously being confirmed and endorsed as woman's true vocation, paintings such as *Mother and Child, Protection*, and *Madonna and Child* participated in the dialogue by problematizing the ideas of comfort and stability associated with motherhood. Yet Muntz's "de-domesticated," iconic representations of the mother also repeatedly connected the ordinary mother with the Madonna, as the supreme example of feminine virtue. As will be argued further in this text, Muntz's mother and child subjects are symptomatic of the ambiguity that pervaded the period of the *fin-de-siècle*, and consequently are characterized by multiple and often contradictory meanings; it can be suggested that what Muntz's images of maternity communicate most strongly is the unstable nature of the concept of gender boundaries itself.

The following chapter examines the complexity beneath the surface of one such seemingly unified representation of a mother and child.

CHAPTER TWO

MADONNA/MOTHER/DEATH: THE REPRESENTATION OF MATERNITY

At the end of the nineteenth century in English Canada,[1] as in America and Europe, painters were exploring the theme of motherhood. The subject of maternity functioned as a discursive site in which issues of morality, feminism, nationalism, and religion entered the public debate. In particular, the intertwining of secular and sacred notions in the construction of femininity was an important aspect of late nineteenth-century representations of the maternal. The earlier nineteenth-century concept of separate spheres, formulated in England, but current in the colonies as well, assigned to the middle-class woman a special role as a secular Virgin Mary, a domestic Madonna. But it was made clear that women's purity was not innate, and could only be guaranteed if they remained, like Coventry Patmore's angel, in the house.[2] The social problems which accompanied the rapid urbanization driven by industrialization threatened to disrupt the private, conservative, middle-class way of life, and women were called upon to become the moral conscience of society. It seemed only natural to most nineteenth-century Canadians that while men competed in the public world, women should safeguard the domestic sphere from the social consequences of progress. As the population of Canada increased and shifted more to urban centres, social problems became more complex. By the mid 1890s the Social Purity movement, with women's

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[1] Throughout this thesis I am speaking only about conditions in English Canada; most of the social and political issues here discussed have a different genealogy and interpretation in French Canadian culture.

organizations in the foreground, made a central contribution to the debate surrounding such urban problems as prostitution, divorce, illegitimacy and immigration, and mounted campaigns to increase public education, suppress obscene literature, and establish shelters for fallen women and needy children.

Eugenics

Since the discourses of eugenics and Social Purity had a significant impact on social constructions of femininity and motherhood, it is important to discuss these subjects in some detail before locating their manifestation in the painting by Laura Muntz that this case study examines. *Madonna and Child* (Fig. 2.1), although also representing the Virgin and Child, relates as well to the secular mother-child relationship central to the eugenic debates of the turn of the century. This intense image of a darkly shrouded woman with a nude child in her lap is pervaded by an atmosphere of darkness and melancholy, and has more affinity with the concerns of European Symbolism than with Canadian representations of mothers and children. It is a work characterized by multiple and contradictory meanings, which the following exploration of contemporary discourses will attempt to unravel.

It can be suggested that the main political project in Canada at the turn of the century consisted of two grand and inseparable goals -- shaping the nation and shaping morality. These concerns found currency through two beliefs: hereditarian biology, later developed into the pseudoscience of eugenics, and the Social Purity movement. The

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[2]The English poet Coventry Patmore's best-known work, *The Angel in the House* (1854), has generally been taken to epitomize the confinement of Victorian middle-class women to the domestic sphere.

British scientist Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), a cousin of Charles Darwin and much influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* (1859), coined the term "eugenics" in 1883 to describe the "science" of hereditarian biology, which held that it was possible to improve the human race by better breeding. Although on the whole Darwin cautioned against transposing his theory of natural selection in the animal and plant domain to human behaviour, his words sometimes belied this proscription and provided fertile ground for the development of eugenic ideas.

> We build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed, and the sick; we institute poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of every one to the last moment[...]Thus the weak members of civilised societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domestic animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to the race of man.[3]

Despite the consequent publication of many and varied theories of heredity, as late as 1880 it was still Darwin who was perceived to be the supreme authority on the subject. Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson, speaking on the subject of "Woman as Sanitary Reformer" at the Sanitary Congress of the National Health Society in Exeter, outlined his proposal for a curriculum of knowledge for the ideal maternal and philanthropic woman, which included a thorough understanding of hereditarian principles: "A little aid from books of learned men, of *the* learned man of this branch of knowledge especially -- you know I can only mean Darwin."[4]

Although Darwin was the respected authority on hereditarian ideas, Mark Haller has suggested that they began neither with Galton nor with Darwin before him. Haller traces eugenic ideas to ancient Christian tradition, in which the sins of the fathers were

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[3] Charles Darwin as quoted by Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 4.

[4] Benjamin Ward Richardson, M.D. F.R.S. "Woman as Sanitary Reformer." Sanitary Congress, Exeter, 23 September 1880. *Tracts of the National Health Society 1880-81*. The British Museum, London, C.T. 297. (10.): 17.

visited upon the sons, and insanity bore a "dark ancestral taint." He believes that Darwinian science allowed old ideas to be recast in contemporary molds, and that it merely provided reinforcement for assumptions which already had been widely accepted.[5]

More recently, Marouf Hasian's account of the historical roots of eugenics also concluded that many early threads were woven into the fabric of the later movement.[6] Constructed through scientific and medical discourses, both the older and the newer theories laid claim to the discovery of objective knowledge about population, heredity and morality. For example, Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) in his *Essay on Population* (1798) argued that inevitable overpopulation would eventually exhaust the resources of the environment, and although he offered no possibility of escape, he suggested that consolation might be sought in the pursuit of a better life. For Malthus, however, "better life" meant the bourgeois values of social propriety and hard work, and his opinions helped to entrench a belief in the moral superiority of the middle classes. This supposed superiority was, in the early decades of the nineteenth-century, also supported by the new discipline of phrenology which linked physical features to mental abilities, and lent "scientific" support to many common prejudices. Phrenologists were convinced that mental capacity, and tendencies such as drunkenness, suicide and theft were wholly inherited; consequently, it seemed to them logical to conclude that it was useless to provide educational programs for certain segments of the population. Although

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[5]Haller 22-23, 41.

[6] In the *Republic*, Plato recounts a mythic tale in which the hierarchy of metals is mirrored in life's proper social stations. In this allegory, men born with a gold nature are predestined to be leaders, while those composed of silver, iron or brass are correspondingly ordered in a descending scale of social importance. This ancient example of the "naturalness" of human inequality -- essentially a justification of rule by the privileged few -- was quoted repeatedly by apologists of eugenics in both Britain and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
Marouf Arif Hasian, *The Rhetoric of Eugenics in Anglo-American Thought* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996) 14-15.

phrenology preceded Galtonian eugenics by several decades, many of their principal tenets were strikingly similar.

> It is a pity that the laws of propagation are not more attended to. I am convinced that, by attention to them, not only the condition of single families, but whole nations, might be improved beyond imagination, in figure, stature, complexion, health, talents, and moral feelings[...]He who can convince the world of the importance of the laws of propagation, and induce mankind to conduct themselves accordingly, will do more good to them[...]than all institutions, and all systems of education.[7]

Eugenics was a pseudoscience extrapolated from broad and often conflicting sources. On the one hand it borrowed from hereditarian theories of plant and animal life, such as Darwin's theory of evolution and Mendel's experiments in biology, extended to include human nature,[8] and on the other from environmentalist approaches, such the ideas of the early nineteenth-century naturalist, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829). Galton, a man of unshakeable faith in science and an admitted agnostic, nonetheless found a secular religion in eugenics, stating that "an enthusiasm to improve the race is so noble in its aim that it might well give rise to the sense of a religious obligation."[9]

In the decades following the Industrial Revolution, Britain was faced with massive social problems. Fearing both unchecked population growth and large scale migration to the urban centres, conservative social Darwinists entered the debate regarding social responsibility and public charity. According to deterministic hereditarian principles, the very condition of needing social assistance signalled a lack of fitness for the struggle of economic survival. Social programs for the poor and the diseased were understood as a hindrance to the natural evolution of human society, and

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[7]Johann Spurzheim quoted in Hasian 18.

[8]The work of Gregor Mendel (1822-84), an Austrian monk experimenting with plant hybridization in the 1860's, was rediscovered at the turn of the century. He established that both good and bad characteristics were passed on from generation to generation, dependent on the combination of dominant and recessive elements. Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: The Eugenics Movement in English Canada* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1990) 16.

by the 1870s even those who persisted in social reform work thought of their charges as "hereditary losers" in the struggle for existence.[10]

After 1880, however, when it became clear that the unfit were not being "naturally" eliminated, the passive outlook of eugenics changed, and took a more dangerously active turn. What began to matter was the quality rather than the quantity of the population. To help those who could not succeed in a competitive world was not only deemed to be useless, it was seen as a sure method of degenerating the gene pool of the "better" classes through the inevitability of intermarriage. In the 1880s the German August Weismann reinforced the old belief in the immutable nature of "germplasm" by stating that even in cases where the environment could have a positive effect on the individual, the benefits thus acquired could not be passed on to the next generation.[11] It was within the context of ideas and beliefs such as these that overtly racist, sexist and classist policies took hold. An ever-increasing intervention in, and monitoring of, the private lives of individuals characterized the biopolitics of turn-of-the-century eugenics. By the first years of the twentieth century Galton and Caleb Saleeby, the leading British popularizers of hereditarian doctrines, were lecturing on subjects such as "positive" and "negative" eugenics. According to these distinctions, the "fit" were to be encouraged to have children, while the "unfit" were not only to be discouraged but medically prevented from procreating. Galton's ideas were used as a justification for a variety of social and political projects, such as the regulation of marriages, the introduction of mental and physical testing for a variety of purposes, the establishment of mandatory health care

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[9] Haller 17

[10] Haller 33. Popular belief has it that it was Charles Darwin who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest," whereas in reality it was the English eugenicist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). McLaren 17.

programs, and the institutionalisation and occasionally the sterilization of anyone deemed to be "unfit."

Although hard-line eugenic ideas had currency on both sides of the Atlantic and shared the ideology of laissez-faire economy, an equally popular belief was neo-Lamarckianism. In opposition to the fundamental determinism of hereditarian thought, neo-Lamarckianism allowed for some individual agency through its hypothesis that inherited patterns could in fact be altered.[12] Moreover, the everyday manifestations of hereditarianism did not necessarily mirror the harsh and rhetorical eugenicist tracts, and were in fact anything but consistent. They covered an array of topics from medical reform to the Social Purity movement, to restrictions on immigration, to better-baby contests. Most people today associate eugenics with the horror of the Holocaust, but prior to the mid-1930's, eugenic programs were supported by men of very different temperaments -- in Britain by literary figures such as George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells; by Winston Churchill as well as by socialist Sidney Webb; in America by Havelock Ellis, whose early studies of sexuality had an impact well into the twentieth century; and in Canada by noted physician Sir William Osler and inventor Alexander Graham Bell.[13] Even though Bell was very much involved in researching and improving the conditions of the deaf, his hereditarian beliefs nevertheless caused him to conclude

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[11] McLaren 17-19. In the language of deterministic biological eugenicists, "germplasm" identified a person's mental, physical and moral potential, and could not be altered by environment or education; the more liberal factions believed that some betterment of inherited "germplasm" was possible as a result of improved conditions.

[12] In both the United States and Canada, less dependent on tradition than European countries, hard-line eugenics found only limited success. Outside Europe it was tempered by a strong belief in progressive reform, especially in the years 1870 - 1905. After that date, North American eugenics also took on a more racist tone, precipitated by the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. See Haller 5-7.

[13] As late as 1935, Ernest M. Best, the general secretary of the YMCA, singled out Nazi Germany as the paradigmatic example for eugenic programs: "Already the Nazi state has taken active steps[...]of intelligent social action toward racial improvement." At this time Germany was carrying out mass sterilization of "mental defectives," and although many people in Canada did condemn Nazi policies, many were also in favour of the procedures which they implemented to preserve the purity of the Aryan race. McLaren 87.

that deaf people should not be permitted to marry.[14] Tommy Douglas, first leader of Canada's federal New Democratic Party, was another well-known "believer." The academic thesis which earned him an M. A. from McMaster University in 1933 was titled "The Problems of the Subnormal Family" and was based on the premise that the mentally and physically subnormal were a fundamental cause of many of the problems of the depression.[15] At the root of any discussion dealing with heredity was the figure of the mother, the bearer of good and bad "germplasm." The maternal influence was central to Douglas' thesis, which he based on statistics gleaned from his study of the family trees of "immoral or nonmoral women" interned in the local asylum in Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

Although dominated by male theorists, eugenics had its share of women converts. Dr. Helen MacMurchy was Ontario's leading public health expert during the first three decades of the twentieth century. She was a vocal eugenicist who promoted restrictive, essentialist views of women's roles with missionary zeal. MacMurchy waged battles against infant and maternal mortality, but did so from a biological-determinist standpoint. As a committed hereditarian she preached the dogma of an inescapable inferiority of the female sex, and from her position as an upper middle class woman and a member of the scientific community, she blamed the average lower class mother for being, in her eyes, hopelessly uneducated and inadequate. She ignored the basic contradiction that was exemplified by her own status: an influential public figure who nevertheless was also a woman. Helen MacMurchy's career can be taken as an illustration of the sometimes contradictory positions taken by women in their

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[14] McLaren 191 n.29.
[15] McLaren 7-9.

negotiations of dominant discourses, and it can be argued that the field of eugenic "philosophy," in particular, provided a rich discursive site in which to manoeuvre, precisely because of its ambiguous nature. Even though the eugenic theories which MacMurchy and other female hereditarians supported were fundamentally classist, sexist and racist, they nevertheless succeeded in establishing significant reforms beneficial to women. It was the very ambiguity of eugenic discourse that allowed liberal policies such as the improvement of working conditions, the introduction of health and maternal benefits, the reduction of infant mortality and even the availability of effective birth control to be demanded in its name. Since the eugenic narrative had a popular as well as a scientific interpretation, it came to be identified with a broad spectrum of ideas. Consequently, it could appear to provide various answers to a nervous Anglo-American population seeking to recapture some degree of stability in newly complex and uncertain times.

In the 1890s in Canada the term "eugenics" was not yet in use, but hereditarian ideas already had wide currency. The educated middle-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestant, typically the convert to, and preacher of, the eugenic message, understood the preservation of his or her own kind, uncontaminated by second-class genetic material, as the victory of civilization over the primitive, of reason over chaos. The poor were seen in a Darwinian light, unfit for the struggle of life. Speaking on the subject of vice and poverty, the Canadian religious reformer S. W. Dean proclaimed in 1914: "Some may be convinced that 'the sty makes the pig.' There can be no question but that the pig makes the sty, and to prevent sty conditions the porcine nature must be transformed."[16]

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[16] Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991) 47.

Sometimes that transformation even took the form of enforced sterilization, positioning reproduction as a property of society and science.[17] As a corollary, childbearing and proper childrearing was the privileged-class woman's greatest work for society. Mariana Valverde encapsulates these beliefs in her succinct statement: "Women did not merely have babies: they reproduced 'the race.'"[18]

Although the medical and scientific aspects of heredity were largely the province of a growing body of experts, generalized hereditarian ideas were circulated among educated people as well as in the popular press. Consequently, when eugenics became "common knowledge" for middle-class Canadians in the first decade of the twentieth century, it was not as a result of a unified didactic program, handed down from above, but rather was built upon a varied background of current social Darwinist beliefs.[19] A comment in the yearbook (1916-17) of the Toronto Heliconian Club, of which Laura Muntz was a member, indicates that eugenics were a subject familiar enough in Canada to be treated in an offhand, wry manner: "Since the dreadful charge of Race Suicide has been laid at the door of the Heliconian Club, we are proud to report two births."[20] It was a popular topic in the United States as well, where as an undergraduate in 1914 the writer F. Scott Fitzgerald composed a song entitled "Love or Eugenics" for the Princeton Triangle Show, whose lyrics humorously challenged the eugenic rhetoric which constantly warned against the consequences of impulse and passion: " Men, which

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[17] This policy had its greatest popularity in British Columbia. Valverde, *The Age of Light* 48.

[18] Mariana Valverde, " 'When the Mother of the Race is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, eds. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1992), 4.

[19] Haller 38-39.

[20] Archives of Ontario, Heliconian Club Papers, Series A - MU 8094, Yearbook 1916-17: 10. The Toronto Heliconian Club was a club for women employed professionally in the arts, with membership reserved for those who had achieved some level of distinction in the fields of art, music, literature and drama. It held its first meeting in 1909; Muntz became a member in 1916, soon after her return from Montreal.

would you like to come and pour your tea, / Kisses that set your heart aflame, / Or Love from a prophylactic dame."[21]

In a North-American context, eugenics also seemed to hold the promise of answers to particular social problems such as the subject of race, which was summoned up in hereditarian discourses as often as the old-world concern with class. The beginning of the twentieth century saw a change in the pattern of immigration into Canada. In former years, white Anglo-Saxons had made up the bulk of new settlers, but they were now replaced by an influx of central and eastern Europeans, Asians and blacks who were the target of appallingly racist statements. Hereditarian arguments promoted the dangerous fiction that most of the nation's problems were due to the rapacious and uncivilized natural character of the Outsider. The working class man had already been considered to be genetically and morally "weaker" than his bourgeois brother, and when the question of race was added to this already unbalanced equation, the resulting constructs took on preposterous dimensions. In one example, the ambiguous malady of hysteria, a diagnosis almost exclusively reserved for women, could nevertheless be embodied in the male immigrant, whose race linked him to the female sex, as a sign of a common inferiority: "A Varsovie, les hystériques mâles sont presque tous des Israélites."[22]

By the early twentieth century, then, the popularized versions of social Darwinism had become familiar territory for the reading public, and provided a fertile environment in which old prejudices and discriminations could resurface. Although the

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[21] Hasian 37.

[22] Julia Borossa, *Hysteria, Discourse and Narrative: Freud's Early Case Histories of Women in Context* (M.A. Diss., McGill University, 1988) 44. This quotes a Polish neurologist in France (1891), but many similar examples can be given for the North American continent.

medical community attempted to dissociate itself from the alarmist tone of popular rhetoric in order to maintain the authority of "scientific" eugenic discourse, the statements generated by both groups seem equally contemptible. "We do not want a nation of organ-grinders and banana sellers in this country,"[23] a member of parliament for West Huron pronounced in 1914, while on the "professional" side Dr. Charles Hastings, medical health officer for Toronto, warned Canadians that they were committing "race suicide" by allowing the new immigrants from Russia, Finland, Hungary and Italy into the country.

> The lives and environments of a large number of these have, no doubt, been such as is well calculated to breed degenerates. Who would think of comparing for a moment, in the interests of our country, mentally, morally, physically or commercially, a thousand of these foreigners with a thousand of Canadian birth?[24]

It was argued that not only did these entirely unsolicited "undesirables" and their large families put economic strain on native Canadians, who had to pay for the foreigners' support through taxes, but that these aliens also were inadvertently "sterilizing their hosts" since as a result of the financial burden, Anglo-Saxons could not afford large families of their own.[25] With the escalation of the regulatory power of the medical community, even the previously accepted races were now subjected to specialised medical examinations and mental testing, since, in the opinion of eugenicists, Canada had become "the garbage pail of England, Ireland and Scotland."[26]

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[23] McLaren 49.
[24] McLaren 50.
[25] McLaren 55.

Social Purity

The eugenic message found what was arguably its most powerful medium in the Social Purity movement. Women, and particularly the figure of the mother, were central to its functioning and its success. In the years 1890-1920, the well-known phrase "woman's mission" retained very little of its mid nineteenth-century meaning. In contrast to the older British theme, in which womanhood equalled devotion to hearth, family and the breadwinning husband, the New Woman's special mission was increasingly public, and was concerned primarily with social motherhood. Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, founder of the National Council of Women of Canada and wife of the governor-general, addressed the first meeting of the Council in 1894 with the statement "Our grand woman's mission is mothering."[27]

Social purity was a term given to a movement bound up in the discourses of morality and social science (which were not perceived as separate practices) and which sought to reform society by eradicating a variety of social problems such as infant mortality and unsanitary housing conditions, by attacking individual vice, and by inculcating the moral message in Canada's children. The Social Purity movement had as its aim not only to "clean up" the present, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to instil in the younger generation the purity ideals "fitting to this age of light, and water, and soap."[28] Women's organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), The National Council of Women and the YWCA, battled for causes such as

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[26] McLaren 50.

[27] Wayne Roberts, " 'Rocking the Cradle for the World': The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914," *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880's-1920's*, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: The Women's Educational Press, 1979) 21.

[28] Valverde, *The Age of Light* 17.

temperance, sex education according to eugenic principles, and the abolition of the double standard, under the slogan "a white life for two." Whiteness stood for sexual purity, it symbolized clean milk and water in the fight against alcohol and disease, and it conjured up images of snow and Canada, thus stirring nationalist sentiment. At the same time, whiteness as an allusion to skin colour and ethnic purity betrayed a xenophobic mentality. The WCTU's stated mission to "carry the Gospel cure to the drinking classes"[29] articulates the essentially Christian temper of women's social reform movements, as well as their classist preconceptions. The association of nationalism, moral purity and eugenic beliefs can be illustrated by the example of Arthur Beall, the WCTU's "purity agent," who lectured to several generations of Ontario schoolchildren between 1905 and 1930. He informed the children that it was their patriotic duty to be pure and healthy in every way, because they were worth at least $50,000 each, and thus were "Canada's most valuable products." The supporters of eugenic theories were particularly concerned with male masturbation, which they believed resulted in disease, insanity and even death. Consequently, Beall led classroom after classroom of schoolboys to repeat "The more you use the penis muscle, the weaker it becomes; but the less you use the penis muscle the stronger it becomes," and assured them that it was all in the cause of sound fatherhood, and the "raising of A.1 thoroughbred live-stock."[30] But the strongest strictures in the areas of social hygiene, sexuality and reproduction were reserved for women. An age-old view of female nature, restated in hereditarian terms, promoted woman's sacred role as mother, while also constantly controlling her "innate" negative potential. Women had been indoctrinated to believe, well before

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[29]Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism," *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, ed. Linda Kealey, 165.

Darwin, that they were the true custodians of genetic material, and hence the future of the race. In his *Advice to Mothers* (1803), William Buchan warned women that it was "little short of intentional murder on the part of a weak, languid, nervous or deformed woman to approach the marriage-bed."[31]

By the 1910s the medical community had been invested with enormous moral influence, and along with women's organizations, both as allies and as objects of their regulatory measures, they formed perhaps the highest authority in social purity issues. Nineteenth-century medical discourse had appropriated women's bodies as "natural" specimens for science, a notion easily adopted by a populace indoctrinated by eugenic theories to associate pathology with the female body. Physicians involved in the social purity movement now analogized the body, and particularly the female body, with domestic space. Since traditionally women's bodies always carried the potential of uncleanliness, the program to establish sanitary conditions in the home (with the goal of preventing illness and especially infant mortality) was metaphorically embodied as female. Accordingly, both the responsibility for, and "cure" of, the sick home fell to the province of women, who were assigned the field workers of the medical profession. The slogan of the Domestic Sanitation Movement in England[32] was *Corpus Sanum in Domo Sano* -- a healthy body in a healthy house -- and it was common practice, for example, for Domestic Sanitation publications to be illustrated with a cross section of a house placed next to a sectional drawing representing the digestive system. Mrs. Harriette

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[30] McLaren 70-71.

[31] Sally Shuttleworth, "Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era," *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History and Politics of Gender*, ed. Linda M. Shires (New York: Routledge, 1992) 34.

[32] The principles of the British model of urban reform were followed closely on the North American continent, and both the ideology and manner of procedure had similar manifestations in Canada and in the United States. Annmarie Adams, *Corpus Sanum in Domo Sano: The Architecture of the Domestic Sanitation Movement 1870-1914* (Montreal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1992) 5.

Plunkett, a writer for the sanitation movement instructed the homemaker as to the precise nature of her social duties, which indeed seemed to conflate her work as social caretaker with that of plumber: "Her sphere begins where the service-pipe for water and the house-drain enter the street-mains," and Plunkett went on to insist that "there is nothing in hygiene that she can not comprehend."[33]

Cleaning up the world, then, was to be women's work. The ideology of separate spheres was structured upon the belief that it was "natural" for women to deal with bodies and homes, and hence with the illnesses of both. Implicated in this ideological formation was the notion of contamination, applied to both women and the domestic environment. The theory of heredity consistently blamed women for the transmission of all genetic weaknesses, and portrayed the female as the "main pollutant, the primary poisoner of the public stream."[34] In Canada, for example, the female "disease" of prostitution was described as a "running sore" to be suffered not so much by the people involved as by the whole "human family."[35] Although social conditions were sometimes implicated in the causes of prostitution, most often it was the individual woman (albeit as a representative of the destructive potential of the entire sex) who was blamed for her inability to limit her body to the domestic sphere. In the same way, when the domestic spaces and morals of society were diagnosed as ill, it was perceived as the fault of the sex to whom these provinces "naturally" belonged. A wide variety of public concerns such as life-threatening childhood diseases, the pure milk campaign and unsanitary housing conditions, as well as general anxieties about "feeble-mindedness" and "white slavery" were seen in terms of contamination. Sue Best has suggested that Western ideas

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[33] Adams 12, 16.

[34] Shuttleworth 37.

of space, ultimately imbedded in Platonic philosophy, betray a persistent desire to domesticate space, to contain it and set boundaries. Furthermore, since the model of the body is in western thought symbolic of a primal boundary, the female body (as an excess in need of regulation) has been integral to the production and constitution of the notion of sexualized space.[36] As the rhetoric of the domestic sanitation movement had it, the normal-looking nineteenth-century home, the *body* of the family, could nevertheless hide murderous items such as wallpapers containing arsenic and untrapped drains,[37] and like the female body, it came to be associated with the anxiety-causing mystery of hidden defects.

The seemingly separate topics of the female body, contamination, and social purity are all imbricated in the western conceptualization of the binary categories of sex and gender: man/woman; mind/body; cleanliness/contamination; health/illness; and finally, life/death. Social purity as a discursive site relied on the perpetuation of these valorized polarities which consistently structured the positive as male, in relation to the negative Other as female. The movement to "clean up society" cannot be seen as an isolated social phenomenon, since it is deeply intertwined with other discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discourses such as eugenics, institutionalized medicine, the body, woman and domestic space, and cleanliness and contamination – all of which, in turn, can be examined as integral aspects of the larger discourse of gender.

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[35] Valverde 35.

[36] Sue Best, "Sexualizing Space," *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, eds. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (London: Routledge, 1995) 183, 186.

[37] Adams 18.

The Domestic Madonna

By far the greatest proportion of Canadian feminists were conservative, middle-class maternal feminists who believed, to a greater or lesser extent, in both social purity and hereditarianism. Linda Kealey understands the term "maternal feminism" as an incorporation of committed social feminism and domestic ideology; turn of the century maternal feminism, then, "refers to the conviction that woman's special role as mother gives her the duty and the right to participate in the public sphere."[38] Maternal feminists justified women's entry into public life by summoning up the traditional belief in women's innate humanitarian and nurturing qualities. These in turn were said to give women pure and moral motivations, and thus make them ideally suited as social reformists. The fact that by the 1880s women were steadily entering into the professions led male reformers like Karl Pearson to articulate this new situation in maternal terms. He warned women that their greatest problem in the future would be the reconciliation of maternal activity with work outside the home, and that it could be solved "solely by the recognition of maternity as an essential social activity."[39] By the 1890s urban problems were more threatening than ever before, and this seemed to provide both a fulfilment of Pearson's prediction and an expanded arena for women's philanthropic work, characterized as maternal. This adaptation of ideology to social fact can be understood, in part, in terms of Roland Barthes'[40] description of the bourgeois strategy of "inoculation" -- the practice of allowing a lesser evil (circumscribed participation in the workplace) in order to prevent the perceived greater one (significant changes in

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[38] Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim* 7.
[39] Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim* 29.

traditional gender roles). The way that Pearson defined women's role guaranteed the triumph of conservative maternal feminism. This same maternal feminism did, however, effectively recruit many middle-class women to causes such as suffrage, which they would not have supported without the legitimising context of the maternal.

Most social issues that involved women were discussed in Christian terms, naming women as potential "saviours," as well as in the language of the maternal, as an extension of women's domestic role. In 1898 the WCTU could confidently state that "A nation rises no higher than its mothers."[41] Furthermore, as maternal feminist philosophy had it, a woman who fulfilled her role as "social housekeeper" did not always need to have children in order to be considered acceptably maternal. In foreign missionary work, for example, where non-Christians often were regarded as children, or as a teacher of hygiene to working class women, or of domestic skills to fallen women in shelters, the philanthropic middle-class woman believed she was mother to all.

The Relevance of Social Context

Current and socially relevant discourses such as maternal feminism and the domestic role of women, issues themselves in part derived from the larger concepts of social purity and eugenics, informed the contemporary art viewers' interpretative framework. But although a knowledge of the social context is a crucial first step in the positioning of the work as a product of a specific historical situation, it cannot be

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[40]Roland Barthes (1915-1980), French literary theorist and semiotician whose work centred on the notion of the presumption of innocence as a characteristic tactic of modern bourgeois society.

assumed to explain it fully. Social and historical contexts are strands of the complex web of psychological and material interactions that constitute the work of art, but the uncovering of *meaning* is more an act of construction than of simply unearthing historical evidence. Marcia Pointon, among others, has cautioned against an uncritical application of the Foucauldian model of analysis, which perceives the subject as entirely constituted through discourse. She believes that such an understanding of ideological forces can allow the historical background to assume an overriding authority, and result in a theoretical position that is suspicious of texts and confident with contexts.[42] For the historian who imagines that the documents of the past, highly mediated by both time and authorship, can provide a kind of contextual "proof" for the object under study, the project of total recovery is bound to be disillusioning. In point of fact, neither images nor texts are simply mirrors of the world, and the assumption that the visual work of art can be translated into verbal terms "without remainder,"[43] is in itself a questionable notion. The act of representation "stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual, or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence."[44]

How, then, can one begin to deal with historical works of art; how can they be re-examined in light of contemporary theoretical ideas without denying the validity of past interpretations? As Donald Preziosi suggests, it may be more fruitful to ask what art objects may be evidence *for*, rather than recirculate the traditional question which seeks

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[41] Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *The Proper Sphere: Women's Place in Canadian Society* (Toronto: Oxford university Press, 1976) 230.

[42] Marcia Pointon, review of *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* by Lynda Nead. *Art History* 12, no.1 (March 1989): 117.

[43] Stephen Bann, *The True Vine: On Visual Representation and the Western Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 28.

[44] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988) 6.

to resolve what are art objects are evidence *of*.[45] A visual representation is more than a message in code; it is not a passive entity waiting to have its secrets unveiled once and for all. Once the search for unitary meaning is abandoned, the painting can be "reframed," not in order to deny any relevance it had in the past, but rather with the intention of bringing out the variety of possible meanings suggested by the image. Mieke Bal has proposed that the viewer/interpreter not take the work of art "tautologically as proof of itself" but rather see it as "questioning itself"; she asks that we not silence it and strike it dumb, and instead attempt to create a theoretical space in which the work is freed to accommodate "all possible questions it might challenge viewers to raise."[46]

Recent feminist theories of subjectivity can be particularly helpful in formulating a viable method of dealing with visual culture, especially when the work is historical and produced by a woman artist. A theoretical framework that is based on a conception of alterity as a positive value can be most useful when the task at hand calls for a reinvention of accepted meaning. Traditional art-historical discourse was suspicious of contradiction and multiple meanings, and a hypothesis which permitted the coexistence of disparate meanings was perceived to be unresolved, a sign of the historian's inability to reach the desired clear conclusion. On the other hand, feminist epistemologies that do not interpret the world teleologically, or in terms of valorized dualities, are more accepting of the necessarily partial and relational nature of knowledge; they not only acknowledge the necessity to problematize, but indeed see it as a positive value. Jessica

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[45] This notion is discussed by Preziosi within a broader analysis of the changing nature of the entire discipline of art history in the late twentieth century. See especially chapter 1, "A Crisis in, or of, Art History?" in: Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History: Meditations on a Coy Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[46] Mieke Bal, "Reading Art?" *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996) 30.

Benjamin's perception of female subjectivity is that it is more receptive to difference than male subjectivity, and thus is better positioned to resist saturating the notion of otherness with denial and contempt.[47] Similarly, Rosi Braidotti seeks to put psychological distance between the terms "difference" and "deviation," and asks instead: "How can we build a new kind of collectivity in differences?"[48] A relevant analysis of Laura Muntz's work calls for just such an expansive method of approach, especially since the small body of historical literature which describes her artistic production is journalistic rather than analytical or interpretative, and does not attempt to grapple with the range of meanings suggested by her Symbolist paintings.

Braidotti's notion of "nomadic subjectivity," in particular, has been helpful in my exploration of Muntz's paintings. By that term, Braidotti means to describe a figurative way of thinking that struggles against convention and keeps the process of interpretation fluid and resistant to closure. She compares her nomadism to Gilles Deleuze's formulation of "rhizomatic" processes of thought. A rhizome is a root that grows underground, sideways. Nomadic thinking, like the metaphor of the rhizome, is lateral and spreading; it moves away from the growth habit of trees; it distances itself from the visible, vertical, linear root of the Western tree of knowledge.[49] Braidotti is not, however, advocating a turn towards the irrational, nor does she propose an easy, uncritical multiplicity as an answer to the complexity of experience. Rather, she suggests the possibility of accommodating ambiguity and contradiction by applying what she calls the practice of "as if."

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[47] Jessica Benjamin, "A Desire of One's Own: Psychoanalytic Feminism and Intersubjective Space," *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).
[48] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 99.
[49] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 23.

> It is *as if* some experiences were reminiscent or evocative of others; this ability to flow from one set of experiences to another is a quality of interconnectedness that I value highly. Drawing a flow of connections need not be an act of appropriation[...]but rather the affirmation of fluid boundaries, a practice of the intervals, of the interfaces, and of the interstices. The practice of "as if" is a technique of strategic re-location in order to rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now."[50]

Braidotti's nomadism offers an alternative to established ways of conceptualizing both the past and the present, and can provide a strategy for problematizing accepted modes of thought.

Madonna and Child

There is little documented information on Muntz's large painting of a woman and a child, which was exhibited in 1988 under the title *Madonna and Child*. (Fig. 2.1).[51] Muntz's exhibition history shows that from at least 1913 on, she used the term "madonna" in the titles of her paintings,[52] and an article dated three years prior to that date testifies that the subject had preoccupied her even earlier: "Her great desire is to paint the ideal Madonna and child. If ever she succeeds in fixing upon canvas the look of human motherhood and divine childhood, she professes her readiness to lay down her earthly brush."[53] There is no contemporary evidence, however, that this work depicts a religious subject, and even if the title *Madonna and Child* were indeed correct, it would serve as only a partial guide to the meaning of a work which, as will be demonstrated, conflates several themes and issues.

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[50] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 5-6.

[51] Lamb, *The Canadian Art Club* 76.

[52] Art Association of Montreal, 30th Spring Exhibition 26 March - 19 April 1913, *A Madonna*, no. 302.

[53] M. J. Mount, "Laura Muntz and Her Work" 13.

An exhibition review dated 1926 describes this painting, although it does not mention its title. The subject is simply grouped among "three studies of child life," and is perceived to symbolize "mother love in the sad-faced, hollow-eyed woman who draws back her black veil protectingly about the chubby child on her knee."[54] This description prompts one to question, from the beginning, if this image indeed represents the Madonna, since the traditional iconography of the young Virgin Mary does not include the colour black. Mary generally wears a cape of blue, the color of constancy, over a long dress of either red, white, or purple. The deliberate use of black in connection with a religious figure seems particularly inappropriate at the *fin-de-siècle*, when the color had specific connotations of evil or death. It becomes doubly significant when associated with the female body, since turn-of-the-century gender constructions tended to polarize women within the categories of sinner or saint. Although there are many other instances of ambiguity and multiple associations, this small inconsistency in the iconography begins the process of disintegration of the unitary meaning in the representation. *"Madonna and Child"* embodies the simultaneous presence of the discourses of death, femininity and the maternal, and the title *Madonna Mother Death and Child* seems a more fitting description of this painting.

Femininity and Death

Psychoanalytic theory, by definition, places a special emphasis on the unconscious, and as such has a close affinity with the feminist aim of redefining female subjectivity. At the heart of debates in both these fields is the figure of the mother,

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[54] "Modern Canadian Art Charms Tourists," *Toronto Star Weekly* (21 August 1926).

which can be envisioned as a conduit or mediating force for unconscious needs and desires. Postmodern psychoanalytic theory understands identity as something fragmented, as never complete and unified. Similarly, the maternal is a subject position beset by conflict and ambivalence. Rozsika Parker's enquiry into the experience of maternal ambivalence is titled *Torn in Two*;[55] it is an apt assessment of the passionate emotions of love and hate which reside in the mother-child relationship. The identity of the mother is variously linked: with the emotions and the unconscious as sites of desire and longing, with the multiple and changeable cultural constructions of the maternal role, and, indissolubly, with the discourses of biology.

In any discussion of the mother, a distinction should also be made between the maternal body and the sexualized female body. An incorporation of overt sexuality in the maternal body is one of the taboos of Western culture, associated as it has been with oedipal dread and sacrilege. In the Christian tradition, the Virgin Mary's status as the highest moral example for all women is based on the model of a motherhood unsullied by sexuality, and all of Mary's qualities derive from selfless, maternal devotion. This view of an essentially unattainable, dematerialized motherhood was nevertheless circulated as an ideal, and was a component of much of the nineteenth century's construction of gender. Victorian figures such as John Ruskin and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) are infamous for their obsessive attachments to pre-pubescent girls, but the possibility of their rationalization of such relationships was a consequence of the paradoxical and confused views of sexuality current at the time. Often the mother-son relationship was implicated in such cases, since the discourses of Victorian motherhood were fraught with contradictory meanings. The Scottish novelist J. M. Barrie had a

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[55] Rozsika Parker, *Torn in Two: The Experience of Maternal Ambivalence* (London: Virago Press, 1995).

penchant not for children, but for women much older than himself, and the autobiographical hero of his book *The Little White Bird* (1902) is tellingly made to confess: "Just as I was about to fall in love I suddenly found that I preferred the mother."[56] Humour was not intended; the declaration illustrates both Barrie's own ultimately irreplaceable closeness to his mother, and the cultural conditions that allowed him the innocence publicly to make such a statement at all.

The awareness of the inevitability of death, the most unrepresentable and mysterious notion of all, has always dominated human consciousness. It is "the major agon of the psyche, the major subject of the text,"[57] and "as the limit of cultural representation, has been associated with that other enigma, the multiply coded female body."[58] The correspondence between death, art, and the female body is a recurrent theme in the nineteenth-century imagination. Regina Barreca writes about the "ineradicable alignment between sexuality and mortality" in nineteenth-century poetry and fiction, a conjunction which, she suggests, "sets up a dialectic for the interplay between fear and desire."[59] Whether the professed theme was Lilith, Ophelia or the Lady of Shalott, Woman signified both a representation, and an attempt at containment. In Robert Browning's "Porphyrias Lover," containment is poetically figured as death. "That moment she was mine, mine, fair, / Perfectly pure and good: I found / A thing to do, and all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around, / And strangled her."[60] The myths of femininity constructed by Victorian poets and

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[56] Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976) 86.

[57] Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds., *Death and Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 10.

[58] Goodwin and Bronfen, *Death* 13.

[59] Regina Barreca, ed., *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 1.

[60] Robert Browning, quoted in Barreca 5.

painters speak of the simultaneous desire and fear of looking, a psychological frame of reference which was manifested in much of the nineteenth-century's prescriptive attitude towards women and sexuality. But it should be remembered that *represented* fantasies of possession are not necessarily identical to the real wielding of power between the sexes; one should not be too quick to imagine a direct correlation between Browning's poetics and violent misogyny. The leap that Browning takes between the desire to possess the beloved and the act of killing her, belongs to the world of romantic literary figurations of Melancholy and Beauty, and not to everyday experience. Although it is a given that artistic discourses function reciprocally with other discourses to constitute ideology, the direct transcription of aesthetic concepts to lived experience should be approached with caution. Bronfen warns against such ideas in her analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's infamous statement that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic of all: "Yet any theoretical insistence on a direct, unambiguous and stable analogy between cultural images and experienced reality defuses both the real violence of political domination and the power of representations."[61]

In "Pauline," Browning repeats the imagery of the beloved's hair, which in Victorian representations was a potent sign of feminine sexuality: "And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms / Drawing me to thee -- these build up a screen / To shut me in with thee, and from all fear; / So that I may unlock the sleepless brood / Of fancies from my soul, their lurking place."[62] Woman's hair remains sexually coded, but it is not used as a metaphor for danger, as it was in "Porphyrias Lover." Rather, it stands for the

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[61] Bronfen 59. Griselda Pollock agrees that "images and texts are no mirrors of the world, merely reflecting their source. Representation stresses something refashioned, coded in rhetorical, textual or pictorial terms, quite distinct from its social existence." *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988) 6.

[62] Robert Browning, quoted in Elisabeth S. Gitter, "The Power of Women's Hair in the Victorian Imagination," *PMLA* 99, no. 5 (October 1984): 942.

sheltering aspect of Woman, the passive muse and peaceful harbour for the poet's restless soul. Since femininity itself was constructed to contain multiple meanings, feminine attributes such as hair could signify in various and contradictory ways. Similarly, the correspondence between death and women does not function in a direct way, based solely on the notion of fear and violence.

Because cultural myths of death and femininity are ambivalently encoded, they are destined to remain outside rational discourse, as sites of uncertainty, complexity, and paradox. Like death, Woman in nineteenth-century patriarchal discourse was envisioned as the Other in an attempt to rid her of ambiguity, although, as with constructs of death, there could be no hope of a satisfactory resolution.

> Because she is semantically encoded as good and evil, as the possibility of wholeness and a frustration of this dream, the connection to the infinite beyond and the measure of human finity, the one stability to be found in myths of femininity is in fact ambivalence. Woman so often not only embodies values associated with death but enacts death's work rhetorically by virtue of functioning as an inessential figure (a disembodied sign without a referent) and as the site of uncanny ambivalence; both rhetorical figures for death's presence in life. [63]

The spectre of death is on the very surface of Laura Muntz's representation of motherhood, and contributes to a production of meaning that is characterized by contradiction.

Rosi Braidotti believes that all representation "cheats"; it rests on the fantasy that visibility and truth work together, whereas in reality there is always more to the experience than the image can show.[64] This is particularly true about representations of death, because the most obvious thing one can say about death is that it is always only

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[63] Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 66.
[64] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 69.

represented.[65] The representation of death is a fantasy. There is no knowing death, and all representations can only be misrepresentations. The question to ask, then, is what *else* can be pictured in the name of death. In Western culture, death is a disordering force; it represents chaos and is a site of paradox; it is the Other; it is dangerous and enigmatic in multiple ways -- culturally, historically, sexually and racially. Although Goodwin and Bronfen clarify that death and life "do not by nature stand in an exclusively binary relation," there is no question that in the popular imagination they appear as *the* fundamental duality. As such, life/death can be seen as the generative force of all other culturally constructed polarities, such as soul/body, masculine/feminine, good/bad. Finally, death is also inescapably physical, although it poses a metaphysical problem. Like the body (and especially the female body) it is the excess beyond the text; it is uncontainable and frightening.

Madonna/Mother/Death and Child

At first glance, the painting in question indeed seems to depict the Madonna; the monumental figure of a woman with a nude child on her lap has but one association in the history of Western art. Furthermore, her melancholy face, and the unspecified setting behind her, support the impression that the image refers to the sorrow of the Virgin Mother. But there are very specific departures from the traditional representations of the Madonna, which compexify the reading and obstruct an easy correspondence of the central figure with the Virgin Mary: the black robe, and in particular the small but

[65] Goodwin and Bronfen 20. I have found the authors' four-point summary (itself indebted to the ideas of Mieke Bal and Jean Baudrillard) to be a very useful starting point for my own exploration of the subject of death. I paraphrase their outline before applying some of their general thoughts to Muntz's paintings.

crucial detail of the woman's finger slipped through a loop in the equally black veil. Since a looped veil (which, once noticed, becomes a focal point of the representation) is not a conventional feature of Marian symbolism, its inclusion implies a specific intention, one that enlarges upon the customary associations. If, then, one brackets the supposition that this is exclusively a religious subject, one can allow the possibility of an alternative (though simultaneous) context -- that of death. It is a theme which can convincingly absorb the black robes, the mournful expression, and particularly the shroud-like dark veil.[66] In word and image, the personification of death in the act of enshrouding its victim is a familiar metaphor for the actual moment of death. Muntz's introduction of the looped veil emphasizes the gesture of enclosure, an intent which was recognized in the contemporary description of the painting, which specified that the woman was in the act of drawing the veil "protectingly" about the child. Maternal protection, however, was normally figured as loving tenderness. Many of Muntz's own paintings of mothers and children, even those which openly allude to the Madonna and Child, show serene and smiling young women. Why, then, has Muntz chosen this dark and sombre vision to portray the subject of mother love? And alternately, if we give primacy to the subject of death, we should question why Muntz chose to cast it in a maternal role.

The most informative article written about Laura Muntz in her own time describes the artist as an "intense and serious woman [who] abhors mere prettiness," and states that "one of the regrets of her life[...]has been the small amount of time that she has been able to give to big, creative work, to things that are allegorical." It stresses that

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[66]Late nineteenth-century women's mourning dress included the wearing of a long black veil, however by the 1890s it was customary to appear in public with the veil attached only to the back of the bonnet, allowing the hair in front to

her true power lies in her ability to express "some of the inevitable pathos of humanity" in even the most straightforward-looking portrait.[67] Several other contemporary articles echo this assessment of the artist and her work.[68] The nineteenth-century English artist George Frederick Watts (1817-1904), whose sensibility and aims were similar to Muntz's, said "I paint ideas, not things," and understood art to be a "great cosmopolitan language" which the painter must use to express something timeless and universal.[69] According to Julian Treuherz, the central paradox of the later Aesthetic movement lay in its commitment to the formal values of the cult of beauty, while at the same time seeking to comment on the profound issues of the human condition. He explains that in these late paintings "the formal perfection of aestheticism served to heighten their emotional power, while their use of symbolic reference, myth and archetype, often operating on a subconscious level, linked them with European Symbolism."[70] It is possible, then, keeping in mind Muntz's disposition towards symbolic themes, that in *Madonna and Child* her interest was not only to portray the subject of motherly love and protection *per se*, but also through it to reflect on the philosophical questions of life and death. The theme of maternal sorrow caused by the death of an innocent child was a most poignant and dramatic subject in the *fin-de-siècle* world of heightened emotions and fascination with spiritualism.[71]

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remain uncovered. Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983) 137.

[67] Newton MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 423, 426.

[68] For example Bell, "Women and Art in Canada"; MacMurchy, "To Paint All Day".

[69] Christopher Wood, *Olympian Dreamers: Victorian Classical Painters 1860-1914* (London: Constable, 1983) 82.

[70] Julian Treuherz, *Victorian Painting* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) 143.

[71] On the subject of spiritualism in England, Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) provides a comprehensive discussion of the various aspects of the phenomenon. Specific accounts of nineteenth-century women's connection with this subject, in both England and America, is given by Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) and Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

Muntz contrasts the waxen skin of the woman with the pink cheeks of the child, who was pointedly described as "chubby,"[72] in order to denote the presence of health and life; the drama may be centred on the suggestion that this robust young life suddenly will be extinguished. The child's cheeks are flushed, but there are also recurring touches of blue on the skin, increasingly so on the lower half of the body, below the mother's hand. He (for the moment it will be assumed that the child is a boy) does not sit contentedly on the mother's lap, and seems to be struggling in an attempt to climb down. His darkened eyes do not look up at the woman's face, but rather focus on the blackness over her shoulder. The gaze is directed into the distance, outside the picture frame. Her fingers are placed gracefully at the child's waist, and if we accept that he appears agitated, she may gently be trying to restrain him. A force as powerful as death, especially if figured in motherly guise, would not need a show of strength to hold her small victim. Her finger is looped through the veil or shroud, as she performs the final act of drawing it around the young body.

Symbolism and Death

Death in the late nineteenth century often was envisioned as a passage rather than an end. In part a legacy of the Victorian bourgeois obsession with control and order, it was constructed as a journey from one regulated realm to another, from a well-ordered life to a well-deserved heaven.[73] This would have been an especially comforting belief for the grieving parent of a young child. Death is here depicted as a gentle and sorrowing

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[72] It will be remembered that this was the word used by the anonymous reviewer in "Modern Canadian Art Charms Tourists," *Toronto Star Weekly* (21 August 1926).

[73] Regina Barreca, ed., *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 6.

mother, bending her grave face down towards the child, but at the same time we sense that she will pull the shroud over with all the inevitability of a natural force. Once more, the social constructions of the "naturalness" of motherhood and the terrible but equally natural force of death are paralleled. To personify death as female was not unusual. G. F. Watts, like Muntz, pictured death as a consoling and gentle mother, who cradles the infant Innocence consigned to her care.[74] (Fig. 2.2) In a monograph on Watts written not long after his death in 1904, the author states: "Death has no terrors for the fundamental Watts...Death is *the Messenger* who comes, not to terrify, but as an ambassador to call the soul away from this alien land, quietly touching the waiting soul with the finger-tips."[75]

In the later decades of the nineteenth century death was such an over explored topic as to be almost cliché. It was expressed through various means in all the arts, as well as in the popular fascination with spiritualism and hypnosis. The *fin-de-siècle* was a period preoccupied with the ideas of the ambiguous and the amorphous, with passages and suggestion, with the world of dreams, reverie and the unconscious mind; it should be remembered that Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* was published in 1900. The Belgian Symbolist poet Maurice Maeterlinck described this mood of uncertainty and anxiety caused both by a millennial mindset and by a society in the midst of sudden and disturbing change:

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[74] In two versions of the same subject, Watts portrays death as a woman past her first youth in order to stress the idea of protection. Yet neither does he depict her as old, avoiding the parallel of old age and the end of life, and thereby retaining the believability of her maternal role. It can be suggested that Muntz follows much the same logic in her *Madonna and Child*.

[75] W. Loftus Hare, *Watts* (London, n.d.), 65-66.

> We all know something we have not learned, and it may well be the only thing we know accurately, for all the rest is doubtful. We must pay attention only to what we cannot properly assess.[76]

Since death is unrepresentable as itself, works of art that attempt to depict death are necessarily rich in suggestion. D. G. Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* (1864-70) -- intense, emotional and evocative -- is an example of just such an image. Painted in memory of Elizabeth Siddal, Rossetti's transcendent, poetic vision evokes the very unrepresentability of death, a fact of which the painter was fully aware: "It must of course be remembered, in looking at the picture, that it is not intended at all to *represent* Death, but to render it under the semblance of a trance, in which Beatrice[...]is suddenly rapt from Earth to Heaven."[77]

The concept of death signals a disruption of rational thought; it is an excess, and the supreme gap in human constructions of meaning. Its image contains more than the artist intended to denote, and its signification is dependent as much on the viewer's imaginings of death as on the artist's unconscious mind. It is not only Symbolist paintings that depend on the spectator to "complete" the work with some element discovered within the self, but it is acknowledged that suggestiveness and ambiguity were of particular importance to Symbolist theories.[78] Although the notion of definitive "movements" should be approached with caution, it may be said that the arts at the turn of the century nevertheless had certain broad characteristics in common.[79] Despite a wide variety of individual approaches and techniques, and highly personalized

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[76] Henri Dorra, ed., *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 144.

[77] D. G. Rossetti quoted in Dorra 23.

[78] Edward Lucie-Smith, *Symbolist Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972) 15.

[79] Although the dates usually given to the movement are from the mid-1880s to the years just before World War I, Symbolism itself can be seen as part of the larger phenomenon of Romanticism, just as much of the work of artists such as Rossetti, and William Blake before him, conforms to the general tendencies of what is often classed strictly as "Symbolist" ideas.

interpretations of subject matter, many artists in Europe and North America shared an attitude which deplored the materialism and determinism which was perceived to be the dominant ethos of the era.[80] They turned instead to the internal, symbolical world, and shunned the external, empirical one. The Symbolist world view has often been described as "*fin-de-siècle* malaise," and diagnosed as "an international symptom of the struggle of introspection with observation, of imagination with fact."[81] Symbolist artists focused on the private universe of the soul, and decried factual statements as a kind of death of the imagination. They strove to express difficult, occult subjects, which resulted in works with hermetic and ambiguous meanings. Because this subjective, suggestive kind of art often had a confessional quality, and made use of a very personal iconography, ambiguity of meaning was in a sense written into the initial premise. An excerpt from Odilon Redon's journal entry for 1902 poetically encapsulated the intense Symbolist belief in the life of the imagination.

> The sense of mystery consists in a continuous ambiguity, in double and triple aspects (images within images). Forms about to exist or existing in the mind of the onlooker. All things that are more than suggestive, since they actually appear to us.[82]

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[80] In a specifically Canadian context, other than in the work of the Québec artist Ozias Leduc (1864-1955), Continental Symbolism did not have a sustained following. The related British Pre-Raphaelite, Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts movements, however, had some enthusiastic supporters, among them Laura Muntz's friend and colleague, the Toronto artist George A. Reid, who was the driving force in the formation of the Arts and Crafts Society of Canada in 1903. (Lochnan, Schoenherr and Silver, eds., *The Earthly Paradise*, 28) Certainly British aestheticism, and in particular the work of Burne-Jones, was well known in both Canada and the United States. For a discussion of the Canadian reception and application of these European movements, see Katharine A. Lochnan, Douglas E. Schoenherr, and Carole Silver, eds., *The Earthly Paradise: Arts and Crafts by William Morris and His Circle from Canadian Collections*, Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto, 1993) and David Latham, ed., *Scarlet Hunters: Pre-Raphaelitism in Canada* (Toronto: Archives of Canadian Art and Design, 1998).

[81] Charles C. Eldredge, *American Imagination and Symbolist Painting* (New York: Grey Art Gallery and Study Center, New York University, 1979) 15, 26.

[82] By the phrase "since they actually appear to us," Redon wished to describe the mental process by which he turned the observation of nature into meaningful symbolic images. In *A Soi-même. Journal (1867-1915). Notes sur la vie, l'art et les artistes*, Redon explains: "After making an effort to copy in minute detail a pebble, a blade of grass, a hand, a profile, or any other element, organic or inorganic, I feel a mental stimulus that makes me want to create, to allow myself to represent the imaginary. When I am so imbued, nature becomes my wellspring, my yeast, my ferment. Because such is their origins, I believe my inventions to be true." Quoted in Dorra 56.

The same sentiment is echoed by Teodor de Wyzewa, a Polish critic of the arts then living in Paris. His words can serve to describe, I suggest, the artistic process followed by Laura Muntz in *Madonna and Child*, and shows the extent to which her artistic expression coincides with Symbolist philosophies.

> Thus the necessity for realism in art [is] not so much a realism transcribing, with no other goal, the vain appearances we believe real, as an artistic realism extracting these very appearances from the false, materially oriented reality in which we perceive them, and turning them into a superior reality that is not materially oriented[...]Therefore art must consciously re-create, by means of *signs*, the total life of the universe, that is to say the soul, in which the varied drama we call universe is played.[83]

The complex imagery of *Madonna and Child* functions on several levels simultaneously. In "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" Julia Kristeva theorizes that motherhood is a primal source of conscious and unconscious emotions and desires, that it is "nothing more than[...]a luminous spatialization, the ultimate language of a jouissance at the far limits of repression, whence bodies, identities, and signs are begotten."[84] According to Elizabeth Grosz,

> [Kristeva's] point is that there is an unrepresented residue in maternity which has not been adequately taken up in religious discourse, a residue that refuses to conform, as Christianity requires, to masculine, oedipal, phallic order.[85]

Madonna and Child communicates Muntz's conscious expression, but it may also be read as a disclosure of her unconscious thoughts and desires (the "residue" of which Kristeva speaks), conveyed through the themes of maternity and religion.

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[83] Teodor de Wyzewa, "Notes sur la peinture wagnérienne et le salon de 1886," *La Revue Wagnérienne* 2 (8 May 1886) 100-113. Quoted in Dorra 148-49.

[84] Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Leon S. Roudiez, ed. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 269.

Maternal protection is figured in its highest manifestation as the Virgin and Child. Muntz also participates in the discourse of Symbolism by portraying these truths through the dramatic, melancholy and occult subject of death. As the personification of Death, the woman is, literally, the Symbolist femme fatale; as the Madonna, she is paradoxically the young Virgin Mary with the babe on her lap, as well as the Mater Dolorosa, engulfed by grief. Madonna/Mother/Death -- she is young and old, both the giver and taker of life. With the authority of the rational world thus called into doubt, Muntz's seemingly conventional representation of a Christian subject is at the same time able to function convincingly on the level of the imaginary. It signals the ambiguous meaning that spans the two spheres of the real and the supra-real, as it was described by Redon and de Wyzewa.

It has already been established that eugenic discourses strongly influenced the social definition of maternity; I have also contended that *Madonna and Child* expresses Muntz's philosophic concerns, particularly with the subject of death as the pathos inherent in the human condition. Muntz addresses both these ideas by drawing a reference to the traditional symbol of pathos -- the Mother of the Saviour -- while at the same time, she invokes the contemporary secular symbol of selflessness as promoted by eugenics and the social purity movement, the "saviour-mother." Just as the Madonna's purpose in life was to nurture and protect the Child, so women in contemporary Canadian society were enjoined to follow her example on both a personal and a social level. In this sense, then, the religious context serves as the conduit for a very relevant topic of her time; it is as if Muntz uses religion as a syntax for the language of motherhood. This same strategy is once again evident in a painting titled *A Madonna*

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[85] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989) 84.

(Fig. 2.3). It portrays a contemporary-looking mother and children, painted in a broad and sketchy manner, who, in light of the title, may nevertheless be interpreted as the Virgin with the Christ-child and John the Baptist. The use of the indefinite article in the title, however, alerts the viewer to the possibility of an alternate meaning, and underscores the deliberate conflation of the sacred and the secular. Muntz's painting implies that "a" madonna is every happy mother. Although Muntz made her living as a portraitist of children, it is interesting to note that in her interpretations of motherhood, children play only a supporting role. It is the mother who embodies the message, and the children are merely the objects that make her selflessness possible. The element that binds the religious with the secular in these images is the message of maternal sacrifice. In a particularized sense, then, the theme of selflessness reflects eugenic prescriptions, while at the same time it is universalized by its association with the Christian ideal of maternal femininity, personified by the Virgin Mother. For the social good of her own time, the secular mother was enjoined to follow the Christian example and confine herself to the home and to philanthropic activities, foregoing broader involvement in the outside world. The bestowal of the title "madonna" on the ordinary woman can be seen as the reward for this sacrifice.

The ambiguity, melancholy mood, and dramatic allusion to death of Muntz's *Madonna and Child* coincide with many aspects of Symbolist art. As has been shown, North American artists generally did not adopt the "decadent" or overtly erotic subjects of the European Symbolists. Certainly Laura Muntz participated more in the American interpretation of Symbolism than in the Continental, and her subject matter remained well within the range considered acceptable for a Canadian woman to paint. Like much

American art of the period, her work has close ties to English late Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic paintings, particularly those of John William Waterhouse, Edward Burne-Jones, George Frederick Watts, and to some extent Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Both Watts and Burne-Jones believed passionately that art had a lofty and noble purpose, and that the artist's mission was to improve the lot of "mankind". They were mid-Victorian moralists more in the tradition of John Ruskin, than followers of the purely aesthetic "art for art's sake" philosophy of painters such as James Whistler or Albert Moore. In his nostalgic and melancholy paintings, Burne-Jones attempted to provide an alternative to the pervasive materialism and ugliness of the urban realities around him. "Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful, and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails."[86]

Although Muntz has not left documented proof that she shared these convictions, it may be inferred that she did. From the articles written about her during her lifetime, most of which were based on conversations with the artist herself, we get a sense of Muntz's strong personality and intense dedication to the kind of work that mattered to her most: "One of her greatest regrets is that she has so little time for her big, creative work, the symbolical subjects which she paints so admirably."[87] Newton MacTavish writes with the air of someone who was more than a mere acquaintance; in his 1911 article "Laura Muntz and her Art" he cuttingly refers to the discriminatory practices of the Royal Canadian Academy, which refused her, and indeed any woman, full membership. He deplores the fact that she cannot append "R.C.A" after her name, while

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[86] Christopher Wood, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Viking, 1981) 112.
[87] Bell 7.

lesser artists could. He suggests, however, that both as an individual and as an artist, Muntz had evolved beyond the pettiness of academic practices.

> This intense, serious woman[...]is dissociated from everything that is academic, for she is a painter with ideas of her own, and she clings to her ideas as though they were established principles[...she]is almost nervously energetic, and she is never happy apart from her work. And, with her, art is a very serious and a very joyous thing.[88]

MacTavish continues to praise Muntz's fine use of colour, her skilful composition and "virile" painting technique, but he specifies that her artistic gifts go beyond even these accomplishments. Her true power lies in her ability to express "more than these superficialities" in even the most straightforward-looking portrait, in which she manages to communicate "some of the inevitable pathos of humanity."[89]

In *Madonna and Child* Muntz constructs yet another meaning by her alliance of universal themes to particular circumstances. It is to the English Symbolist artist Edward Burne-Jones' stylized and attenuated forms that the haunting woman/death figure most closely corresponds.[90] The typology of the child, however, cannot be traced to Burne-Jones, who, apart from other considerations, was not a painter of children, and in fact it is difficult to find any artistic source for the child in this image. He has the air of being painted from life, and is an incongruous element in an otherwise unified painting. The austere background shares a sombre, tonal palette with the veiled figure, who is drawn with an elegant economy of line in keeping with the melancholy atmosphere.[91] The

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[88] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 419, 422, 426.

[89] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 424.

[90] North American artists generally did not adopt the "decadent" or overtly erotic subjects of the European Symbolists. Certainly Laura Muntz participated more in the American interpretation of Symbolism than in the Continental, and her subject matter remained well within the range considered acceptable for a Canadian woman to paint. Like much American art of the period, her work has close ties to English late Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic paintings, particularly those of Edward Burne-Jones, George Frederick Watts, and John William Waterhouse.

[91] Watts' artistic philosophy included the idea that colour must be made to correspond to the mood of the particular subject, and consequently paintings such as *Death Crowning Innocence* are very low in tone. Hare 62. An article dated 1901 praises Muntz's ability to "speak to us with knowledge, [although] not all truth yet," but laments that "low tones are

child, on the other hand, is comparatively Rubensian and far too large for the lap he occupies. He is an anachronistic presence; the woman and ground belong to the late nineteenth-century world of symbol and mystery, while the child appears to be a much more modern being. His well-fed body and thick golden hair could serve as an advertisement for the eugenic composite ideal of youth. It is likely, however, that this stylistic anachronism was intentional. It is my view that the incongruity of the two figures is a crucial aspect of the symbolism of the painting, and allows the image to function simultaneously on two levels: it deals with the universal human drama of life and death, but it performs this drama via the specifically relevant topic of infant mortality.

Infant mortality was a subject of paramount concern in Canada. It was central to the major discourses of the day, such as eugenics, social purity, motherhood, and empire. At the turn of the century, one out of every five children in Toronto died within the first two years of life.[92] Furthermore, the medical community placed the responsibility of preventing infant death above all on the mother, already indoctrinated to envision herself as the redeemer of all modern ills. With that in mind, it may be proposed that Muntz used the language of Symbolism to picture the female figure as a timeless and mysterious presence, as an embodiment of an idea (a conflation of death and holy motherhood) more than as a real woman, while the construction of the child as a contemporary figure allowed the artist to speak directly to the audience of her day. On the universal level, then, Muntz heightens the emotional intensity of the inevitability of

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beautiful, but so sad!" Knife and Brush (pseudonym), "The Art Exhibition From two Standpoints," *Saturday Night* 14, no.17 (9 March 1901): 7.

[92]Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 15. The infant mortality rate in Montreal was the highest in North America, claiming one in three babies before their first birthday.

death by casting the victim as a child; on the historically specific, personal level, the everyday reality of children dying as a result of disease and unsanitary conditions is ennobled through the discourses of religion and Symbolism. It is a sophisticated invention on Muntz's part, and one that coincides with the Symbolist aim of creating images that emphasize suggestiveness and complexity, and in which material reality is permeated by an aura of mystery.

As for Muntz's dark lady of death, she is cast in the mold of Nimuë, the enchantress in Burne-Jones' *The Beguiling of Merlin* (Fig. 2.4). There is a marked stylistic similarity in the sharp-angled jawline and dramatic set of the head on the long white neck. An all-pervasive mood of sadness and the supernatural, centred on the strong female presence, permeates both scenes. In both, however, the women are deeply melancholic, as if driven by some inward force to wield a power whose nature they do not wholly understand. Julian Treuherz sees in Burne-Jones' image the depiction "of female mastery over the passive male[...]powerfully suggestive of repressed desire."[93]

The Baleful Head (Fig. 2.5) repeats Burne-Jones' familiar facial typology in the androgynous couple, who gaze at the head of the Medusa reflected in a well. Except for the attribute of the snakes, however, the monster-figure is depicted by the artist as being no different from Perseus and Andromeda.[94] It is the reality of the dream and of the psyche; a world where beauty, death, and evil are interchangeable. The otherworldly atmosphere which is present in this and most other paintings by Burne-Jones, and which may be perceived as well in the works that serve as case studies in this thesis, is characteristic of Symbolist sensibilities. Burne-Jones' work was extremely popular in

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[93]Treuherz 149.

North America, where it influenced a number of artists. His medievalizing, decorative style may be seen, for example, in Mary L. Macomber's (1861-1916) *Memory Comforting Sorrow* of 1905 (Fig. 2.6), a work which was highly acclaimed by her American audience.[95] Macomber spent most of her life in Boston, and made just one brief visit to Europe circa 1899, where, like Muntz, she particularly admired the work of Rembrandt.[96] The central figure in this allegorical painting is stylistically similar to Muntz's Madonna, and even more so to what was likely a common source, Burne-Jones' pensive Andromeda. The mood of Romantic yearning and unfulfilled anticipations permeates all three paintings; Burne-Jones articulated this wistful longing: "I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be[...]in a land no-one can define, or remember, only desire."[97]

Desire is as inescapably part of the human condition as death. Subjectivity is constituted upon a constant tension between desire for stable, controlled meaning and an awareness of its absence; an awareness of an unrecoverable imagined fulfillment of wholeness in the first relationship between the mother and the child. The subject is split by the longing to satisfy desire and the simultaneous awareness of the impossibility of full satisfaction. The articulation of desire brings to consciousness the existence of lack. These exchanges between the conscious and the unconscious self result in unpredictable and fluid meanings, in the escape of the unutterable along with the conscious expression of the socially acceptable.[98] Works of art also function at this intersection of conscious

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[94] It is also significant to the interpretation of Muntz's madonna that although she repeats the pose of Andromeda, her face and expression are drawn in the image of the deathly head.

[95] Another American woman artist who was attracted to Burne-Jones' style was Sarah Dodson. Eldredge 91.

[96] Eldredge 156.

[97] Wood 182.

[98] Jacques Lacan discusses the notion of desire and lack in relation to the conscious and unconscious self as a dialectic between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, whereas Julia Kristeva uses the terms semiotic and symbolic to refer to these

intent and unconscious desire. It should be remembered that the subject of death was neither hinted at by Laura Muntz in the titling of her *Madonna and Child* (if indeed that was the title), nor was it mentioned in the contemporary descriptions of the work. I have proposed that it is nevertheless the pivotal aspect of the painting, although it does not cancel out other interpretations, including the contemporary one that described it as an illustration of "mother love." In my analysis of this painting I have taken Mieke Bal's suggestion that we need not take the picture "at its word"; consequently, I have allowed the representation to manifest its various meanings by giving free play to its psychic dimensions, although I have also tried to ground the process in a close observation of the work and the discursive fields which surround it.

The combination of the subjects of death and maternity is an unusual one for the art of the time, particularly in Canada. The fact that these themes coexist in other paintings by Laura Muntz, for example in *Mother and Child* (Fig. 2.7) and *Protection* (Fig. 1.32), can be taken as an indication of the particular significance that this pairing had for the artist.[99] Although biography and private sources (such as letters, journals and diaries) are important components of historical research, it is my belief that they should be used judiciously in the process of interpretation.[100] But it would be unrealistic to avoid altogether the influence of biographical facts, particularly if one is exploring the

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notions. Both Lacan and Kristeva posit the heterogenous split subject in opposition to the traditional concept of the conscious self as a unified, consistent whole. Kristeva's subject-in-process is "divided between unconscious and conscious motivations, that is, between psychological processes and social constraints." Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 6.

[99] In both these paintings, the children are shown as if asleep, a convention followed in post-mortem photography of the time. In *Mother and Child* there is a particular and distinct limpness in the young body, which the sad-looking mother holds upright rather than cradles against her body. The allusion to infant mortality in Muntz's *Protection* is discussed further in this text.

[100] In recent years it has become an accepted notion that the biographical is a genre strongly mediated both by history and by the author's voice, which appropriates a confessional mode to which it is not wholly entitled. The autobiographical source, however, is still perceived to occupy a discrete place of its own, ignoring the possibility that the confessor could have a psychological or political stake in both constructing and protecting her or his identity.

emergence of fears and desires. None of the three paintings that employ the themes of death and motherhood is dated; *Protection* was reproduced in *The Canadian Magazine* in 1911, and *Mother and Child* can be situated roughly within the same time period, since it is quite similar in subject and style. The only direct reference to *Madonna and Child* dates to 1926, but it is almost certain that the painting was completed before that date, and probably no later than 1915. Muntz was therefore in her fifth decade at the time of these paintings. She had had no biological children, although she had acquired her own nephews and nieces as stepchildren upon her marriage to her deceased sister's husband in 1915, at the age of 55. As well, in the fourteen years between 1900 and 1914 Muntz experienced the deaths of two sisters, two brothers, her father and a sister-in-law. Sadly, but not unusually, five of her nieces and nephews died in infancy, and at least two other of her siblings' children died before they reached adulthood. Consequently, and apart from any consideration of the social relevance of mothers and children, or of the *fin-de-siècle* legacy of melancholy subjects, Muntz's mature age, childlessness, and intimate experience of loss would have been reason enough for her contemplation of the connections between women, children and death. It is not my intention to suggest that *Madonna and Child* is autobiographical, but rather that on the level of the unconscious, the painting signals the expression of the contradictions caused by the collisions of interior and exterior life. As well, the already paradoxical nature of artistic expression is further complexified in the attempt to picture death at all. Since representation presupposes an original presence or object, in the case of death it can only refigure an absence;[101] it is doubly fictive and necessarily involves the artist's unconscious longings.

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[101] Goodwin and Bronfen 7.

Patriarchal Western culture imagines both death and femininity as essentially unknowable concepts; their ambiguity brands them as enigmas, as the necessary Others against which systems of control and power can be defined. Multiply coded and chaotic, femininity is positioned culturally as being closer to death than to life -- it is "radically other to the norm, the living or surviving masculine subject."[102] Although women's life-giving role must be accounted for, even that is mediated by the constantly double-coded construction of Woman. She is Mary and Eve, life and death; she is "the original prenatal dwelling place[...]and as Mother Earth, she is the anticipated final resting place."[103] Despite this inconsistent construction of femininity, we imagine wholeness and security as embodied most clearly in the mother and child dyad, but a further paradox constitutes motherhood itself as ambivalent and contradictory. Although it is characterized by passionate feeling, and is promoted as the paradigmatic cultural model of protection, it also contains the potential for destruction.[104] In *Madonna and Child* the mother is also the personification of death; she is thus the antithesis to stability, the killer of children, the Symbolist femme fatale figured as a vampire.

The Monstrous Other

Popular imagination perceives the symbolism of death and the vampire in such analogous terms that it need not be elucidated. The correspondence made in the late nineteenth century between women and vampires is perhaps not so transparent. Muntz's "madonna" enacts the traditional ritual of the vampire as she draws her cape around the

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[102] Goodwin and Bronfen 13.
[103] Goodwin and Bronfen 13.

body of her victim before she sinks her teeth into the innocent flesh. The child is as if captured in the instant of realizing the coming danger, and moves his limbs all at once in an effort to escape. He places his fist against her neck, creating an equivalent gesture of violence. Dramatically, his face is resigned to the inevitable, and his blank and darkened gaze already belongs to the world beyond. The vampire-woman gazes down, lips slightly parted, as she prepares to enclose the child in the private space needed to perform her act.

The vampire represents the monstrous side of femininity. Rosi Braidotti traces this discursive positioning of women as a sign of aberrance to Aristotle's theory of human reproduction, which established women as a deviation from the male norm. The construction of the irrational and inferior female, lacking in physical as well as in mental capacities, thus established the otherness of women as the necessary negative to the male positive: "The topos of women as a sign of abnormality, and therefore of difference as a sign of inferiority, remained a constant in Western scientific discourse. This association has produced, among other things[...]the horror of the female body."[105] In this context, Braidotti discusses the new nineteenth-century science of teratology, which consisted of the study and classification of monsters. The etymology of the term is ancient Greek; the word *teras* (the root of the English word "monster") means something "both horrible and wonderful, an object of aberration and adoration."[106] Braidotti thus clarifies that originally the idea of the monster was not exclusively abhorrent, despite the fact that it was also associated with deviance and with departure from "natural" symmetry. This particular sense of the monstrous, which attracts and repels at the same time, can be

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[104] Euripides' child-murdering mother, Medea, is a paradigmatic example of the destructive power of female passion.
[105] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 79.

likened to Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject, which she applies to the conceptualization of the maternal body. Abjection represents a threat to established meaning and stable identity; it betokens the phobias that both the subject and society struggle to keep tenuous and borderline.[107] The fact that in the latter part of the nineteenth century this fluid concept of the indeterminate monster was reconstructed as a science, is indicative of the attempt on the part of scientific discourse to categorize, in order to discipline and regulate bodily differences.[108] The language of teratology defined bodily malformations in terms of excess, lack, or displacement of organs. All these definitions marked a move away from the stable, definitive logic of the male body. Since the terms "excess" and "lack" also were used repeatedly as descriptions to disparage the "abnormal" feminine, it is not difficult to imagine the parallels that were made between monsters and women's bodies. It was especially the mother that could be considered "morphologically dubious."[109] Because the mother's physical body changes shape during the process of pregnancy and childbirth, it provided a material basis for the social constructions that identified her with all that was temporary, irrational, unstable and mysterious. Death, monsters, and women in their reproductive (and therefore also sexual) function incarnated the feared and the unknown.

The identification of woman as a sign of the abnormal and the monstrous, then, can be recognized in the *fin-de-siècle* casting of the female as vengeful harpy, siren and vampire. It was the vampire, aptly, which refused to die as a metaphor for the dangerous

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[106] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 77.

[107] On Kristeva's notion of abjection, see *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

[108] Braidotti sees the traditional practice of categorizing physical difference via a system of binary oppositions as part of the larger concern with the status of alterity within the Western tradition of rational thought. In any modern discussion of the ideological formations of discipline and regulation, one must acknowledge the influence of Michel Foucault, in particular his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979).

woman. In 1915, the American actress Theda Bara starred in the film *A Fool There Was*, in which she played the role of a true femme fatale, an insatiable sexual predator and killer of men. Throughout the film she was identified only as "the Vampire"; within months of the debut of the film, popular culture branded what it called "adventurous" women as "vamps."[110] The film had been based on a book by Porter Emerson Browne. The cover of the first edition, published in 1909, reproduced Philip Burne-Jones' infamous painting *The Vampire* (1897). It pictures a young woman in nightdress, who leans suggestively over the body of a man splayed out on a bed, his arm hanging limply over its side. Her mouth is set in a snarling smile as she gazes down triumphantly upon her latest victim, who by his closed eyes, ghostly skin and dark wound-like spot on his chest signals a state of lifelessness. Whether he is actually dead or simply depleted by the vampire's (clearly sexual) attack is moot -- the point is that he is as good as dead. Medical discourse at the end of the century supported the conventional view of men as victims of their own sexuality, a condition which left them vulnerable to the schemes of predatory women. It was believed that men were physically and morally depleted by orgasm; conversely, women were perceived to feed off sexual encounters, and to draw life energy from men.[111] Bram Dijkstra traces these constructions of the bestial sexual woman to the hereditarian theories which by the 1890s were absorbed into the popular consciousness: "By 1897 everyone knew that women who had reawakened the beast were doomed to slide back down the evolutionary ladder until they reached the hunting

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[109] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 80.

[110] Bram Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) 12.

[111] An advertisement in *The Toronto World* for 1898 offers a "free book to men only" to inform them about "those weaknesses resulting from ERRORS OF YOUTH, such as DRAINS, NIGHTLY LOSSES, WEAK BACK, IMPOTENCY" which would cause them to lose all their vitality as a result of sexual "expenditure." *The Toronto World* (3 May 1898) 9.

grounds of primitive humanity, for in them, nature yearned for savage rituals."[112] Philip Burne-Jones, the son of Edward Burne-Jones, was a friend of Bram Stoker, whose *Dracula* was published in the same year that *The Vampire* was exhibited. But as Dijkstra points out, it was not their likely exchange of ideas that lies at the root of either work; rather, it was "the socioeconomic environment of the 1890s[...]the institutionalization of an imperialist economic agenda [which] required that "others" be conceptualized as evil, inferior, or both."[113]

Women, as the most visible Others in society, were the prime targets of eugenic diatribes. Throughout his book *Manhood Wrecked and Rescued* (1900), the Montreal clergyman W. J. Hunter used the pseudo-medical eugenic terminology that is also the language commonly used to describe vampires -- words such as "blood," "loss," "drain," and "prey" -- and stated apocalyptically that "loss of semen is loss of blood."[114] It seemed clear to him that sexual activity that was not primarily reserved for the purpose of procreation would lead to the death of the race, and the female "vampire" must have figured as the biggest threat.

In the earlier part of the 1800s, however, vampires were not portrayed as demons or snarling aliens, the way that Bram Stoker imagined his Dracula in the last years of the century. As Nina Auerbach describes them, vampires were perceived as "singular friends" and it was considered "a privilege to walk with a vampire."[115] Byron's Augustus Darvell (1816) or Mary Shelley's monstrous Frankenstein (1816) were represented as indeterminate creatures, dangerously close to humans. The female vampire, especially,

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[112] Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters* 84.
[113] Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters* 85.
[114] Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters* 86.
[115] Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) 13.

did not need to display outward signs of otherness, such as fangs or red eyes, since she was considered already ambiguous and alien because of her sex. Sheridan LeFanu's Carmilla (1872), for example, reveals a human yearning when she whispers to Laura, her enraptured prey: "I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you. I have never had a friend -- shall I find one now?"[116] Female friendships in the nineteenth century were often characterized by a passionate devotion that was described in the language of the erotic. Like her human counterpart, Carmilla, too, is permitted to both feel and elicit desire. Auerbach explains the differences in the literary representation of male and female vampires:

> As a woman, the vampiric friend releases a boundless capacity for intimacy [...] Everything male vampires seemed to promise, Carmilla performs: she arouses, she pervades, she offers a sharing self. This female vampire is licensed to realize the erotic, interpenetrative friendship male vampires aroused and denied [...] Only among women, those specialists in romantic friendship, is vampirism embodied in a physical, psychic union that experts of the next century would label 'homosexual'.[117]

In the context of *Madonna and Child*, the intimate nature of the female vampire suggests a parallel, though not an equivalence, to passionate maternal love and protection.[118] On a physical level Muntz's female protagonist remains human (like Carmilla she does not have distinctive markings), but everything else suggested by her presence functions on the level of the psyche, as a sign of intensity and otherness. As vampire, she represents consuming intimacy and shared blood -- much like the passionate feelings of a mother for her child, which, as maternal mythology has it, transgress the bounds of everyday human emotions. It may even be suggested that both

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[116] Auerbach 38.

[117] Auerbach 38, 39, 45.

[118] It is possible to interpret the black-clad woman either as the Madonna or the Vampire, but she is far too symbolic-looking to be understood as an ordinary mother; the contemporary description of the subject as simply "mother love" seems to me wholly inadequate.

Madonna and Child and *Protection* are fundamentally not about women and children at all, but rather about passion.

The two women in these paintings are presented as diametric opposites: literally the black vampire versus the white angel. The two aspects of Woman, as constructed by nineteenth-century patriarchal discourses, are shown via the character of the metaphor that is employed. The vampire incarnates the forbidden passion of the sexual female, here displaced as maternal love. In that context, the child becomes a problematic figure -- s/he is pictured androgynously, neither clearly male, as a possible object of heterosexual interest, nor female, as a sign of erotic love between women. The child is also disturbingly large/old to be shown nude, the pale flesh displayed against the black robes of the woman. Victorian articulations of gender and sexuality often centred upon images of young children, and nineteenth-century literature, art and photography were all preoccupied with the erotics of children's bodies.

If Muntz's subject were to be understood simply as vampire and prey, sexuality would be consistent with the theme; but my aim throughout this chapter has been to suggest that *Madonna and Child* is an ambiguous image which does not foreground any one specific interpretation. Rather, it shifts fluidly among various possibilities, and remains, in the end, a painting with multiple and simultaneous meanings. Consequently, the sexualized nudity of the child understood as a transference of vampiric female sexuality, is tempered by two other separate narratives: the religious and the domestic. The very presence of the Madonna protects the exposed body from sexual reference; furthermore, the gesture of drawing the veil over the body, while simultaneously drawing attention to the nudity, suggests that the intent of the image is fundamentally

modest. It is as if the Virgin has displayed the living holy relic of the Child to the viewer, and now is about to draw the curtain upon it once again. Alternately, when the pair are interpreted as a secular mother and child, the cultural construction of "holy motherhood" still shields them from any troubling associations. It is important to recognize, however, that the themes of Christianity and motherhood are not sufficient to dispel all sexual association; Leo Steinberg has shown that sexuality has long been a component in representations of the Christ-child, and John Pultz, in his discussion of Victorian photographs, suggests that in itself, "the depiction of the nude child in the deeper allegory of domesticity is disturbing."[119]

The maternal angel in Muntz's *Protection* shows another representation of feminine desire. Desire, passionately imprinted on the broad planes of the angel's full, sensual face, cascading hair and outspread wings, is pictured differently than it is in the vampire's cadaverous features and enveiled body. However, like the vampire/Madonna, she is also a strongly maternal figure, and therefore there can be no overt signs that her desire includes a sexual component. The children whom the angel, her gaze averted, cradles to herself are covered to the neck, inhibiting any possible sexual reference to the body. By contrast, in *Madonna and Child*, the vampire is permitted to remain intent upon the child's nude body only because the sexual references are countered by the mitigating presence of the Virgin. The angel's virtual absorption of the young bodies into her own suggests that all her passion is rooted in the selflessness of maternal protection; the children's heads have visually replaced her breasts, now given up solely to their maternal function. She has renounced her sexual identity (an identity nonetheless clearly

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[119] Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). John Pultz, *Photography and the Body*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995) 41.

pictured) and redirected her desire into the sphere of the domestic. Desire, however, tends to rebel against such constraint. Just as *Madonna and Child* may be understood to signify in several simultaneous ways, so this image of the angelic mother may also be imagined to act out its drama on the enormous scale of Greek tragedy; a monumental figure dressed in classical robes, the winged mythological being protectively cradles the sleeping/dead children,[120] at the same time that she mourns the loss of her own potential for wholeness.

In both *Protection* and *Madonna and Child*, then, the discourses of Muntz's social and artistic milieu, as well as the artist's own individual experience and psychology, combined to produce the symbolic figures of the angel, the madonna and the vampire. They may be understood in part as an attempt by a woman artist to picture female longing and desire, albeit within the conventional context of the maternal.

[120] The subject of infant mortality is highly relevant to the understanding of *Protection*, as it is to *Madonna and Child*. The motherly angel pictured here may be protecting the merely-sleeping innocent children, but there is a hollow-eyed pallor, particularly on the face of the child on the right, which suggests death. The angel's intensity of emotion alone directs the viewer's thoughts to more dramatic circumstances.

CHAPTER THREE

PROTECTION IN THE CONTEXT OF NORTH AMERICAN SYMBOLISM

Laura Muntz's *Madonna and Child* and *Protection* (before 1911, Fig. 1.32) are hybrid paintings that are difficult to situate within the artistic trends of the time in Canada. They can be better understood in relation to European Symbolist and Aesthetic ideas, and particularly in the context of the American manifestations of these sensibilities. Although the need for an indigenous nationalist expression had, from at least 1880, figured large in the discourses of art in Canada, it was predominantly art from the Continent and the United States (itself guided to a great extent by European examples) that formed the model for Canadian artists during the two decades around the turn of the century. Inspired chiefly by the innovations brought home to Montreal by William Brymner and to Toronto by Robert Harris, artists who had studied in France in the 1870s, a second wave of Canadians left for the Paris schools and academies during the last decade of the nineteenth century. Muntz was among this second group, arriving in Paris in 1891. By that time, the artistic approaches available to the large foreign student population were far more diverse than they had been in the 1870s, when the naturalistic, academic Paris Salon style had ruled the European art world. Now, the light-filled canvases and painterly brushwork of the French Impressionists made their mark on the Anglo-American community, as did the tonal harmonies and "art for art's sake" aesthetic philosophy of James McNeill Whistler. As well, urban artists turned with renewed interest to the subject of rural life, and the Canadians and Americans abroad

were particularly keen to represent rustic Dutch village scenes, just as they developed a strong admiration for the contemporary Hague School of painters. All these artistic possibilities, each with its own particular associations and ideologies, fed the North American imagination. The following pages will discuss some salient points of the American interpretation of Continental Symbolist and British Aesthetic art, and will demonstrate the ways in which these New World ideas marked Muntz's own approach to the European prototypes.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, artistic trends and interests travelled easily across the border between Canada and the United States. American artists exhibited widely in both Montreal and Toronto, with a constant American contingent in the annual shows of the Fine Arts Department of the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. As well, it was common for Canadians interested in the arts to travel south to visit cultural centres such as Philadephia and New York, in order to view exhibitions, to study at respected art schools such as the Philadelphia National Academy of Design and the New York Art Students League, and to participate in the more lucrative American art market. A substantial number of artists had chosen to live in New York in order to further their careers -- among women painters Florence Carlyle, for example, or Muntz's former pupil Henrietta Shore, or again Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles who settled there with her husband in 1915.[1] Laura Muntz, as well, took advantage of the professional possibilities offered by that city; the *New York Times* for 26 April 1904 mentions her participation in the annual exhibition of the Society of American Artists, and lists her painting titled "Little Miss Shy" among those that had been sold.[2] It can be assumed that

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[1] Farr and Luckyj 26-27.

[2] "The American Artists," *New York Times* (28 April 1904): 8.

this was not her first visit to New York, and she continued to do so into the late 1920s.[3] A Canadian critic of the time noted the artistic cross-fertilization which had always occurred between the two countries on the North American continent: "There must necessarily be a certain affinity between the work of the painters[...]whether of the Unites States or of Canada."[4] Before proceeding with the American context, however, it would be useful to discuss the subject matter of the painting under study in this case history.

Mothers and Angels

Protection (Fig. 1.32) is the title given by Laura Muntz to an image of a female angel who holds two children in a close embrace. Only the heads of the children, their eyes closed, are visible against the angel's body. They are depicted in a vaguely-described space, too small to realistically contain their outstretched bodies. Their forms are shrouded in white drapery which blends into the white robe worn by the angel, who turns her strong profile away from the children's faces and gazes into the darkness. The entire pictorial space is taken up by her monumental shape, and her wings, cropped at the top and sides, give the impression that they are so vast that the image cannot contain them. Signs of the supernatural, they are barely visible against the darkened background, and their feathery texture mingles with the thick fall of hair which tumbles over the angel's right shoulder and is similarly absorbed into the shadows.

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[3] A letter from Muntz to Marie Douglas, dated 21 October 1925, states: "I am going to New York some time this winter or early spring, with some watercolors." It was customary in North America to hold annual art exhibitions in the spring, and Muntz was likely timing her trip to coincide with them. Muntz Collection, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, Dorset County Museum, England.

[4] Gualtieri 109.

Newton MacTavish stressed that this painting was "allegorical," one of Muntz's "big creative works," as if to make a distinction between poetic creativity and the prosaic labour of the portrait commissions which were the main source of her income. He describes the work as being

> an exquisite suggestion of an all-embracing tenderness and sympathy. The little ones sleep with childish abandonment, unconscious of the great world of strife and sorrow, upon which the guardian angel looks with solicitude and compassion.[5]

This description is more considered than the one provided in the press for *Madonna and Child*, which, it said, stood simply for "mother love." But although on one level the meaning of *Protection* is exactly as described, it has been argued in this thesis that the representation on the canvas can speak of multiple thoughts and desires, both conscious and unconscious. To say categorically that *Protection* represents heavenly care, symbolized by the guardian angel watching over the children as they sleep, is to ignore the potency of this highly evocative image. Just as in my reading of *Madonna and Child* my aim was to show the ways in which it referred to various social discourses and psychic realities, so the task at hand is to analyse the enigmatic subject of *Protection* in its context, and to tease out the various strands of meaning from its apparent unity.

An advertisement for "Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription" in the *Toronto World*, 30 April 1898 (Fig. 3.1), addressed specifically to women "during the period of prospective maternity," pictures a smiling angel looking down upon a child peacefully asleep. It intends to lead the viewer to assume that all is well, but the happy scene is soon tempered by the cold realism of its caption.

> When a baby smiles in its sleep it is the mother's fond belief that an angel is kissing it. No woman attains the supreme joys of womanhood until she knows

[5] MacTavish, "Laura Muntz" 423 -24.

> the caressing touch of a first-born's fingers. No woman knows the supreme sorrow of womanhood until she sees her baby in the cold embrace of death.[6]

As the advertisement continued to make clear, the late nineteenth-century mother understood that the angel of life could also be the angel of death.

> Thousands of women daily achieve womanhood's supremest joy, only to meet a few days or weeks or months later, its supremest sorrow. This is because so many babies are born into the world with the seeds of death already sown in their little bodies.

The dual role of the angel, as both protector and messenger of death, can be seen once again in a mid-century engraving titled *The Sick Chamber* (Fig. 3.2). In this scene, however, one is uncertain which of these two missions the angel has been sent to fulfil. Gazing benevolently at an ailing youth who clasps a prayer book, the male angel, as heavenly counterpart of the long-haired adolescent propped on his pillows, holds a cross and points to the open window, suggesting a final departure from earth. The inscription beneath the window-ledge reads "And now Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is ever in Thee." This epigraph reinforces the ambivalence of meaning, as does the scene outside the window. A rainbow and breaking clouds, with a prominent beaconed lighthouse in the distance, could signify either the final peace of heaven or, alternately, the promise of God's grace and the sufferer's recovery.

Angels were uncertain beings, often pictured as androgynous, and although they were understood to be celestial agents, they were perceived as powerful protectors in their own right. Angels traversed the boundaries between earth and heaven, between the rational and the irrational, and their easy negotiation of transitional spaces associated them, in the popular unconscious, with the magical and the uncontainable. The angel had a physical body in order to manifest on the earthly plane, but was also necessarily

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[6] *Toronto World* (30 April 1898): 6.

incorporeal as a sign of difference from ordinary humans. Always conceived of as ambiguous and multiple, the angel summoned a response that not only permitted, but compelled a departure from the conceptual and discursive patterns that regulated everyday experience. As they existed in the imagination, angels were associated with goodness and purity, but once represented, the embodied angel could take on wider possibilities of meaning, and express a multiplicity of emotions and desires, unutterable in conventional discourse. The mother-angel in *Protection*, portrayed in the monumental form of a classical deity or a mythological goddess, speaks at the level of passion of the female experience of maternity and sexuality, birth and mourning, which were central, powerful, and defining issues of the discourses of femininity at the turn of the century.

The association of mothers and angels did not begin with Patmore's "angel in the house." British Evangelism had preached to women their duty of selfless and dedicated motherhood, a role which from the 1790s on was absorbed into middle-class society. By the mid-nineteenth century the equivalence of saintliness and motherhood had become a rhetorical device by which to express memories of happy childhood.

> Well, I have been happy once! I have been a child! -- and I have been in heaven! I have stood in the smile, and lain in the arms of one of God's angels. I was the happy child of a gentle and loving mother.[7]

By the 1880s in Canada, the social purity movement encouraged women to enlarge the scope of their "natural" selfless devotion to the world outside the boundaries of home. Described in language that was intended to draw a correspondence to the miraculous powers of celestial angels, the middle-class woman in her philanthropic (hence motherly) role was envisaged as a "heroic 'slum angel'" who could enter the "dens and vile places of the vast centres of humanity [and] raise a degraded womanhood

into better life and nobler ideals," [8] and emerge morally unscathed from the experience. Moral healing, however, was not her only duty; Dr. Benjamin Ward Richardson, speaking at the Sanitary Congress of the National Health Society in Exeter, in a lecture titled "Woman as Sanitary Reformer," painted an idealized picture of the healing angel in every house. He suggested that women "master physiology," know all about the prevention of diseases, their incubation periods and sick room care; they must watch out for the dangerous "mental contagions" to which a patient may fall prey, and should be knowledgeable in nutrition and the general principles of hereditarian beliefs. In short, he envisioned the caring wife and mother as almost equal to himself quantitatively in knowledge, though certainly not qualitatively, in terms of status. Quoting the words of Solomon, he assures the selfless mother of her reward: "her children shall rise up and call her blessed."[9] Thus, Richardson both associates the selfless mother with biblical models of goodness and sacrifice, and essentializes his rhetoric by alluding to the absolute authority of religious moral values. To further distance women from the intellectual sphere, Richardson promises that if the female reformer would apply her knowledge of proper nutrition to childhood afflictions such as rickets, they "would pass away as if by the spell of an invisible enchantress."[10] The fact that she had gained this information through learning is ignored, and instead Richardson transposes even the educated woman back into the discursive realm of the irrational and the magical, into the world of enchantresses and healing angels.

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[7] These are the words of the hero of William Smith's novel *Thorndale* (1857), quoted in Trudgill 79.

[8] Valverde, *Age of Light* 65.

[9] Benjamin Ward Richardson, M.D., F.R.S., "Woman as Sanitary Reformer," Sanitary Congress, Exeter, 23 September 1880. *Tracts of the National Health Society 1880-81*, British Museum, C.T. 297. (10.) 17.

[10] Ward Richardson 8.

The idea of the healing angel was most charged with emotion, as Richardson understood, when related to the health of children. The intensity of the emotional impact was grounded in the high rate of infant mortality in both Europe and North America in the years between c. 1890 and 1920. The subject was of particular consequence in Canada; a contemporary list of fourteen countries showed Canada with the sixth highest rate, while in the related problem of maternal deaths as a result of childbirth, Canada was fourth.[11] Since eugenic discourses constantly instilled the message that maternal and child health was nothing less than the "survival of the race," the problem was related to various other social concerns, such as nationalism, immigration, the role of the medical establishment, and of women's organizations such as the NCWC, which made a concerted effort to ameliorate the conditions of the time.[12] Hereditarian ideas regarding the middle-class mother's role in the building of nationhood were such common currency by the 1890s, that an advertisement for "Blood and Nerve Pills" reserved half its space for the headline which, the first and all-important word bolded and underlined, read "**Woman.** The Health of the Nation Depends on the Health of Its Women."[13]

Laura Muntz's Symbolist work, as discussed in the preceding study of *Madonna and Child*, allowed interpretation on several levels of meaning. Just as the woman depicted as the Madonna could be read as a contemporary mother, and thereby allude to the material conditions of eugenics and infant mortality, she could also in a more symbolic way be figured as death and the vampire, thus providing a reference to the

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[11] Suzann Buckley, "Ladies or Midwives? Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality," *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, Kealey, ed., 134-35.

[12] Suzann Buckley discusses the various reforms undertaken under Lady Ishbel Aberdeen's guidance as the president of the NCWC in the 1890s. One such program was the establishment of the Victorian Order of Home Helpers, later the Victorian Order of Nurses, which was designed to offer aid and information concerning proper nutrition and sanitation specifically to mothers with infants. Kealey, ed., 136.

[13] *The Toronto World* (3 May 1898): 5.

various discourses of femininity of the time. To begin with the first level, then, the figures portrayed in *Protection* speak of infant mortality even more strongly than did *Madonna and Child.*

Imaging Infant Death

Protection: the angel cradles not one, but two sleeping children, and as a result suggests the protection of childhood as a universal concept, rather than the representation of the care of an individual mother within the family unit; it takes the scene out of the category of everyday parental supervision and into the realm of a greater guardianship. It may be argued that the sleeping children are simply representative of innocence, but even before addressing other details in this image which problematize such a reading, it must be noted that sleep has long been a metaphor for death. The conventional picturing of angels keeping watch over children was much like the advertisement for Dr. Pierce's medicine -- a smiling angel leaning over a child sleeping peacefully in its bed. The popular press, and advertisements in particular, understandably used the current and most easily recognizable visual vocabulary in their reach; in comparison, Muntz's picturing of the theme employs none of this conventional language. The children are uncomfortably fitted into the unrealistic space encircled by the angel's arms, and the head of the older child is positioned at a strangely awkward angle. He or she (the sex of either child is not specified) is the more prominent of the two, and more clearly evokes associations with death. Dark-haired and engulfed in shadow, with eyes deeply set in the pale face, s/he shows not the slightest hint of a smile, but rather establishes a melancholy and sombre mood. The younger child is

pictured far less mournfully, sleeping comfortably in a more natural position, and the variations of light and shade on the face suggest rosy-cheeked health when compared to the older. But just by her/his proximity to the older child s/he is already tainted by death, and the difference in the way s/he is depicted serves only to emphasize the sudden nature of childhood death and its structural association to life. If one reads this image as a reference to infant mortality, the "great world of strife and sorrow" described by Newton MacTavish has already touched the children directly; the angel can offer only "solicitude and compassion," reflecting her limited powers as protectress rather than saviour, and aligning her all the more with the fundamental role of the mother.

The angel embraces the children in a motherly way, but quite unlike traditional representations of mothers (or Madonnas) and children, she looks neither at them nor at the viewer, but instead turns her head obliquely from the sight. Muntz's is a very disturbing variation on the conventions of motherhood themes: normally, by looking down the mother adores her children, and by meeting the viewer's gaze, she communicates her love for them. By deliberately avoiding to look at her children, as though the sight were too painful to bear, and instead turning her head to the saturated blackness that establishes the background of the scene, the angel-figure heightens the feeling of foreboding and death.

The picturing of dead infants had its own conventions in the second half of the nineteenth century. A peculiar painting by the English artist Ford Madox Brown, titled *Waiting: An English Fireside of 1854-55* (1855, Fig. 3.3), presents an ordinary-looking domestic scene, complete with a reference to the father of the family, an officer away in the Crimea. The father's portrait miniature lies atop a pile of letters on the small table

just at the baby's head, and if the viewer chooses to ignore the cadaverous body of the child who ostensibly lies asleep, then the painting is a conventional image of an ideal Victorian household. However not to acknowledge the representation of death is not an option; the child's white robe reflects the flames of the fire in an alarmingly blood-like way, and the little body is laid out on its mother's lap as if on a bier. Tim Barringer suggests that one of the intents of the painting is precisely to allude to infant mortality, "a common tragedy in the period, [which] entered even this most reassuring of domestic images."[14] Madox Brown treats the topic in a particularly obscure and unsentimental way, unlike most painted references to dead children which centered on the intense emotionalism of the subject. Connected in oblique but powerful ways with Romantic notions such as the cult of the tomb (expressed in the ritual of obsessive visits to the loved one's grave), the nineteenth-century response to death was markedly different from either the preceding era's more rational and scientific approach, or the twentieth century's suppression of the realities of death and dying.[15] In the highly charged world of Victorian literature and art, the "mortality rate from immorality,"[16] as Regina Barreca has put it, could be high -- one need only think of Augustus Egg's well-known painted trilogy (*Past and Present* 1858, Tate Gallery, London) which traces the consequences of a mother's sexual indiscretion, and ends with her fateful contemplation of the moon above the murky waters of the Thames. North American versions of the subject were less fraught with emotion, but the theme of infant death naturally lent itself to the expression of strong sentiment, and a certain amount of pathos was appreciated by the

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[14] Tim Barringer, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998) 91.

[15] Joachim Whaley, ed., *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) 6-7.

[16] Barreca 3.

trans-Atlantic viewing public as well. In a review of the art section of the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893, the reporter for the Canadian periodical *The Week* stated pragmatically that the American painter Robert Reid

> ... has a good thing in "Death of her First-born." The young mother leans on the coffin of her child, all the light comes from the candles and falls on the white drapery of the coffin, and the figure of the mother. The pathos is so genuine, the composition so simple, and colour so soft and light in key, as to make a really remarkable picture without showing any great degree of skill.[17]

From the eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth, painting the dead, and especially dead children, was part of American tradition. The popularity of post-mortem portraiture began to wane after c. 1860, but the genre continued to be produced well into the 1890s, mostly by poor, young or itinerant artists who advertised this special service in the daily presses.[18] But it was the medium of photography which was most often relied upon to preserve the image of the beloved dead child. The market for post-mortem images was extensive enough to allow painters and photographers of the genre to co-exist, although, partly out of necessity, the conventions differed for each medium. Since painters were not limited by the restrictions imposed upon photography by the real subject, they used the broader possibilities of representation at their means, and the dead were almost universally painted as if still alive and in robust health, a practice observed especially in the case of children. Photography could not so easily erase the reality of the dead body, a fact which sometimes produced unwanted visual references. E. Annie Proulx's recent commentary on twentieth-century attitudes to the links between photography and death gives a vivid account of these earlier practices.

> Certainly photographs have been associated with death and the dead from the early days of the process, notably through memorial images of children and

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[17] "World's Fair Exhibit, VII," *The Week* 10, no. 33 (14 July 1893): 780.

[18] Jay Ruby, "Post-Mortem Portraiture in America," *History of Photography* 8, no. 3 (July-September 1984): 204-205.

> adults dressed in their finest clothes and posed on chairs or sofas as though reading or asleep. Above all, memorial photographs were personal, produced for a specific bereaved family, showing a specific individual, and often displaying anecdotal content. They were not always beautiful; some show tracks of blood curving from the nostril to the jaw, the shrivelled and emaciated faces of dehydrated infants, blistered mouths, and glaring eyes. Nor did the bereaved families always accept these difficult images. An 1878 manual for British photographers advises collecting the fee before making the photograph, "so general is the feeling of horror inspired."[19]

Even in the medium of photography, however, choices did exist; since dominant late nineteenth-century ideology regarded death not as an end (requiring the body to be realistically pictured in a coffin), but rather as a peaceful sleep, the dead child was often shown in less harrowing ways, as if resting in a pram, or sleeping in a crib and still watched over by the grave figure of the mother. A Canadian example from 1878 shows just such a scene, while another, dated 1869 (Fig. 3.4) positions the dead infant's arm raised up and tucked near his face, indeed as if in peaceful sleep.[20] Other interesting and sometimes eerie variations were attempted, such as painting opened eyes onto the closed eyelids, or, ingeniously, turning photographs of the prone body ninety degrees so that it appeared to be standing.[21]

In a melancholy scene titled *The Heritage of Motherhood* (1904), the American pictorialist photographer Gertrude Käsebier (1852-1934), who specialized in themes of womanhood and motherhood, produced an iconic image of maternal grief caused by the death of a child. The model was her friend Agnes Lee, who had lost her young daughter four years previously; the two had been the subject for what is Käsebier's best-known photograph, *"Blessed Art Thou Among Women"* (1899), which celebrated both pious

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[19] E. Annie Proulx, "Returning Death's Gaze," *Harper's Magazine* (April 1998): 31.

[20] Post-mortem children's photographs in the Notman Collection of the McCord Museum, Montreal, reproduced in Katharine J. Borcoman, *William Notman's Photographs of Children*, Masters Diss., Montreal, Concordia University, 1991. 160, 151; there are examples dating to as late as 1889.

[21] Ruby 212.

womanhood and the distinctive aesthetic of the Arts and Crafts movement. Lee had been a poet and an author of children's books, and her poem titled *Motherhood*, which expressed her sorrow for "a child beloved and lost," was the inspiration for Käsebier's portrait.[22] Ann Michaels, writing about the photographer, has remarked that "Käsebier had long been aware that grief from children's sickness and death was an inevitable part of nineteenth-century motherhood...[In *The Heritage of Motherhood*] Käsebier turned Agnes Lee's solitary mourning into a universal statement of the trials and sorrows of motherhood."[23]

Whether, in like manner, Laura Muntz produced *Protection* from a specific "inspiration" that had its roots in real experience is not known; she certainly had had sufficient personal knowledge of the grief that the death of a young child brought to families, as five of her own nieces and nephews had died in infancy. But despite the reality of her individual experience, Muntz, like Käsebier, also was aware of, and responding to, the art practices and conventions of her time. Without implicating the idea of mystification in the artistic process, it can be said that artistic products are the consequence of an unmeasurable blend of both the interpellation of social and cultural discourses and the peculiarities of the individual sensibility.

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[22] Barbara L. Michaels, *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and her Photographs* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992) 52.

The Feminization of American Culture

The work of the American painters of the Boston School, and to a lesser extent of the older generation of tonalist painters who influenced them, can provide another meaningful context in which to view Laura Muntz's *Protection*. Both these groups of artists appropriated the image of women as metaphors to express particular social and cultural messages which related to American concerns with nationalism, and specifically with the conflicting discourses surrounding the materialism which was increasingly prevalent in American culture at the turn of the century. Women were positioned as indicators of wealth and leisure, at the same time that they were made to serve as symbols for the ideals of purity and antimaterial innocence. Muntz shared aspects of this American mentality, which defined itself in opposition to many of the central concerns of European Symbolism.[24]

Ann Douglas has written about the split between elite and mass culture in America, and dates its emergence to the years around the mid-nineteenth century. She proposes that traditional "high" culture was gendered as masculine, while popular culture was perceived to reflect feminine values. She attributes a large part of this occurrence to what she has termed "the feminization of American culture." During the latter part of the nineteenth century women were the prime consumers of culture, and Douglas suggests that consequently women had a major influence on the production, as well as on the character, of cultural material. She contends that American "feminine" culture was in large part responsible for the loss of the moral and intellectual values

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[23] Michaels 52.

[24] The North American rejection of, for example, the *femme fatale* who featured so prominently in European Symbolist art is discussed further in this chapter.

inherent in the traditional Protestant ethic, but specifies that "the tragedy is not the demise of Calvinist patriarchal structures [but rather] the failure of a viable, sexually diversified culture to replace them."[25] Douglas' essential premise is that women capitalized on American society's definition of feminine identity by participating in and supporting a mass culture characterized by, for example, highly sentimentalized, light fiction that dealt with domestic subjects, the genre of consolation literature, and the proliferation of popular magazines. Douglas suggests that this kind of "feminized" literary production was not so much intended to reflect intellectual pursuits as it was meant to represent a form of leisure.

Religion was also perceived to have been changed by the feminized sensibility prevalent in American society. In 1862 the *National Preacher* magazine bemoaned the loss of old-style, Congregationalist ministers, who gradually had been replaced by a clerical group that moved in a world made up almost exclusively of women: "The sword of the spirit [is] so muffled up and decked out with flowers and ribbons as no longer to show what it is."[26] As early as the 1830s, the English writer Frances Trollope and her compatriot, feminist and journalist Harriet Martineau, published their studies of New World customs and "domestic manners," and commented on the symbiotic relationship between women and religion in that society. Although Martineau provocatively declared that no one listened to American ministers except "women and superstitious men," both writers understood that a "feminized" church did not necessarily reflect an egalitarian society. Trollope observed in 1832 that "it is from the clergy only that the women of America receive that sort of attention which is so dearly valued by every female heart

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[25] Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977) 13.
[26] Douglas 113.

throughout the world. With the priests of America the women hold that degree of influential importance which in the countries of Europe is allowed them throughout all orders and ranks of society." Five years later, the more acerbic pen of Harriet Martineau described "women being driven back upon religion as a resource against vacuity; and of there being a professional class to administer it."[27]

The complex issue of women's negotiations of dominant ideologies may be partially elucidated by the notion of *cathexis*. Wendy Holloway interprets the term as an "investment" that promises "some satisfaction or pay-off or reward"; Teresa de Lauretis defines cathexis as "something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest."[28] Cathexis may help to explain the discursive positions that women have taken in history, and the compromises that these positions necessarily entailed: the promise of power, albeit limited and relative, is what motivates one's choice of position, but it is a promise that is not necessarily fulfilled, or perhaps fulfilled but with unexpected or undesirable results. Nancy Cott's study of women in the evangelical Christian communities of New England in the early nineteenth century, and their appropriation of passionlessness as a virtue, can be taken as an example of the gains that women can achieve, as well as the losses which they incur, in the adoption of a particular discursive position. Cott explains that because women had far more to lose as a result of sexual encounters -- public censure, unwanted pregnancy, health problems, ill-fated marriage -- the replacement of sexual passion with passionlessness (understood as an essential component of feminine nature) allowed women to have some control over their sexual

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[27] Douglas 100.

[28] Wendy Holloway, "Gender Difference and the Production of Subjectivity," *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*, eds. Julian Henriques, Wendy Holloway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn and Valerie Walkerdine (London: Methuen, 1984) 238. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.) 16.

lives, even if that authority consisted in a denial of their own sexuality. At the same time, this repression enhanced the moral status of women, opened new avenues to public life, allowed the possibility of passionate female friendships exempt from the suspicion of carnality, and contributed to both the establishment of a perceived sisterhood among women (based on shared, noble traits) and the solidarity of the early women's rights movement.[29] The cathectic aspect of this construction was society's wholehearted acceptance of passionless saintliness (the Virgin Mary) as a model for all women, and the cementing of its location within the confines of the home. Throughout the nineteenth century the formula of saintly motherhood continued to give women certain privileges, while at the same time limiting the possibility of their participation in crucial areas of public life. "The cult of motherhood, like the Mother's Day it eventually established in the American calendar, was an essential precondition to the flattery American women were trained to demand in place of justice and equality."[30]

Nineteenth century social and cultural discourses constructed various, and often conflicting, versions of femininity. It should be clarified, however, that a "feminized" culture still functioned primarily according to patriarchal systems and definitions. In her enquiry into Western articulations of the notion of genius in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Christine Battersby refers to this type of ideological construct: "To be a genius, a person has to be *like* a madman -- but not a madman[...]Romantic genius must also be *like* a woman -- but not a woman."[31]

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[29] Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs* 4, no. 2 (1978): 233.

[30] Douglas 75.

[31] Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Toward a Feminist Aesthetic* (London: Women's Press, 1989) 106.

Ideal Femininity

In the field of the visual arts in the decades around the turn of the century, women were a primary subject matter for American artists, the overwhelming majority of whom were male. Their representations of femininity were made to embody specific cultural and political beliefs, which were promoted as an opposition to the pervasive materialism of the age, as well as to the decadence which they perceived to be characteristic of contemporary European, and especially French, art. Bailey Van Hook's recent study of women and art in American society has examined the nature and genealogy of the idealized visions of femininity which virtually monopolized American painting from the late 1870s to the beginning of the Second World War. She agrees with Ann Douglas that during these years the privileged woman was the primary consumer of popular culture, and that American culture was classified as feminine rather than masculine. Woman represented the rarefied world of art and refinement, and, as passive icon of a leisure class society, she was, in Van Hook's words, "the creation and not the creator, and became the symbol of an artistic generation's search for beauty."[32] The overwhelming majority of American paintings (especially ones produced by male artists) that show female subjects refer to this particular representation of identity, and their images of women show a femininity made to shoulder many ideological burdens.

A difficulty with Van Hook's study, however, is that she recirculates handed-down beliefs about gender and art production in the nineteenth century in her equation of the works of male and female artists of the period, and assumes that their artistic intent and sensibility were similar if not identical. For example, she justifies her use of

the masculine pronoun as a reference to artists both male and female on the grounds that contemporary artists and critics invariably spoke of artists as the "best man" or "grand fellow." In support of this usage she quotes Lisa Tickner's description of the position of women artists in Britain, which was similar to the situation in America. "Thousands of women were trying to make a living as artists by the turn of the century, but the *idea* of the woman artist, if increasingly familiar, was uncomfortable and contested."[33] Van Hook continues to say that "even to refer to the artist alternately as female, would be a false reading of the period."[34] And yet, it is precisely statements such as hers, which seem to support traditional history's now-debunked claim that there were no "great" women artists to speak of, that have provided the challenge to feminist art historians. It seems to me unproductive to acquiesce to the period's marginalization of "thousands of women trying to make a living as artists" by reproducing the patriarchal language and standards of the period. In order to recuperate the work of historical women, feminist art historians need to examine women's production as the marginal category that it was, and precisely to address it within the context which made their work "uncomfortable and contested."

For more than three decades feminists have been dismantling the traditional view of historical art as being exclusively male, or labelled as masculine in character if the successful artist was a woman. Van Hook includes only five examples of the work of women artists out of a total of eighty-five illustrations, a choice that seems to be grounded in her belief that "the approach that female painters took when they represented women did not differ in any recognizable way from that of their more

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[32] Van Hook 67.
[33] Van Hook 67.

successful male colleagues."[35] Yet even in the few illustrations that Van Hook reproduces in her book one can detect important, though perhaps subtle, differences in the paintings produced by women. Lilian Westcott Hale's *Edition de Luxe* (1909, Fig. 3.5) for example, seems to be less possessive of the female subject when compared with similar work by male artists; that is to say, with paintings which do not have as their primary goal the exhibition of the female body. It is true that, like her contemporaries, Hale participates in the general tendencies which weave together the notions of the feminine, the ideal and the decorative, since it is clear that the viewer is meant to associate the beauty of the blossoming branch with the delicate young woman. But although the woman is represented as being completely unaware of the observer and set in the middle distance of the pictorial space, Hale does not follow the customs of either device, which allowed the spectator a psychologically unimpeded gaze. In similar examples of women reading, such as Thomas Wilmer Dewing's *A Reading* (1897, National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.) or Edmund Tarbell's *Girl Reading* (1909, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston),[36] the women set far back in the space of the domestic interior may be understood as a male representation of the "other," which analogized distance and difference, and provided a viewing position that facilitated a voyeuristic gaze into the female world pictured on the canvas.

Edition de Luxe, on the other hand, does not follow the same conventions. The woman's body in the middle distance is not dwarfed by the surrounding space, and is almost entirely blocked off by the expanse of the table. Her dress is particularly unrevealing of the body beneath, and even her face is hidden in deep shadow. Hale's

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[34] Van Hook 67.
[35] Van Hook 64.

only reference to the feminine body is the thick, pinned up hair and the graceful left hand fingering the edge of a page. The quality of refined (*luxe*) femininity which Hale does choose to foreground is expressed in the rarefied atmosphere that the young woman inhabits, but despite a representation which characterizes her as both privileged and delicate, Hale does not simply reduce her to a signifier of culture, since she pictures the model's absorption in her book without allusion to reverie, boredom or melancholy. These last were perceived to be gendered sensibilities, exclusively feminine, and ones upon which many male painters centered their imagery. In comparison, Childe Hassam's *Tanagra* (1914, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.) or Robert Reid's *Fleur-de-Lys* (c. 1895, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)[37] show the women idle and lost in reverie, thus marking them as equivalent to the precious, decorative objects that surround them. The viewer is invited to gaze upon them just as they themselves gaze dreamily into space.

Van Hook herself compares *Edition de Luxe* with William Merrit Chase's *In the Studio* (c. 1880, Fig. 3.6). Her brief analysis of these paintings is not in itself incorrect, but as regards a feminist deconstruction of the images, Van Hook's attempt remains entirely superficial. Her judgement that both Hale's and Chase's images "reveal that the identification of women and culture was equally a construct of male and female artists"[38] is evidence that the author has not taken the time required to uncover the subtle differences that only a close study of the image can reveal.

Lilian Westcott Hale's *Edition de Luxe* departs in significant ways from Chase's *In the Studio*. His painting shows a finely dressed young lady, large-plumed bonnet on her

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[36] Both examples are reproduced in Van Hook 88, 64.

[37] Both reproduced in Van Hook 71, 94.

head, who sits on a bench and glances down at a page in an enormous book laid out on the Turkish carpet at her feet. She is set so deeply into the expanse of a studio veritably choked with decorative objects that by her diminished size alone she gives the impression of being just one more precious "thing" among the many that fill the space around her. The impression of objecthood, rather than personhood, is reinforced by the large medallion or platter set on a swath of fabric on the bench beside the girl. In pictorial terms, the object assumes equivalent importance in size, placement, texture, and play of light and shade -- in fact, this insignificant-looking motif functions as a parallel image, an inanimate twin, down to the books scattered at *its* feet. The colossal size of the volume that the young woman peruses, added to the context of the vast room filled with strange treasures, lends the scene a fairy-tale atmosphere; she is little Alice, cautiously exploring the foreign, magical Wonderland of male artistic culture. It can even be argued that in this particular case, and even though the book is a portfolio of drawings, its relative size is related to the patriarchal assumption that women and intellect (represented by books in general) do not naturally belong together. It is difficult to find even one aspect of Chase's painting that does not reinforce the notion of female insignificance, much as one would wish to discover traces of a resistant discourse that could temper this representation of dependent, decorative femininity.

It is Chase's objectification of the female figure that distinguishes his painting from Hale's. Whereas the woman represented in *Edition de Luxe* does in part symbolize decorative beauty, she is not made to do so at the expense of her identity; that is, she is not transformed into one of the decorative objects she is meant symbolize. I have digressed into an analysis of the differences between Hale's painting and those of some

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[38] Van Hook 147.

of her male colleagues in order to illustrate one instance of a more general belief: my conviction that women's experience of the world is not identical to men's experience, and that the great majority of paintings by women contain traces of this difference. A strong aim of this thesis is to show how this notion is manifested in the work of Laura Muntz. Muntz, like Hale, centralized the presence of the female figure, but at the same time she showed a resistance to the objectification of women that lent the work of their male colleagues an essential part of its meaning. The elements that both Muntz and Hale shared with the male members of the Boston School were their concerns for the ideal and the antimaterial. Muntz explored these ideas further in *Protection*, but the themes in this work are aligned as well with the darker and more mysterious images of women by American tonalist painters such as George Fuller (1822-84) and John La Farge (1835-1910). These associations will be examined in the following pages.

Idle Femininity

Van Hook offers an elucidating analysis of the ideology of bourgeois capitalism, which defined important aspects of late nineteenth-century culture as feminine and relegated it to woman's "sphere." Culture was considered the property of the wealthy and the privileged; thus it was associated with leisure, and particularly with the women whose inactivity was seen as a measure of their own "good breeding," as well as a symbol of the success of their male providers. [39]

[39]In 1908 an article entitled "The American Woman as a Higher Type" echoed the capitalist ideology that had constructed female idleness as a positive quality: "The American woman is the only real aristocrat now living in America. The reason is not far to seek: they represent the only leisured class in America." Mrs. T. P. O'Connor, "The American Woman as a Higher Type" *World Today* 14 (March 1908): 287, quoted in Van Hook 143.

Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*, published in 1899, introduced the notion of "conspicuous consumption" into the North American critical vocabulary. This term was aimed at the upper and middle class practice of acquiring expensive objects, such as art, for the sole purpose of demonstrating social position and wealth. Furthermore, the privileged women who were the principal consumers were perceived to be equivalent to the precious objects which they were encouraged to amass. According to Veblen's theory, women were designated the "idle rich" of American society. While the husbands and fathers spent their days in the rough and competitive (and incontestably male) world of commerce, the wives and daughters were entrusted with the female "work" of attending to American cultural life. The resulting feminized culture, however, was judged by the conventional standards of worth, which were perceived to be identical to masculinity; unsurprisingly, it was found to be wanting. An observer of American culture just after the turn of the century lamented its effete character, declaring that "man's 'business interests' are[...]devouring him body and soul. And with him goes the rugged strength, the red blood corpuscles that we need to make our culture a living breathing reality."[40] It could be argued, however, that men not only lacked the time, but also the interest in high culture, and that instead it was the excitement of the burgeoning marketplace that captivated the male imagination. The statistics seem to support this conjecture: in 1901, 85 percent of art exhibition attendance was female, and Van Hook suggests that perhaps "it was a measure of culture's diminished importance in American life that it was identified as feminine."[41]

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[40] Josephine Conger-Kaneko, "Effeminization of the United States" *World's Work* 12 (May 1906): 7524, quoted in Van Hook 145.

[41] Van Hook 144.

In the visual arts, a telling expression of newly feminized sensibilities was the virtual equivalence that the art world assigned to the separate qualities of beauty, goodness and femininity. As an antidote to the harsh urban realities of everyday experience, American culture constructed a passive and decorative ideal of beauty, which only women were qualified to embody. Just as society perceived activity, energy, and strong character to be the paradigm of masculinity, so inactivity -- reformulated as refinement, grace, elegance, and charm -- signalled the ideal model of femininity. The pervasiveness of this typology in American art distances it from the more varied European descriptions of femininity, and underscores, as well, the conservative nature of American moral attitudes. Throughout history the notion of feminine beauty has been contingent upon male ideals, but the particular nineteenth-century formula unequivocally associated feminine beauty with moral purity. Simply the fact of being female (white and middle-class, it must always be specified) burdened the ordinary woman with the responsibility of not only conducting her own affairs in a blameless manner, but also charged her with the moral duty of ennobling the crass materialism of the world outside her home. It was expected that she would do this not by her active presence within the systems of power, but rather by philanthropic works, and especially by cultivating the inherently female qualities of physical grace, spiritual beauty and selfless behaviour. While the rules of capitalism required men to be ruthless in their everyday dealings, the discourse of moral domesticity required women to function as their passive spiritual helpmates. Discourse theory has shown that at any point in history conflicting discourses emerge to challenge dominant ones, and undeniably the women's rights movement introduced alternate models of femininity. But, as Whitney Chadwick

has observed, mainstream feminism in nineteenth-century America was "reformist at heart [and] directed toward righting social wrongs rather than radically restructuring relationships between the sexes,"[42] and femininity as represented in the overwhelming majority of paintings by male artists of the period, remains in the category of the romantic and the ideal.

An important distinction which Americans drew between their own art and late nineteenth century European art was focused on the perception of moral character, with American art positioned as a parallel to the fresh, democratic spirit of the young republic. This belief influenced the nature of virtually all the work done by painters who had returned to America after having received their training in the ateliers of Europe. The political and cultural climate in the United States was markedly different from that of contemporary Europe, and the styles and genres which American artists had learned to value during their studies abroad could not simply be transplanted upon their return to their homeland. The criteria of the American art market differed from those of French Salon culture, most conspicuously in the category of suitable subject matter. French academic art centered around the human figure, especially the nude female body, whereas in America the nude headed the list of subjects that the art-going public found unacceptable.[43] Moreover, academically trained artists often placed the nude in an Orientalized or mythologized setting, genres that Americans found neither familiar nor relevant. Other important European genre subjects, such as historical narratives or the popular scenes of peasant labour, likewise had little success, and since American

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[42] Chadwick 199.

[43] Among the reasons for this attitude Van Hook suggests the lingering Puritan taboo against nudity, as well as the nationalist fervor and "frontier ethos" which pervaded American culture especially after the 1876 Centennial, and which contributed to the establishment of landscape, rather than the figure, as the most valued genre. 52-53.

identity was formulated in opposition to Old World beliefs, paintings which avoided decadent European themes were considered to be appropriately nationalistic.

American artists turned their attention to producing images of decorous, ideal women. By the late 1890s American art had been affected as much by the tonal "symphonies" of its notorious expatriate, James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) as by French academic art. Whistler had been in London during the 1860s, just at the dawn of the Aesthetic movement, which aimed to depict beauty for its own sake, as it was put, without the need for a justifying narrative grounded in any of the traditional genres. The British Aesthetic artists (principally Edward Burne-Jones, Frederic Leighton, George Frederic Watts, Albert Moore, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in his later years) were inspired by an eclectic mix of artistic sources: by Japanese prints and Chinese porcelain, by Ancient Greek and Hellenistic sculpture, by a romanticized medievalism, and by the idea of the correspondences of the arts. Whistler's tonal, atmospheric views of the Thames by night were titled "nocturnes," and reflected the Aesthetic fascination with the abstract, emotional language of music. This was a sensibility in direct opposition to the pervasive realism of French academic painting. If by the 1870s Whistler's paintings had not made him famous in his native country, his libel suit in 1878 against John Ruskin, probably the most influential art critic of the nineteenth century, had made him a household word.[44] It is during this trial that Whistler proclaimed his allegiance to the theory of "art for art's sake,"[45] which substantially affected American depictions of ideal

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[44] After viewing one of Whistler's *Nocturnes* at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, Ruskin publicly criticized him for "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." In essence, the quarrel centered around the Ruskinian concept of art as an imitation of nature and as a carrier of moral and spiritual values, versus Whistler's modernist understanding of art as an expression of the artist's intention and imagination. Whistler won the case, but was awarded only one farthing in damages.

[45] This phrase was not coined by the artists of the Aesthetic Movement, but rather came from the writings of the French philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867). It referred to the belief in the intrinsic worth of the formal aspects of art, rather than in its capacity to convey didactic or moral values.

womanhood. Whistler's images of women suited American sensibilities, since they contained none of the sensuality and lasciviousness of French nudes, and instead remained decorously and romantically clothed. Whistler's loose brushwork, tonal harmonies and moody atmosphere, as well as the overall decorative character of his work, influenced scores of American artists. The painters of the Boston school in particular adopted Whistler's tendency to regard the female model as just one decorative element among many-- Chase's *In the Studio*, Hassam's *Tanagra*, and Reid's *Fleur-de-Lys* are excellent examples of American Aesthetic imagery.[46]

In the later manifestations of British aestheticism, it was Whistler who most strongly maintained the detachment which the theory of art for art's sake suggested, and only Moore who continued to embody the pure decorative ideal of the late 1860s in his painted friezes of cool, impassive women.[47] In the complex conditions of the *fin-de-siècle* period, all artistic trends, like everyday life itself, underwent particularly rapid changes. In a late Victorian world characterized by ideological contradiction, art could not maintain a discrete position exempt from multiple and contradictory meanings. According to Julian Treuherz, the central paradox of the later Aesthetic movement lay in its commitment to the formal values of the cult of beauty, while at the same time seeking to comment on the profound issues of the human condition. "In these late paintings, the formal perfection of aestheticism served to heighten their emotional power, while their use of symbolic reference, myth and archetype, often operating on a subconscious level, linked them with European Symbolism."[48] This distinctive fusion of style and meaning

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[46] Van Hook 107.
[47] Treuherz 142.
[48] Treuherz 143.

characterizes much of Laura Muntz's work, and is particularly relevant to the understanding of *Protection*.

The Ambiguities of Materialism

Another characteristic common to the majority of both Aesthetic and Symbolist artists was their antimaterialist philosophy. This stance was aimed as a critical commentary on the physical ugliness of urban, industrial life, and, more importantly, on the rampant consumerism which they believed was robbing society of its spiritual values. It signalled, furthermore, an attempted resistance to the increasingly commodified art market of the late nineteenth century, in which art dealers cultivated the notion of individual, instantly recognizable style in order to market the art object as an exclusive product. Expressing the sentiments of a great many artists who opposed such a commodified role for art, the French painter Emile Bernard proposed the formation of a communal brotherhood of artists: "The goal of this group, called the Anonymous Ones [*Association des Anonymes*], is thus art for art's sake. Not glory, not commerce, not reputation: the edification of an idea, of a work." His colleague Maurice Denis phrased the same idea in the most uncompromising terms: "The moment the artist thinks of money, he loses the sentiment of beauty."[49]

An antimaterialist discourse permeated North American art circles just as it did European ones. Artists in the United States and Canada, particularly those who had returned from sojourns abroad and whose work tended toward Symbolist rather than

[49] Laura Morowitz, "Anonymity, Artistic Brotherhoods and the Art Market in the Fin de Siècle," *Art Criticism* 11, no. 2 (1996): 71, 73.

modernist ideas, rejected the pragmatism associated with the creed of progress. Certain aspects of North American attitudes toward culture contributed to the urgency that many artists felt in their search to re-establish a meaningful role for art. Whereas cultural life had maintained its respected and established position in European society, in turn-of-the-century America it was perceived to be an elitist indulgence. In addition, the codification of culture as feminine added to its lack of prestige. It should be recognized, then, that the artists who devoted themselves to the ideals of goodness and beauty understood their position as a defence of art's traditional role: as a timeless and universal expression of the human spirit. Van Hook interprets their antimodernist and antimaterialist stance as a nostalgia for an irretrievable past: "Culture was their bulwark against encroaching realism, naturalism, positivism, industrialism, materialism and other pervasive manifestations of "progress" in the late nineteenth century."[50]

For the Symbolists, then, the choice of artistic style was considered to be a telling aspect of an artist's philosophy. If perceived to be simply style for style's sake, it signalled a corrupting participation in the market. Consequently, and as an alternative to the contemporary glorification of the pragmatic and the particular, the Symbolists conceived of style as inseparable from meaning. The contemplative, moody images produced by the Americans who were drawn to Symbolist and Aesthetic ideas communicated a belief in a higher reality, and the idealized women who constituted their principal subject were the carriers of this message of physical and spiritual beauty. Because men represented action, energy, and the strong character required for success in the competitive modern world, they could not at the same time function as suitable models for a universal, spiritual message. The idealized American woman, on the other

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[50] Van Hook 139.

hand, served as the paradigmatic emblem of pure beauty, and, constructed as a symbol of culture and leisure, she also epitomized passive contentment. These qualities were appropriate to the notion of idle, protected femininity, attributes which were employed to illustrate two separate and paradoxical characterizations of woman: as antimaterialistic angel and as symbol of material prosperity.

The association of ideal women with antimaterialistic discourse was justified on the basis of the perceived superiority of women's moral character. It was understood that the male world of commerce necessitated a certain amount of ruthlessness. Persistent gender stereotypes proclaimed that men were better suited, both intellectually and physically, to deal with the challenges that this new competitiveness required. Women, on the other hand, were deemed incompatible with public life. Conventional views of femininity held that women's innate moral purity equipped them for just the opposite: that it could, in fact, act as a corrective to the harshness of American materialism. The discourse of "separate spheres" thus justified women's exclusion from effective participation within the systems of power, and naturalised their prescribed role as nurturing angel. Similarly, ideal, fragile feminine beauty was perceived as a symbolic antidote to the physical ugliness of the increasingly urbanised landscape.

In the decades around the turn of the century, feminine beauty was a recurrent subject in American popular literature and poetry, just as it was in the visual arts. These cultural media transmitted the belief that the beauty of the ideal "Fair Woman" was rooted in purity of spirit, and that it was this essential characteristic, and not merely physical attributes, which lent feminine beauty its ennobling power. At the same time, however, female beauty was described as being the epitome of charm, elegance,

refinement and taste -- in effect, the exemplary attributes of the society lady. Bailey Van Hook has remarked that these qualities "imply holding back, containing, restraining, [and] intimate a conservatism" which reveals the bourgeois nature of the feminine ideal.[51] The contradiction between establishing women as cultural indicators of nonmaterial, uplifting virtues on the one hand, and upper-class elegance on the other, conforms with Veblen's perception of women as a vital aspect of American conspicuous consumption. American Symbolist paintings, particularly those of the Boston School, correspond with this inconsistency. The nationalism inherent in positioning the purity of "The American Girl" against European "decadence" did not preclude the paradoxical role that she was made to play in her own culture -- that is -- both as an indicator of American wealth, and as a moral safeguard against the corrupting potential of materialism.

To use the example of Childe Hassam's *Tanagra* once again, the artist indicates the equivalence of the model with her affluent surroundings in several ways. He uses the same textural, tactile brushstroke to describe both the fashionable interior and its graceful inhabitant. Combined with the overall decorative aspect of the scene, this creates a pictorial unity which leads the viewer to regard the woman as one material object among many. However, since the entire image is characterized by an ornamental femininity, it serves to direct the viewer's thoughts away from the (male) world of material concerns toward the (female) sphere of culture and refinement. This is suggested most of all by the delicate screen which blocks out the bustle of the cityscape outside, but the screen may also be imagined as a metaphorical barrier which serves to hide the fact that money was necessary to purchase both the luxurious objects and the

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[51] Van Hook 168.

leisure of the young woman. Money is the unuttered yet recognized foundation of this refined version of conspicuous consumption. And yet, the alternate (antimaterialist) cultural reading of femininity, that of woman as moral safeguard, is not far under the surface. Because the woman is so still and introspective as she contemplates the figurine in her hand, she seems to allude to the imposed correspondence between herself and the precious object. The notion of the essential objecthood of her existence is supported by the artist's choice of title, which may be taken to refer both to the classically draped woman and the sculpture in which she sees her reflection. On one level, then, the young woman's rich surroundings represent desired Continental elegance and sophistication, but as she stands immobile, hemmed into a corner by her luxurious possessions, she functions on a secondary level as a reminder of the fundamental worthlessness of non-spiritual pursuits.

The Canadian Context

How, then, did Canadians respond to European trends and to the American models so close to their borders? In a long commentary in *The Canadian Magazine* on the state of the arts in Canada at the end of the 1890s, Harriet Ford suggested: "Let us take the Americans as an example, much as it might go against the grain to do so."[52] This recommendation was directed at what she saw as the Canadian establishment's antagonism to "foreign influence," that is, to European art movements. Ford's own advice to those who called for a distinctive national school of painting that concentrated only on Canadian subjects was that national style was a matter of slow evolution, and

best achieved through the absorption and eventual transformation of established traditions. "The whole state of the fine arts in Canada is in too unformed a condition to admit of the possibility of any marked distinction in Canadian art, of any kind." Americans, on the other hand, had begun to forge a national style, precisely because

> they have thrown themselves into the swim of every movement. Their students have gone abroad in hundreds, and have taken up, sometimes with purpose, sometimes with superficiality, as was inevitable, the methods and manners of their various influencers. And with what result? Already they are beginning to show distinct traits.[53]

As for the discourses of antimaterialism, they were current in the Canadian art world at the end of the 1890s, just as they were in the American schools that painted ideal women, or in the Symbolist circles of Europe. J. A. Radford, a member of the Ontario Society of Artists, expressed this sentiment in the clearest of terms.

> Some men paint from a monetary basis, many to amuse themselves, thinking it a jolly pastime instead of a sacred profession[...]The true artist paints because he loves God, nature and humanity the more, and not for the drivelling pittance doled out to him by the opulent who give, as for a charity, for works that they hoard as treasures when the artist is dead, but do not even then appreciate their full value.[54]

Radford's antimaterialist rhetoric aligns him with factions which saw themselves as the defenders of culture and morality in the crass consumerism of modern times. Like the Americans, he too envisioned a role for art which was in accordance with the New World promotion of itself as uncorrupted and ethical, and which in addition was closely associated with nationalistic sentiment. "It is necessary that artists should create nothing that is not absolutely true, wholesome and clean[...]Artists have a grand duty to perform. They may be a fulcrum in modelling the country's patriotism, sentiment and taste." [464]

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[52] Harriet Ford, "The Royal Canadian Academy of Arts," *The Canadian Magazine* 3, no. 1 (May 1894): 48.
[53] Ford 48.
[54] J. A. Radford, "Canadian Art Schools, Artists and Art," *The Canadian Magazine* 2, no. 5 (March 1894): 462.

Radford envisioned this nationalistic art in terms of its opposition to a certain kind of European prototype, understood to be a reflection of a decadent society. His description identifies the type of licentious Symbolist work from which American culture wished to distance itself as well. "Many of the spasmodic eruptions of wantonness displayed on canvas suggest a want of feeling and refinement, or they are the product of diseased brains, and they were intended for a time less intellectual and moral than ours." [463] And just as American painters equated female purity with the freshness and freedom of American life, best represented by the indigenous landscape, so Radford repeats this same perception in the Canadian context, and unmitigatingly envisions women and nature to be identical. "Where in the world are there handsomer women, bluer skies, richer sunsets, wider prairies, larger waterways, more fertile landscapes, more luxuriant foliage, more gorgeous autumns, or more magnificent mountain scenery than in Canada." [464]

After the 1870s, the French school superseded both the English and the German as the preferred European model for Canadian and American painters. But, according to at least one writer, it was not the French Impressionist (or decadent Symbolist) school that was most popular during the 1890s -- "it is not the art of '93 that has captured the artistic fort of America, it is that of '76 -- the very antithesis of the modern dashing school."[55] The author of this statement, himself a painter and an associate of the Royal Canadian Academy, believed that Barbizon School artists such as Daubigny, Rousseau, Troyon, and especially Corot and Millet, "painted with a spiritual humility even in their most commonplace subject," and thus were particularly suited to the North American

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[55] W. A. Sherwood, "The Influence of the French School Upon Recent Art," *The Canadian Magazine* 1, no. 8 (October 1893): 638.

temperament. "It matters not whether [the painting] be the product of another race and nation; so long as it reflects our condition, it will[...]appeal to our inmost feelings."[56]

It was Jean-François Millet in particular who struck a chord with North Americans, largely as a result of a particular event. In 1889, Millet's *Angelus* was bought by James Sutton, president of the American Art Association. The acquisition created extraordinary public interest, partly on account of the record purchase price of $110,000 but also because Sutton had outbid the French government for its ownership.[57] Americans saw this as a moral victory of the young nation over old Europe, and although the general public did not at first understand the subject matter of the painting (many searched for the "angel" in the picture), they soon praised "this incarnation of purity and love of humankind."[58] The *Angelus* was publicly exhibited in New York between November 1889 and January 1890 amidst a carnival-like atmosphere, but soon after its exhibition Sutton nevertheless sold the *Angelus* to a French collector who later bequeathed it to the Louvre. Among the many interpretations of the *Angelus* offered in the press was one which saw in Millet's peasant woman the combined virtues of the American mother and the Madonna, while another linked the painting -- "this incarnation of purity" -- with antimaterialist sentiment.

> Really, the glamor of all these tens of thousands of dollars is not a favorable light through which to see the picture. To the sensitive eye easily affected by its environment, it has something of the effect of painting the lily.[59]

Despite the brief period of exhibition of Millet's painting, it continued to be widely reproduced and discussed in the press throughout the 1890s. Nine years after the

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[56] Sherwood 638.

[57] The circumstances surrounding the American purchase of the *Angelus* are discussed in Laura L. Meixner, "Jean-François Millet's *Angelus* in America," *The American Art Journal* 12, no. 4 (Autumn 1980).

[58] Meixner 80.

Angelus left American shores, Jean Grant's "Studio and Gallery" column in Toronto's *Saturday Night* announced that a public lecture had been given by Laura Muntz at St. Margaret's College on subject of, as Grant put it, "Jean-François Millet, The Great Poet of Patient Suffering."[60] The humble circumstances and many trials of Millet's life had been consistently sentimentalised in the American press, and this characterization had remained part of his personal mythology. Grant's epithet reflected the accepted view of Millet and his work as manifestations of innocence and spirituality. After reporting that Muntz's lecture had been accompanied by numerous reproductions and had been very well received, she reiterated that "we know of no more touching and sublime history, perhaps, in all the annals of art than that of Millet." In his article on French influence in North America, Sherwood had likewise been effusive on the subject of the Barbizon painters' work.

> And this sentiment! Sentiment -- is it incompatible with the true end and aim of art? I venture to say this, that the influence of a poetic picture upon the artist's mind, all things being equal, is infinitely greater than the most masterly production of an unsentimental subject. The impression made by the French painters of that date was simply marvellous.[61]

American Allegories

Newton MacTavish considered that *Protection* was an allegorical work; that, as defined by the term, it was an expression, by means of symbolic figures or actions, of truths or generalizations about human existence. Although this allegorical aspect of

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[59] Meixner 84.

[60] Jean Grant, "Studio and Gallery," *Saturday Night* 13, no. 4 (9 December 1899): 15. Muntz was art director and instructor of drawing and painting at St. Margaret's College from 1899 to 1901.

[61] Sherwood 639.

Muntz's distinguishes her from her Canadian contemporaries[62] it can be said, nevertheless, to situate her in the larger North American context. Artists on the North American continent did not as a rule paint mythological subjects in the European tradition of the genre, but employed myth and allegory as more generalized devices through which the events and preoccupations of human life could be universalized and made to refer to a higher reality. "They preferred quasi-myths that did not describe or illustrate a specific story, but whose ambiance, setting or dress was vaguely inspired by classical themes."[63] To further emphasize the universal intent of her image, Muntz uses a soft, atmospheric rendering of the figures rather than the solid outline associated with realism. The boundaries of the shapes are generalized and blended together to form an evocative organic whole, a visual metaphor, as it were, for the unity of a philosophical concept. Her technique is in both brushstroke and expression very similar to the work of American tonalist artists such as George Fuller.

Tonalism is the name given to the distinctive method and outlook of a group of American painters and photographers in the period between 1880 and 1900.[64] This group included artists such as Fuller, George Inness (1825-94), James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), Thomas Dewing (1851-1939), John Twachtman (1853-1902) and Albert Ryder (1847-1917), and photographers such as Edward Steichen (1879-1973), Clarence White (1871-1925) and Gertrude Käsebier (1852-1934), who shared a method of expression which favoured the poetic mood of a subjective reality, which in turn reflected their disillusionment with the urban, industrial and commercialized way of life

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[62] I do not include the work of muralist painters in this consideration.

[63] Van Hook 84.

[64] Wanda M. Corn, *The Colour of Mood: American Tonalism 1880-1900* (San Francisco: M. H. De Young Memorial Museum and the California Palace of the Legion of Honour, 1972.)

around them. Tonalist works created a mood that spoke of nostalgia and longing, of mystery and suggestion. Tonalist artists intended their work as a contrast to what they perceived as the vulgar and mechanical products of both the American Hudson River School which preceded them, and the French Impressionists then in vogue. Their spiritual link was more with the European artists of '76, than with those of '93, as W.A. Sherwood had discerned, and their techniques were reminiscent of the delicate tonalities of Corot, but fused with the mysterious and dusky hazes that enveloped the figures painted, for example, by Eugène Carrière.[65] Naturally, there were significant differences among the many artists sympathetic to tonalism -- Whistler's "arrangements" and "harmonies" are not identical to Dewing's more academic sensibility -- but in a very general sense they did all share the characteristics described above.

The paintings produced by Laura Muntz after the turn of the century were also described using the vocabulary of tonalism. Her work was said to be "atmospheric" and her "low tones" were deemed to be "beautiful, but so sad."[66] Others spoke of her "symphony of colours," or of the "harmonies of tone and arrangement that are enthralling."[67] The artist with whom such language was most commonly associated was Whistler, whom Muntz had met in Paris where he was "among the visiting artists" (presumably at the Académie Colarossi) and "whose mannerisms [she] clearly recalled."[68] Whistler's *Symphony in White No.1: The White Girl* of 1862 (Harris Whittemore Collection), is a younger and more innocent being than Muntz's angel, but the play of tonalities, soft focus and air of mystery links the two representations.

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[65] The American tonalist painter Xavier Martinez (1869-1943) studied with Carrière in Paris in 1900-01. Corn, 40.
[66] Mortimer Lamb, "Studio -Talk," 162; *Saturday Night* 14, no. 17 (9 March 1901): 7.
[67] Bell 7; Hector Charlesworth, "Summer Shows at Toronto Art Gallery," *Saturday Night* 41, no. 40 (21 August 1926): 3.
[68] Harold Mortimer Lamb, letter to Miss Waldon, 4 November 1964, Muntz File, Hamilton Gallery of Art.

Although Muntz's work did not approach the intensity of either Whistler's decorative design or his tendencies toward abstraction, her work demonstrates an awareness of his methods and in several works she experimented with the type of subject that Whistler, more than any other artist, popularized in North America. A review of the annual exhibition of the American Society of Artists for 1904, for example, was titled "Whistler the Dominant Influence on the Younger Painters."[69] Whistler's portrait of *Little Rose of Lyme Regis* (1895, Fig.3.7) gives the young subject the kind of wistfulness and psychological depth that was perceived in Muntz's *A Daffodil.* It is executed in the same loose, painterly style that Muntz favoured, and is reminiscent of the dozens of children's portrait commissions which Muntz produced regularly after her European years.

The Japanese Kimono (c. 1904-06, Fig. 1.34) shows Muntz's participation in the contemporary interest in Japanese objects and art; Whistler had been an early collector of Japanese prints and Chinese porcelain and his work of the 1860s was strongly conditioned by the Japanese aesthetic. But Muntz, like most North American artists, only appropriated the costumes and objects of Asia (Whistler and Mary Cassatt are the great exceptions, and neither artist resided in the United States for any length of time), and Muntz's model, dressed in a kimono and holding a fan, likewise retains a Western solidity quite alien to the basic principles of Japanese design. Her combination of Eastern objects and Western women is representative of a type of American painting influenced by Whistler's example, but one that also was highly conditioned by the eclecticism that marked the art of the *fin-de-siècle*. Americans did, however, adopt the decorative character of Whistler's compositions, as indicated by the Boston School and the ideal women whom they depicted as equivalent to the aesthetic objects that

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[69] "The American Artist," *New York Times* (26 March 1904): 9.

surrounded them. Muntz's oil sketch of a young woman examining a vase (Fig. 3.8) is just such an image, and like countless American examples of the period, invites the viewer to observe the woman just as she contemplates the elegant vase in her hand. Although the elucidation of the decorative, Whistlerian genre given below does not refer to this oil sketch in particular, it nonetheless perfectly describes its character.

> There was a solemn aura surrounding these paintings, as though aesthetic choices were matters of the utmost seriousness. The women hold objects gently. The air is still and silent[...]The artist intimates that only a few choice souls can appreciate the woman and the fine object she holds. Another implication is that only women have the time and the aesthetic aptitude to appreciate those objects.[70]

Canadian artists from the 1890s to c. the 1920s thus also responded to the decorative aspect of Whistler's aestheticism, which by that time had been adopted and modified by the Americans. Florence Carlyle, in particular, produced work that could be classified according to a "Whistlerian" sensibility.[71] Although Muntz did not often use that method of picturing, *The Japanese Fan* shown at the exhibition of the Art Association of Montreal in 1902 demonstrates once more her acknowledgement of the stylistic trends of the day.

The comparison of *Protection* to some specific works of American painters can help to situate key aspects of a painting for which there is no real precedent in the Canadian art of the time. The intensity of emotion expressed in it distances it from Whistler's example, and one looks instead to paintings such as George Fuller's *Nydia* (c. 1882, Fig. 3.9). John La Farge's *Venus Anadyomene* (1862, Fig. 3.10) and Wyatt Eaton's

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[70] Van Hook 107.

[71] Julia Gualtieri mentions stylistic devices such as flattened space and thin application of paint, as well as Carlyle's use of musical metaphors, associated with Whistler's practice of titling paintings with musical references, such as "Symphony," "Nocturne," or "Sonata." 166, 171. Gualtieri has discussed the Canadian approach to the aesthetic sensibility in terms of images of reverie. She mentions the work of Laura Muntz in her categories of "pure" and "aesthetic" reverie, indicating that Muntz exhibited paintings with titles evocative of the genre. However, the paintings

Ariadne (1888, Fig. 3.11) may also be fruitfully compared to *Protection* in terms of technique and mood, but their use of the nude figure places them in a different set of discourses which do not contribute to this discussion. It is telling that Muntz's later paintings do not refer only to the Boston painters of ideal women, but that they also look back to the forerunners (Fuller, La Farge, Whistler), whose work was more mysterious and intense than that of the younger generation.[72] Van Hook explains that the effect created by Fuller's work, for example, "would be considered 'poetic' in the language of the day, a judgement largely referring to a painterly technique that blurred the edges of the forms, intimating a higher spiritual reality."[73] *Nydia* is a typical example of Fuller's non-narrative paintings which aim to create an atmospheric mood and intimate vaguely mysterious events. The young woman looks searchingly into the distance, her deeply shadowed profile turned away from the viewer. The effect of Fuller's pictorial methods and decontextualized subject[74] is that the setting, the central figure, and by extension femininity itself, are rendered mysterious. Muntz, although she employs very similar techniques to imbue her subject with mystery, also includes narrative through her specific reference to both motherhood and the angelic. It is the addition of the aspect of mysterious femininity, however, that complexifies her narratives.

Of the younger Boston School artists, Abbott Thayer was the recognized painter of angels; the combination of Fuller's style and Thayer's subject matter, positioned within the general cultural environment of the American painters of ideal women,

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have not been located, and the particular subject matter and treatment of it in paintings with titles such as "Iris" or "Passing Dream" can only be conjectured.

[72] A painting similar in mood and style to *Protection* is Muntz's *Motherhood* (location unknown, reproduced in *The Canadian Magazine* (September 1911): 423).

[73] Van Hook 59.

[74] Fuller used literary titles for several images of decontextualized female figures, but he acknowledged that the titles were arbitrary and that his work was intended to be non-narrative. Van Hook 59.

provides a particularly relevant background for an understanding of Muntz's *Protection.* During the 1890s, Thayer was considered the foremost interpreter of innocent female beauty, and his *Angel* (1889, Fig. 3.12) was a particularly appreciated work. The critic Homer Saint-Gaudens called Thayer "a painter of the essential spirit of man [*sic*], since no one has fathomed deeper than he the mystery of infusing concrete human beauty with the most elusive of divine significance."[75] The model for Thayer's angel was his own young daughter, and the work has a secondary reference as a naturalistic portrait. Yet Thayer's stated intention was to represent the phenomena beyond the real world: "The essential difference between the artist's figure and the actual human beings that swarm about us is exactly as total as that between a symphony and the voices in our daily life."[76] Thayer's description of his young angel corresponds to *Protection*, but the almost academic naturalism of his style tempers the aura of mystery and produces a potent symbol of the fresh and innocent nature of American womanhood -- the "American Girl" -- that was also understood to stand for the character of the nation itself. In contrast, Muntz's womanly and maternal angel inhabits a darker world that is governed by more otherworldly concerns than nationalistic sentiment. The American critic Royal Cortissoz considered Thayer's angels to represent "divine beauty[...]pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life."[77] By contrast, the harsh realities of life, with their intimations of mortality, are precisely the topics that Muntz's image conveys.

Another of Thayer's symbolic subjects is the allegorical *Caritas* (1893-97, Fig. 3.13), which, like *Protection* again, pictures a woman and two children. The young

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[75] Van Hook 162.
[76] Van Hook 137.

woman who represents divine charity holds her outspread arms protectively over the heads of two children. The little girl and boy stand naked against her draped body, while a dark column of natural matter rises up behind her. It is composed of leafy shapes that can stand for both vegetation and feathers, and the column swings out at the top to mimic the rise of wings. This reference to angels and gardens brings to mind the original garden, an interpretation supported by the presence of the little surrogate Adam and Eve. The figure of Charity stands unimpassioned and serene in the centre of the image, and symbolizes a detached divine presence rather than a maternal one. She is in this manner again distanced from Muntz's protective angel, whose whole being is characterized by emotion.

Protection draws on the visual model of Thayer's images of female angels, but it does not reproduce Thayer's naturalism, which associated him with a more modern perspective.[78] While the work shares Thayer's conception of women as otherworldly beings, its emotional impact is heightened by a mood and sense of mystery more closely aligned with Fuller's evocative tonalist approach.[79] Whereas the idealized female images painted by Thayer stood as a metaphor for by-gone purity and innocence, Muntz's angel is both womanly and maternal. Although linked to antimaterialistic discourses in her role as protectress of the children who inhabit either an earthly or heavenly plane, she is also a figure of intensity and melancholy. Laura Muntz's passionate angel both disturbs

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[77] Van Hook 163.

[78] Van Hook clarifies that many American painters painted ideal women in a very technically advanced manner, which echoed the principles that they had learned in Paris from teachers such as Jules Bastien LePage: "She must be such a woman as never existed in perfection of form; at the same time the sunshine must fleck her firm flesh, perhaps, and preferably, studied out of doors. *Angels of Art* 154.

[79] *Nydia* was part of a series of three-quarter-length female figures which Fuller painted in the 1880s. It is interesting that, with a few exceptions, Muntz also avoided painting the entire body and preferred half and three-quarter length views. It was another method, perhaps, to stress the mysterious and keep the prosaic at bay – to keep her subjects' "feet off the ground," metaphorically speaking.

Thayer's decomplexified equivalence of femininity and innocence, and endows Fuller's mysterious women with a more philosophical dimension.

CONCLUSION

Motherhood Redefined and Future Directions

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth Laura Muntz was known as the foremost Canadian painter of mothers and children. Yet her own life experiences had no direct reference to the motherhood subjects for which she was admired. Unmarried until the age of 55, and having lived the life of an independent, professional artist with a successful studio and teaching practice, she exemplified instead the late nineteenth-century concept of the New Woman. It was from this perspective that Muntz redefined and expanded the conventional and domestic themes of mothers and children. Although *Protection* refers on one level to a mother's care and concern for her children, it also involves the more general concepts of innocence and purity, themes which ally her to the American Boston School. She is distinguished, as well, from conventional representations of motherhood by her reference to the troubling idea of infant mortality, a subject which she expands through allegory to stand for the universal experience of death and suffering.

Parallel but equally central to both *Protection* and *Madonna and Child*, are powerful discourses around constructions of femininity. In *Protection*, Muntz chose to discuss the feminine through the figure of an angel, but her angel is fashioned as a more complex figure than the ideal woman of the Boston School painters. Muntz pictured a potent but tragic figure, who communicates a helplessness in the face of powerful events and emotions. It can be suggested that *Protection* is about neither angels nor children, for it is the woman in the image who is the main carrier of emotion. Her presence is so

powerful that her robe and wings, meant to signify the supernatural, become superfluous and appear almost like theatrical props. Angels signify the ethereal and the incorporeal and normally figure in discourses that direct attention away from the body. Muntz, on the other hand, pictures the angel as a kind of mythological goddess whose intense presence strongly denotes the body. In contrast to the sleeping/dead children, from whom she turns away as if to deny her maternal role, she is characterized by lushness and passion, an excess of the body which finally cannot be absorbed into either the domestic or the maternal.

A similar complexity may be discerned in *Madonna and Child*, in which a seemingly unitary depiction of the Virgin and Child can be deconstructed to reveal its visual and conceptual inconsistencies. It can be seen as an image of the Madonna and the Infant Jesus; a representation of the ideal mother and child, perceived as a corollary to the Christian references; a vampiric *femme fatale* with disturbing allusions to predatory female sexual appetites. Yet under scrutiny, none of these interpretations can maintain their individual integrity. Any one image or idea is soon replaced by another, and the child who at first glance was perceived to be a perfect example of robust health is transformed into a victim already almost on the other side of life. In a similar fashion, though *Madonna and Child* touches upon contemporary social issues such as hereditarian theories and infant mortality, both connected in significant ways with the figure of the mother, it also invokes the symbolic figure of the vampire in order to articulate an alternative perception of femininity, one in which the expression of longing and desire disrupts the accepted boundaries of the domestic and the maternal.

This thesis has provided a close analysis of Laura Muntz's *Madonna and Child* and *Protection*, but there is much in this artist's work that remains yet to be discovered. Two areas that seem especially fruitful for future study are the relationship of Muntz's art to Pictorialist photography, and her treatment of Dutch themes examined in the context of the contemporary perceptions of the rural subject as indicative of a lost innocence.

Muntz's most direct link with photography is through her close friendship with Harold Mortimer Lamb, and much of her work shares the aesthetic and ideology of Pictorial photographers in both Canada and Europe working in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Pictorial photography had its roots in the earlier British "art" photography of well known figures such as Henry Peach Robinson and Julia Margaret Cameron. Although John Ruskin was notoriously opposed to the products of the Industrial Age, in the earlier years of his career he, too, was a proponent of the new medium.[1] In a letter to his father, dated 1845, Ruskin gave it his qualified endorsement: "Among all the mechanical poison that this terrible nineteenth century has poured upon men, it has given to us at any rate one antidote -- the Daguerreotype."[2] He did not, it should be noted, go so far as to conceive of photography as a fine art in itself, and remained consistent in his credo that if the machine threatened or compromised the original occupation, it was to be rejected. Consequently, Ruskin thought that as a documentary tool or as a technical aid to the painter photography could prove useful, but concerning its deeper relationship to the fine arts, declared "I wish it had never been

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[1] As time went on, Ruskin found photography more and more unacceptable, even as a purely documentary medium.

[2] Jens Jäger, "Discourses on Photography in Mid-Victorian Britain," *History of Photography* 19, no.4 (Winter 1995): 320.

discovered, it will make the eye far too fastidious to accept mere handling."[3] Julia Margaret Cameron, on the other hand, had none of Ruskin's qualms about the benefits of the camera. In 1864, just one year after she began taking pictures, she was characteristically direct about her intentions. "My aspirations are to ennoble Photography and to acquire for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the real and the Ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and beauty." [4] Much of the recurrent content in Cameron's photographs -- children, madonnas, angels, wistful moods and innocent bodies which nevertheless alluded to the erotic and the sexual, symbolic references to otherworldly realities, references to the art of Watts and Rossetti -- was also central to Laura Muntz's painting, and it would be of art-historical interest to investigate the paths that a study of this correlation would reveal.

The debate about the "true" nature of photography began almost as soon as the first daguerreotype appeared in France in 1839. The invention had no real precedent, despite its connection, at first, with the many new printing techniques which had developed from the beginning of the century. Since there was no specific vocabulary of terms and ideas with which it could be discussed, photography remained a flexible category until past mid-century, and was inserted alternately within the discourses of art, science, education and machinery. A description of the activities of the Calotype Club in London in 1847 illustrates the mix of wonder and confusion that photography elicited: "We have attended a meeting of a dozen gentlemen amateurs associated together for the purpose of pursuing their experiments in this art-science (we scarcely know the word

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[3] Jäger 321, n.50.

fittest completely to designate it)." [5] In England after the 1850s, photography began to be aligned with the fine arts. Like Julia Margaret Cameron, Henry Peach Robinson was a proponent of "art" photography. Aside from producing his well-known composites, Robinson also wrote extensively on the subject. In 1869 he published *Pictorial Effect in Photography*, and in the preface to his 1886 book, *Picture Making by Photography*, he advised photographers to "think for themselves as artists and to learn to express their artistic thoughts in the grammar of art[...]The materials used by photographers differ only in degree from those employed by the painter and sculptor." [6]

The American Pictorialist photographers who were Muntz's contemporaries -- Edward Steichen, Gertrude Käsebier, Holland Day, Alvin Langdon Coburn, Clarence White and Alfred Stieglitz -- belonged to the Photo-Secession group in New York, and most, along with Harold Mortimer Lamb, were also members of the Linked Ring, the British arm of the International Pictorialist movement. All were interested in expressing the introspective, inner world of the imagination, and they were united in their wish to communicate a spiritual reality beyond the prosaic concerns of their own increasingly materialistic society. Even documentary photographers such as Lewis Hine embraced much of the Pictorialist aesthetic -- he preferred to be called an "interpretive photographer" and produced many images of women and children, with titles such as "A Tenement Madonna" and "Ellis Island Madonna."[7] These very titles are a clue to the meaning-laden constructions around the subject of mothers and children, a subject shared by many contemporary painters, including Laura Muntz.

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[4] Julia Fagan-King, "Cameron, Watts, Rossetti: The Influence of Photography on Painting," *History of Photography* 10, no.1 (January-March 1986): 19

[5] Jäger 317.

There are many avenues to follow in a study of Muntz's associations with photography. Portraiture attracted a number women photographers of the time, and women and children formed the basis of their practice as well. There are numerous correlations between Muntz's approach to her subjects and Gertrude Käsebier's, and the work of the Canadian Minna Keene, who specialized in children's photographic portraiture, provides interesting links with the painter as well. Above all, the similarity between Muntz's portraits and those of Mortimer Lamb are striking, and although it is commonly held that the painter takes the cue from the photographer, the influence of Muntz's work upon Mortimer Lamb (who studied painting with her for a short period of time)[8] should not be discounted.

The second theme which seems particularly rich with possibility relates to the relevance of the Dutch subject to Canadian artistic culture. Muntz's repeated visits to Holland, and her many representations of Dutch life, coincided with the enthusiasm expressed by European and North American artists for pastoral themes and rural settings. Idealized depictions of bucolic village scenes were popular at the end of a century which, in fact, was witnessing the demise of the traditional, rural way of life. Driven by a nostalgia for the perceived innocence of pre-industrial and pre-capitalist society, North Americans, especially, began arriving from the 1880s on to set up art colonies in small Dutch communities such as Egmond, Laren, Dordrecht and Volendam. Laura Muntz and Wilhelmina Hawley chose the art colony at Rijsoord, to which they returned during several summers in the 1890s. The North Americans were particularly

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[6]Margaret F. Harker, "Henry Peach Robinson: The Grammar of Art," *British Photography in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Mike Weaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 133.

[7] Miles Orvell, "Lewis Hine: The Art of the Commonplace," *History of Photography* 16, no.2 (Summer 1992): 88.

taken with the traditional costumes still worn by the villagers of Rijsoord, and Muntz, too, sought out local women to model for her in their wooden clogs and starched white coifs. As Annette Stott suggests, most of the expatriate artists romanticized rural existence at least in part because many of their paintings were destined for the homes of middle-class Americans, who found in these images a model of a virtuous, antimaterialistic approach to life that they felt was disappearing from their own society.[9]

Perhaps even more than their neighbours to the south, Canadians were infatuated with Dutch subjects from the last decades of the nineteenth century until the First World War. Collectors in both Montreal and Toronto patronised the artists of the Hague School -- especially the Maris brothers, Joseph Israëls, Anton Mauve, Johannes Bosboom and Jan Hendrik Weissenbruch -- more than they had French, or indeed any other art.[10] Mary Ellen Dignam, the founder and president of the Women's Art Association of Canada, and a devotee of Dutch art, was instrumental in mounting several exhibitions which featured the work of the Hague School. These were shown not only in Toronto, but through a program of travelling exhibitions in cities throughout Eastern Canada as well. It was her belief that "the truth, simplicity, directness and sympathy with which Dutch painters especially have interpreted their environment should be the best lesson for Canadian artists."[11]

It can be argued that Laura Muntz's Dutch subjects do indeed demonstrate a realism that differentiate them from the majority of her other works, and it would be of value to examine to what extent her direct experience of Rijsoord modified the

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[8] Lily Koltun, ed., *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada 1839-1940* (Markham: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1984) 321-22.
[9] Stott, *American Painters* 346.

commonly held and idealized concept of Dutch life, and to what measure she nevertheless adapted her art to the sentimentalized expectations of the buyer at home. Of interest, as well, is the particular appeal that Dutch subjects, whether by Dutch or Canadian artists, seemed to have held for women viewers.[12]

Laura Muntz's wide-ranging and richly symbolic body of work provides a fertile ground for multiple investigations. Like many of her Canadian contemporaries, Muntz painted conventional scenes of motherhood, but she is distinguished from only these themes by the production of her symbolic canvases, which contain many levels of meaning. This thesis has presented an in-depth discussion of two such complex images: *Madonna and Child* and *Protection*. In these, Muntz examined the multiple correlations of maternity and femininity, and brought to the subject a breadth and complexity which contributed largely to her recognition in her own time, and which makes her relevant to ours.

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[10] For a discussion of the Canadian taste for Dutch art in the nineteenth century see Marta H. Hurdalek, *The Hague School: Collecting in Canada at the Turn of the Century* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1983).

[11] Hurdalek 18.

[12] The American journal *The Art Amateur*, which was subtitled "Devoted to Art in the Household," reported in 1895 on an exhibition of Dutch subjects at The Woman's Art Club, and suggested that the name "sensitivists" be given to the nineteenth-century Dutch painters, a description that in itself would have had appeal for contemporary women viewers "Exhibition of the Woman's Art Club," *The Art Amateur* 32, no.4 (March 1895): 106.

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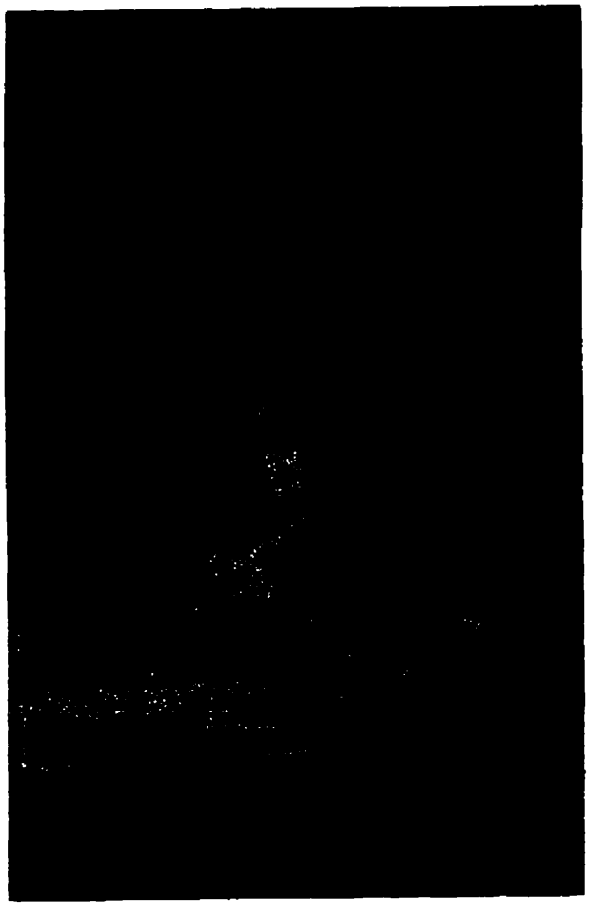

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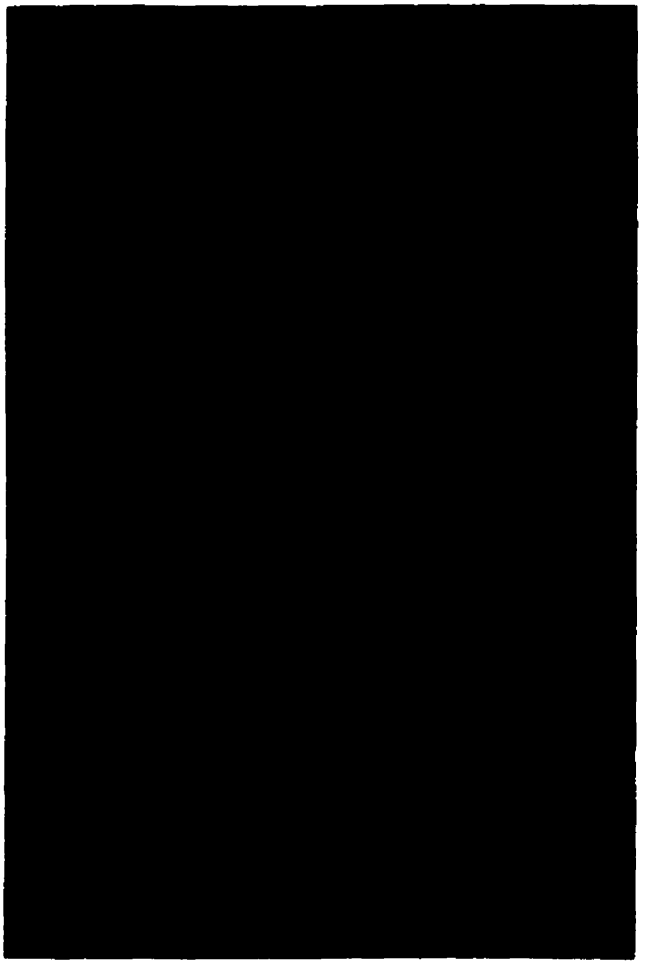

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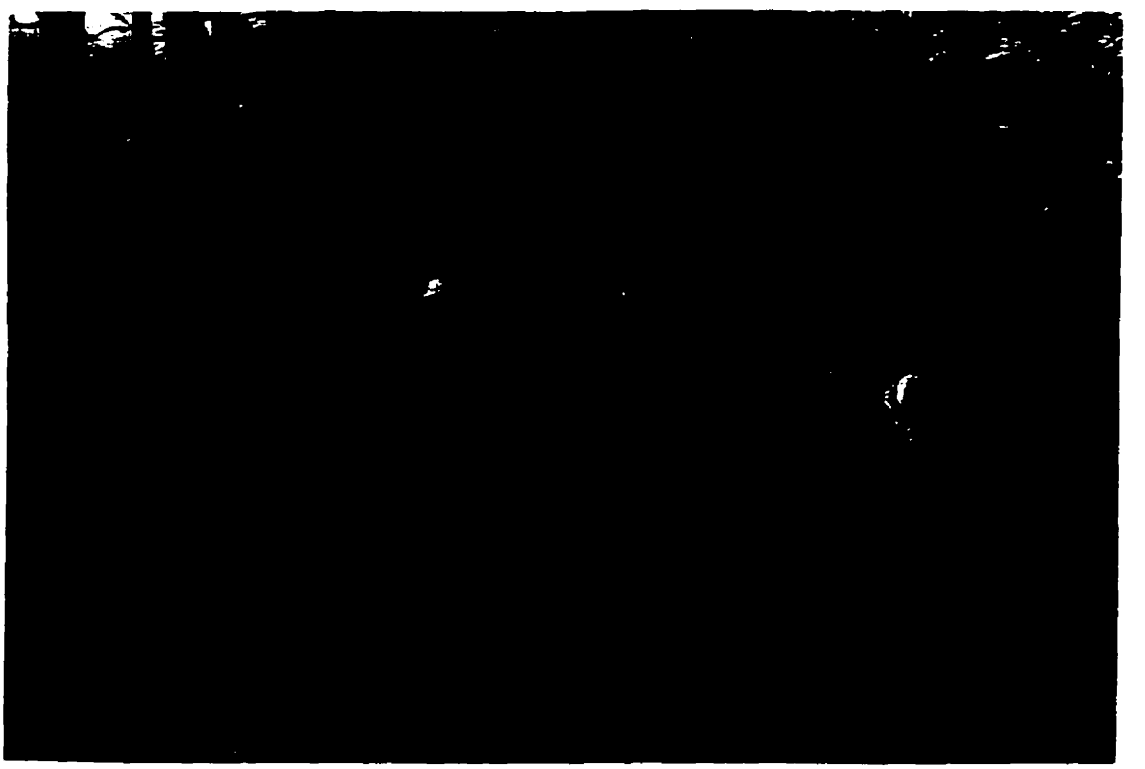

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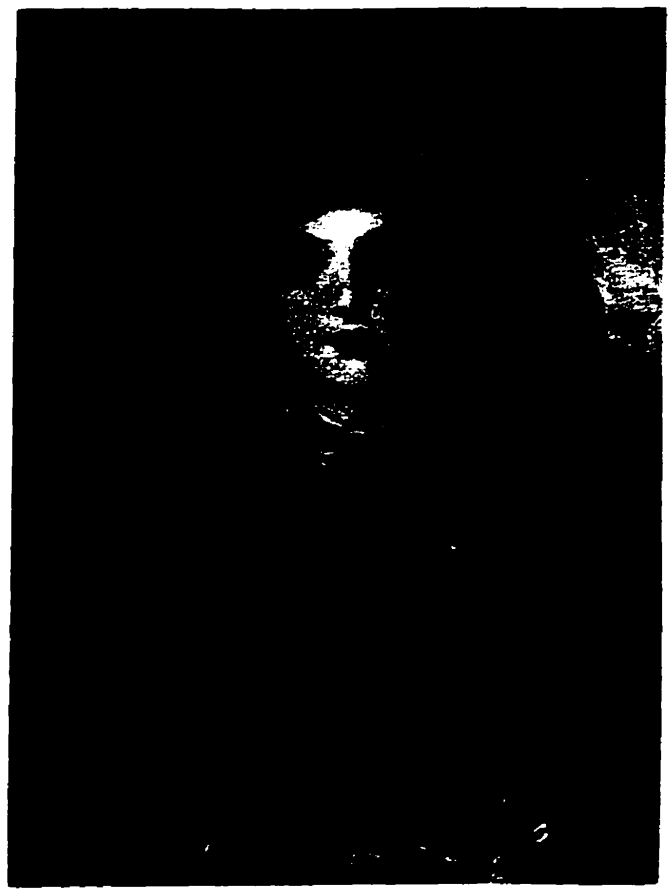

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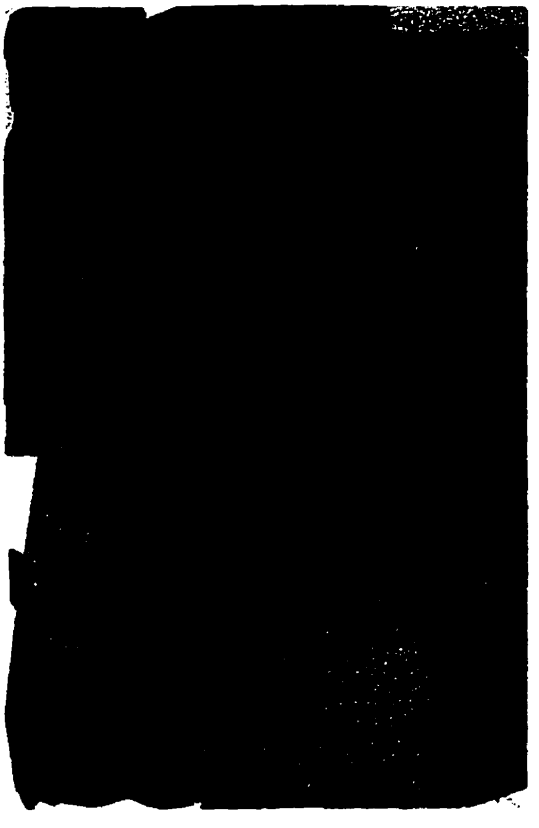

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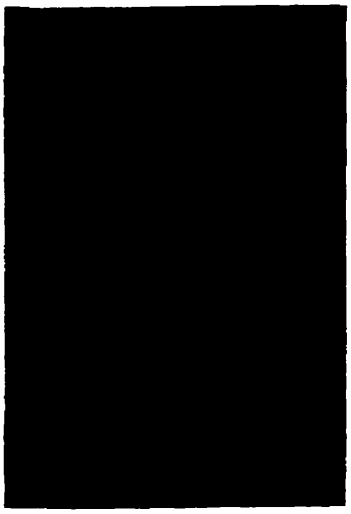

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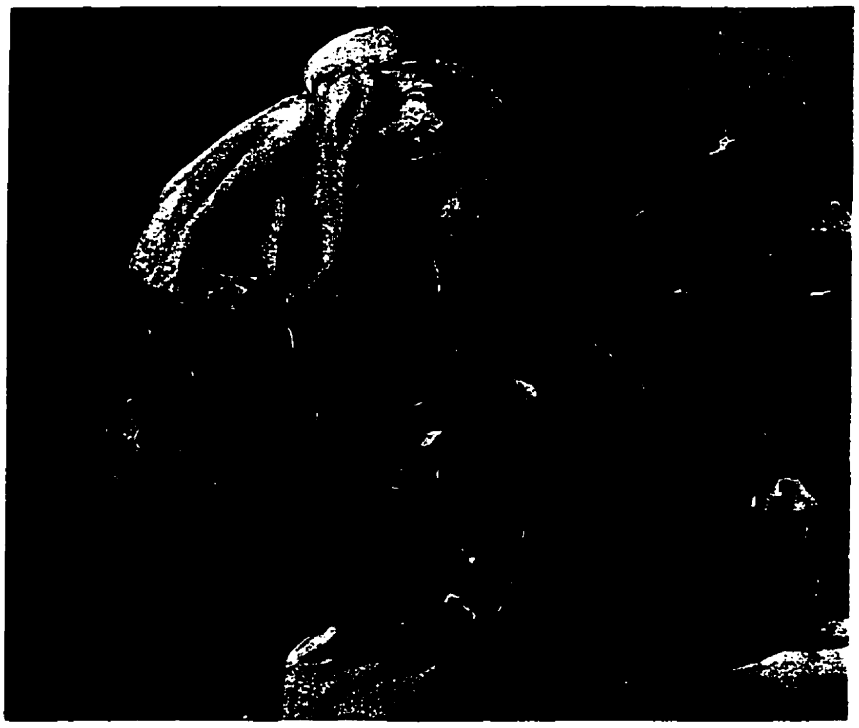

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Fig. 1.29 Laura Muntz, *Girl Raking Hay, Holland*, c. 1894-5.

Fig. 1.30 Laura Muntz, *Mother and Child*, c. 1898.

Fig. 1.31 Laura Muntz, *The Lesson*, 1895.

Fig. 1.32 Laura Muntz, *Protection*, before 1911.

Fig. 1.33 Laura Muntz, *Admiration*, c. 1914.

Fig. 1.34 Laura Muntz, *The Japanese Kimono*, c. 1904-06.

Fig. 2.1 Laura Muntz, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1914.

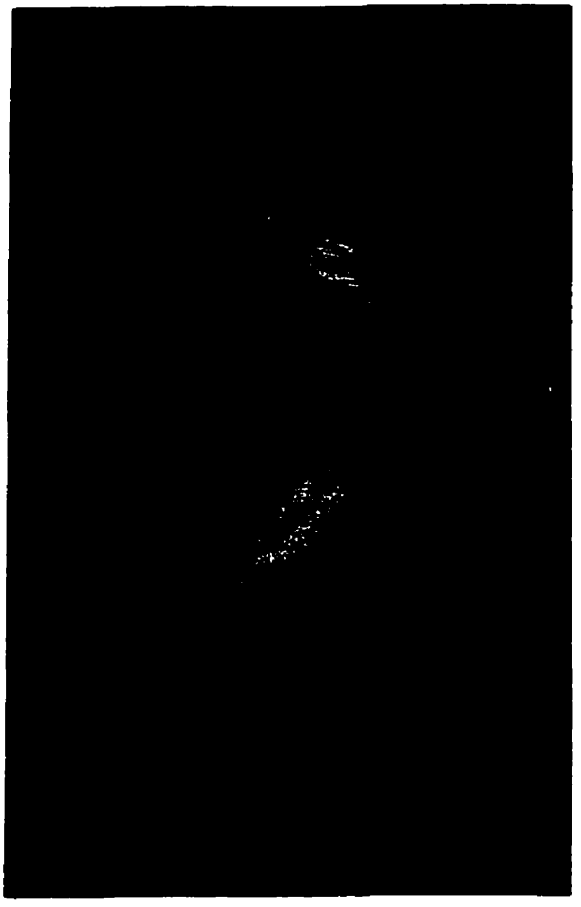

Fig. 2.2 George F. Watts. *Death Crowning Innocence*, c 1885.

Fig. 2.3 Laura Muntz, *A Madonna*, c. 1913.

Fig. 2.4 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin*, 1874.

Fig. 2.5 Edward Burne-Jones, *The Baleful Head*, 1886-87.

Fig. 2.6 Mary L. Macomber, *Memory Comforting Sorrow*, 1905.

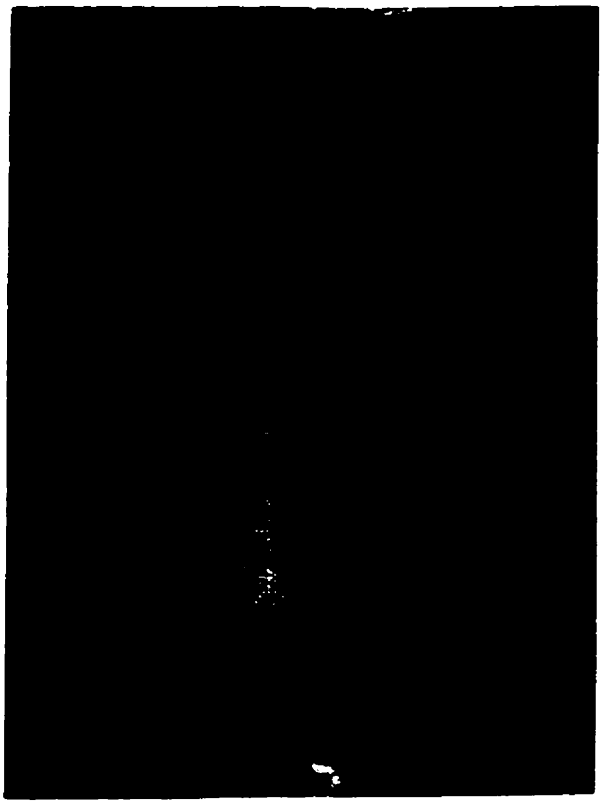

Fig. 2.7 Laura Muntz, *Mother and Child*, c. 1911.

Fig. 3.1
Advertisement, *Toronto World*,
30 April 1898.

Fig. 3.2
After Robert Walter Weir, Thomas
Phillibrown, engraver, *Sick Chamber*, c. 1860.

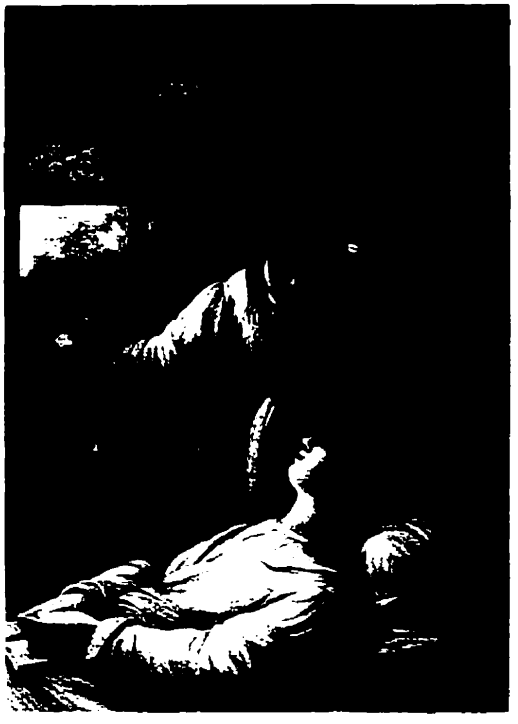

Fig. 3.3
Ford Madox Brown, *Waiting: An
English Fireside of 1854-5*, 1855.

Fig. 3.4
Postmortem photograph, *Mr.
Hogson's Child*, 1869

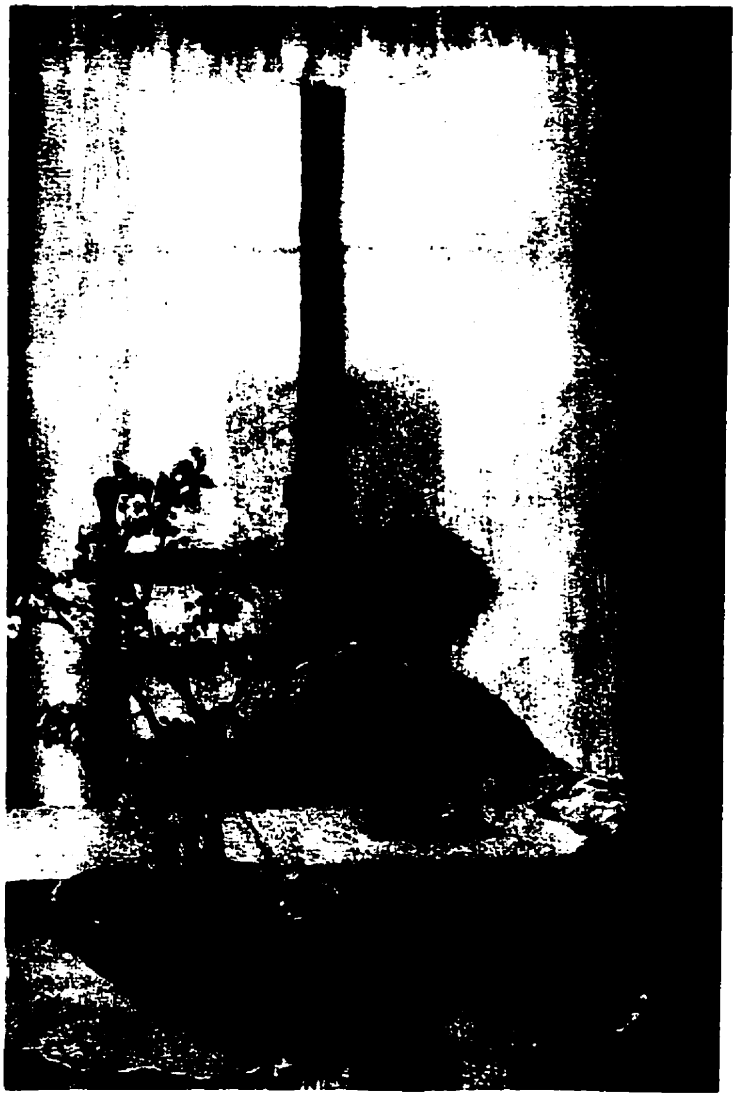

Fig. 3.5 Lillian Westcott Hale, *Edition de Luxe*, 1909.

Fig. 3.6 William Merritt Chase, *In the Studio*, c. 1880.

Fig. 3.7 James A. McNeill Whistler, *Little Rose of Lyme Regis*, 1895.

Fig. 3.8 Laura Muntz, *Young Woman Examining A Vase*, c.1902-06.

Fig. 3.9 George Fuller, *Nydia*, c. 1882.

Fig. 3.10 John La Farge, *Venus Anadyomene*, 1862.

Fig. 3.11 Wyatt Eaton, *Ariadne*, 1888.

Fig. 3.12 Abbott H. Thayer, *Angel*, c. 1889.

Fig. 3.13 Abbott H. Thayer, *Caritas*, 1893-97.