

# “Just the kind of girl who would want a chap to be a man”: Constructions of Gender in the war stories of Tryphena Duley

Sonja Boon

Volume 25, Number 1, Spring 2010

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds25\\_1art04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds25_1art04)

[See table of contents](#)

---

## Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

## ISSN

0823-1737 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

## Cite this article

Boon, S. (2010). “Just the kind of girl who would want a chap to be a man”:  
Constructions of Gender in the war stories of Tryphena Duley. *Newfoundland  
Studies*, 25(1), 73–90.

# “Just the kind of girl who would want a chap to be a man”: Constructions of Gender in the war stories of Tryphena Duley

SONJA BOON

WAR, SUGGESTS MARGARET R. HIGONNET, might be understood as “the space where women ... are not” (Higonnet, 1995, 87). Indeed, some scholars have suggested that the cultural memory of the Great War defined a masculine subject, conferring authority and authenticity upon the soldier in a process that has, until recently, largely ignored the contributions and perspectives of women. As Debra Rae Cohen has observed of postwar British mythologies of the Great War:

[The] master narrative of the war reasserted the notion of the battle front as the *only* front, both valorizing the battlefield experience and emphasizing its incommunicability ... The home front was thus implicitly deemed not worth writing about, the stresses and strains of women’s nascent citizenship a less important topic than ‘what society had lost.’ (Cohen, 85)

In his study of Newfoundland’s cultural memory of the First World War, Robert J. Harding concurs. He notes that colonial myth-making in the immediate aftermath of the war, which linked the bloodshed on the battlefield with constructions of nation and empire, mirrored British approaches: “Australia’s experience at Gallipoli was similar to that of the Newfoundlanders’ experience at Beaumont Hamel, as both dominions memorialized their bloodiest wartime engagements as events which made them into stronger nations” (Harding, 2006, 18).

In the last twenty years, scholars have expanded not only the subject of war, but also the definition of war itself. Research has demonstrated that women were actively engaged in a wide range of activities, including nursing, activism, volunta-

alism, and writing (Acton 2004; Goldman 1995; Gullace 1997; Higonnet 1987, 1995; Khan 1988; Ouditt 1994; Tylee 1988, 1990). These scholars have argued for the relevance of women's experiences, even as they have recognized the incompatibility of these experiences with the cultural memory of the Great War. Nevertheless, Susan Grayzel (1999, 2002) argues that even recent scholarship has overlooked the range of women's wartime experiences that were conditioned by culture, history and geography. This point alone makes a study of Newfoundland women's creative responses to the war relevant.

Janet Watson (2004) observes that in many respects men and women were "fighting different wars," a fact which suggests the need to rethink our starting points. She argues that we must acknowledge these differences, noting that: "how people thought about gender and class ... profoundly influenced how they imagined the experience of different kinds of war work" (6). Watson's perspective is confirmed in Jane Potter's aptly titled *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print*, which expresses the idea that women experienced war vicariously and through imaginative fiction, much of which was authored by women. These works might be best understood not as literature, but as cultural artefacts (4). As Potter observes: "Novels that exploited the Great War ... were part of the public's fantasy investment in the War ... there was a continuing demand for stories that brought order where there was chaos and allowed the reader vicariously to experience life as she would like it to be lived" (91). Such works not only comforted women at home, but also often functioned as propaganda designed to foster support and commitment to the war effort. Both Watson and Potter take for granted women's vicarious experience of war, yet they also argue for the relevance of those experiences. They ask such questions as: If war was indeed a space where women 'were not,' then how did women experience war? How did they imagine their roles? How did they respond to the call to arms? In the case of one of the stories examined here, who was "the kind of girl who would want a chap to be a man" ("Grey Socks" 8)?

I continue this line of questioning by examining the constructions of gender in two short stories penned by the middle class St. John's woman Tryphena Chancey Duley. I argue that both works insist on normative understandings of gender as essential components for wartime success. As pieces of wartime propaganda written from the perspective of the women who 'stayed behind' and experienced war as sisters, daughters, mothers and lovers, these two short stories rely on conventional middle-class understandings of gender roles and responsibilities to further the patriotic goals of the war effort. Of particular interest is Duley's engagement with "touch" as a conceptual metaphor. For her, touch is a sense located in the female body and the ideology of the feminine; it is fundamentally disrupted by war, yet restored through the regenerative power of the war itself. The stories might be understood as fictions of touch: severed, forbidden, refused and destabilized. At the same time, as patriotic propaganda, they position touch as intrinsic to the affirmation of the war and assert the commitment of the people of Newfoundland to the needs of

the Empire, thus re-inscribing the values of duty, constancy, courage and endurance during an era of profound social and cultural upheaval.

Tryphena Chancey Duley, or Phenie, as she was called, was born in Carbonear in 1869. At the age of twenty she married the Water Street jeweller, Thomas J. Duley, and settled into middle class life in St. John's. Living on Rennie's Mill Road, her family grew to include five children: three sons and two daughters, one of whom later became the celebrated Newfoundland novelist, Margaret Duley. There is no doubt that Mrs. Duley felt her war responsibilities keenly. She watched two of her three sons go to war; the eldest, Cyril Chancey Duley, returned a decorated war hero, while her youngest son Lionel was killed in action at the age of twenty on 29 September 1918, less than two months before the Armistice was signed. It is, perhaps, from her experiences as a 'mother of men' that she drew some of the inspiration for her two stories.

The war not only affected young men; women were deeply committed to the war effort from its beginning. One women-led initiative was the Patriotic Association of the Women of Newfoundland which was founded in St. John's on 31 August 1914 and quickly drafted volunteers into a wide range of activities. The W.P.A., as it came to be known, grew out of a strong history of women-organized charitable organizations in Newfoundland such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union of the late nineteenth century (Cullum 1995; Warren 1998, 2005). The W.P.A. undertook a wide range of activities, from the production of "comforts" for the soldiers, to Red Cross bandages, family visits and a variety of fundraising initiatives. These initiatives were designed to support the Newfoundland war effort, certainly, but were also undertaken in support of families in war-torn European countries (Bishop-Stirling and Webb 106). Each of these acts was consistent with a distinctly feminine form of patriotism. Reports of the W.P.A.'s activities outlined the nature, extent and successes of their various endeavours and included statistical tables detailing their work. By the end of 1916, for example, members of the W.P.A. had produced some 62,685 pairs of socks, 8984 shirts, 6080 pairs of cuffs, 2012 handkerchiefs, and 1731 nightshirts (W.P.A. 7). Other W.P.A. publications celebrated the work of particularly industrious volunteers, making special mention of groups such as the "most patriotic" children at Springdale Street School, who "knit for the soldiers during recess, and ... have made 600 pairs of socks," and acknowledging the commitment of women such as Mrs. Alfred Harvey who "just completed her 345th pair of socks; we wonder if anyone in Newfoundland has done as many?" (*Distaff* 1917 19). Women's public performances of patriotism not only encouraged more women to participate, but may have also provided moral support to the soldiers, and in a broader sense, promoted patriotism among the population as a whole. Duley served on the W.P.A.'s Finance Committee, was convener of the Alterations Committee and, as a member of the Work Directors' Committee, supervised volunteer efforts on Tuesdays and Thursdays (W.P.A. 3).

The W.P.A. also offered women an outlet to express their patriotic fervour through writing. Duley's short story "Mothers of Men," for example, appeared in *The Distaff*, a journal published under the auspices of the Red Cross Branch of the W.P.A. The publication included a variety of material, including patriotic notes, information on nurses stationed abroad, theatre reviews, travel guides, reports on women's education, and various social and cultural commentaries. *The Distaff* also showcased the creative writing of Newfoundland women, including poetry and reflections by women such as Phebe Florence Miller, Marie E. Way and Rose M. Greene. At once thoughtful, reflective, sentimental and patriotic, these works expressed women's social roles, thoughts, ideas and experiences as they grappled with the sorrowful realities of war while avowing their support of the war effort. Way's "Glorious Khaki," printed in the second issue, for example, celebrates God, nation, empire and normative masculinity, asserting the regenerative power of the war through the bloodshed of the soldier (10). Miller's "The Knitting Marianna" (1916), drew on Tennyson's "Marianna," using the trope of knitting to organize the poem. Here, knitting is conceived as an activity that allows widows to enter into the patriotic sphere of the war through the production of comforts, but also as a quiet, intimate, repetitive activity that enables reflection on the cruel reality of the orphaned child and lonely widow:

And so at morn, and noon, and night,  
     Her needles joined the battle-song;  
 They clicked the glory of the right,  
     While comforts flourished, gray and long,  
 Her idle tears away she flicked —  
     They only hindered needlecraft;  
     She smiled back when her baby laughed,  
 Grew wistful when he crowed and kicked.

She only said — "Ah heart so weary,  
     The lonely years ahead!  
 But living men are cold and dreary,  
     And one must knit," she said. (10)

Through knitting, which L. Lynda Harling Stalker (2006) suggests the women of Newfoundland understood as "intrinsic to their concept of what it is to be a woman, a mother, and a wife in rural Newfoundland" (215), Miller evokes the nurturing care of the widow and mother whose selfless actions undertaken in the face of profound sorrow and loss, provide demonstrable proof of her patriotic commitment to the war effort.

Duley's short story "A Pair of Grey Socks" was published 1916. The heady early days of the war, when young men of the island eagerly signed up to join the

Newfoundland Regiment, had passed; much needed to be done to bolster continued recruitment. Twelve pages long, and bound together with a short piece by her daughter, Margaret, "A Pair of Grey Socks" introduces the idyllic fictional outpost of Sweetapple Cove, home to Mary Within, a young woman of moral virtue. Mary never rebels, but conforms to the path laid out for her. Her allegiance is first and foremost to the happiness of her family; she is a dutiful daughter, a loving sister and an active member of her community. Mary quietly accepts the reality of war; she supports her brother and his friends by knitting socks to be sent to the soldiers at Gallipoli. In a moment of weakness, Mary includes a photograph and poem with one of her newly knitted pairs of socks — a large pair, for "she didn't like small men" (5) — convincing herself that nobody will ever find out. The socks find their way to the feet of an Irish soldier, who carries her photo near his heart and, after the war, comes to Newfoundland to claim his bride. The adventure and glory of war — journeys willingly embarked upon by Mary's brother and his friends — are vindicated by the happy ending.

The second story, "Mothers of Men," is far more melancholy. It appeared in 1917, after the devastating losses during the Battle of the Somme. Just four pages in length, and attributed to "the Author of 'A Pair of Grey Socks'" (11), this story examines what David R. Facey-Crowther (2003) has identified as the Newfoundland soldier's most important intimate relationship, the one he shared with his mother. Unlike the heterosexual romance plot that structures "A Pair of Grey Socks," "Mothers of Men" is a story of loss and redemption, in which a mother, Anna Carleton, struggles to reconcile her worries, concerns, hopes and dreams with what it means to be a mother of men in the face of a war that claims the lives of both of her sons. Devastated by grief and sorrow, and questioning the "price of manhood" (12), she receives a visit from a young man who takes her to the "City of Perfect Things" (13), a space of boundless warmth, vitality, joy and peace. There she is given a final opportunity to see her sons again. No longer covered in the blood of war, they are rejuvenated and energized in a heavenly world. The story is clearly designed to assuage women's unrequited maternal desires — those childless mothers whose arms would never again touch the warm, youthful bodies of their sons — and to reflect on the realities of war, even as it simultaneously asserts the rightness of the effort.

Within the context of women's war literature, Duley's two short works are conventional, presenting young men eager to embrace the adventure of war and women quietly and dutifully knitting for their men folk. Like the works analysed by Jane Potter, "A Pair of Grey Socks" and "Mothers of Men" might be considered propaganda pieces designed to increase support for the war effort through an affirmation of 'traditional' family values and normative gender conventions. As Lois Bibbings (2003) observes, such works offered tales of adventure and heroism, inculcating the young recruit with the values of honour, duty and nation in a process which redefined manhood "in terms of soldiering" (338). For the men of the newly

formed Newfoundland Regiment, the Great War could have been seen as a natural extension of their adventures as fishermen and sealers: the chance to venture to into the unknown, to fend for themselves, to take on the natural elements and to return victorious. As Bibbings points out, the adventure of war promised soldiers opportunities to “*become* (heroic) men” (339), a process of Darwinist ‘remasculinization’ that would also, simultaneously, strengthen and enrich the state (348). Wartime masculinity, linked directly to notions of nation and empire, was synonymous with such characteristics as heterosexuality, virility, strength, authority, adventure and pride, but also linked to broader concepts of citizenship and imperial expansion (Grant 830). Duley’s soldiers exemplify these qualities. Mary Within’s brother, Jack, encouraged by the stories shared by his British grandfather and the enthusiasm of his friends, looks forward to the masculine adventure of war: “His eyes glowed and his head went up. Oh, he was glad to be a man.” (“Grey Socks” 2). Anna Carleton’s sons, too, revel in the patriotic promise of a Newfoundland regiment:

Eyes brightened, lips moved with a continuous stream of talk, none waiting for his comrade to cease, each declaring he would go, and go quickly. Oh! they hoped it would not be over before they got into the thick of it. These were glorious times to be living in! (“Mothers” 12)

Such works also propagated normative understandings of femininity. Associated with the domestic sphere of home and family, conventional femininity was a relational identity that celebrated softness, docility, duty and virtue. In wartime propaganda, women were supportive partners, loving mothers and daughters, and affectionate sisters whose main role was not to make decisions; rather, they supported their men in the patriotic decisions they made (Ouditt 89-130). As Anna Carleton’s mother explains to her: “My child, it is every woman’s lot to suffer for men’s bravery. We must help, not hinder; and, my darling, you would not have them do other than they are doing, would you?” (12). Such a positioning undoubtedly drew on the teachings of the church and the traditions of English common law, which propagated a prescriptive — if idealistic and ultimately unrealistic — view of women as docile, fragile and submissive beings whose legal standing was linked directly to that of their husbands and fathers and whose happiness revolved around their nurturing commitments to home and family (Cadigan 1995; Cullum 1995; Forestell 1995; Keough 2008).

Such conventions likely held less sway in outports, the setting of these stories, than they did in the middle class St John’s neighbourhood in which Duley lived. Marilyn Porter challenges assumptions about the direct relationship between normative gender conventions and lived experience, arguing that a traditional sexual division of labour governed outport social organisation but that rural women were actively involved in all aspects of life (Porter, 1995). In addition to this, Linda

Cullum (1995) asserts that women maintained close networks with one another, building formal and informal communities of support that, in some cases, existed outside normative gender ideologies. Indeed, given the economic hardship experienced by many outport families, Porter argues that a superficial critique of the sexual division of labour misses the point:

The ideology of male dominance is strong in Newfoundland culture. A combination of the male culture of fishing, a strong Church presence and a kinship system which separates women from their own community, seems to ensure an ideological domination which reflects the male control of the technical means of production ... Ideological domination [however], did not seem to reflect the much more complex economic reality ... both sexes accepted the sexual division of labour; both men and women worked unrelentingly hard and everybody was poor. (*Place and Persistence* 91-92)

Willeen Keough has argued convincingly that “middle class ideology and Catholic church discourse ... made few incursions in plebeian culture because it clashed with the reality of women’s lives” (Keough 2008, 367). These scholars suggest that we carefully consider the slippages between the ideological stances propagated by Church and state, and the real living conditions and life experiences of the women of the outport communities.

The question, then, is how this tangled relationship between the urban and middle class ideologies and the lived experience of women in different social contexts played itself out, and what this means for our understanding of the stories penned by Tryphena Duley. According to Sean Cadigan (2009), the administration of the war “was largely an effort of the St. John’s elite” (187). Given the fact that these works emerged from social institutions founded and propagated by members of the elite, such as Duley, it seems likely that the social and cultural values of the stories were those of the urban middle- and upper-class elite. While the fiction evokes outport life, it was governed by the conventions of elite St. John’s society; and, as such, propagated class-based understandings of gender behaviours and identities. Those in the middle and upper classes of St. John’s envisioned women not as autonomous subjects, but in dependent roles defined by their relationships to male family members (Cadigan 1995; Cullum et al 1993). At an ideological level, male authority over the family was absolute. Church ideology, disseminated from the pulpit and through a range of educational initiatives designed expressly for girls and young women, demanded allegiance to narrow gender roles and inculcated females into the conventions of Christian feminine virtue. Mothers were expected to take leadership roles in the moral development and direction of their families (Martin 2006; Cullum et al 1993). Conservative voices in the percolating debate around woman suffrage, which first emerged in the 1890s and remained a topic of public discussion into the war years (Duley, “Radius” 16), emphasized women’s natural commitment to their homes and families (Kealey 1993). Even many sup-



porters of woman suffrage continued to assert women's 'natural' roles as mothers and wives (Kealey 1993). Indeed, that a 1913 speech by Myra Campbell — an active member of a number of voluntary organizations, including the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Society and the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire — was suppressed, only to be published, with a precautionary note, in 1927 (Duley, "Radius" 23-25), is suggestive of the power of conservative ideologies of gender during this period. Such, then, is the environment in which Duley's works were conceived and, significantly, for which they were written. It is no surprise to discover that Duley's stories reflect the social and cultural values of middle-class St. John's life. In particular, these stories emphasize the social divisions between men and women and, through the metaphor of touch, stress women's roles as guardians and nurturers of the home, heart and family.

We must recognize the cultural specificity of Newfoundland, and the unique historical moment in which these works were written. This is particularly relevant given their author's active involvement with the W.P.A., a key organisation of Newfoundland women's war efforts on the home front. Much scholarship exists on the wartime women writers of the Empire and the United States (Bassett 1985; Buck 2005; Coates 1996, 2001; Cohen 2002; Goldman 1995; Sharkey 2007; Smith 2003; Tector 2003). These scholars have demonstrated the diversity of women's responses, exposing a broad range of reactions which were shaped by culture, class and geography. Donna Coates (2001), for example, has discovered widely divergent responses among women writers from Australia, New Zealand and Canada, results which should remind us that Newfoundland women's written responses to war might differ from those of Canadian women. As James K. Hiller points out, by 1914 Newfoundland "had developed a distinct culture and identity" (79). Facey-Crowther (2003) concurs, observing that the correspondence of Newfoundland soldiers reveals a strong sense of national identity as Newfoundlanders. This is certainly evident in Duley's stories, which emphasize the patriotic value of the Newfoundland regiment: "Boys grouped themselves together ... and discussed eagerly the possibility of forming a Regiment from their own Island" ("Mothers" 12). As such, an understanding of the historical, political and cultural specificity of Newfoundland on the eve of the Great War is integral to this analysis. The war might be evocatively imagined as a coming of age, a trial in which the colony proved its mettle to Britain and the other nations of the Empire through the courage — and deaths — of its young men. As Patrick O'Flaherty has observed, the war was a rite of passage. It was a test of heroic masculinity designed to ascertain whether Newfoundland had what it took to be a full member of the British Empire, to know whether the colony was able to take up its rightful position on the world stage (278-79). In this, its efforts appear to have been at least temporarily recognized. As Terry Bishop-Stirling and Jeff A. Webb put it: "Newfoundland seemed to have earned a place of respect among larger nations" (109).

Newfoundland's response to the Empire's call to arms was swift. The Newfoundland Patriotic Association was founded in August 1914, just a few short weeks after Britain declared war. By year's end, the tiny colony had sent 734 men to war and was training a second contingent (O'Flaherty 271). These men formed the nucleus of the Newfoundland Regiment, the first armed forces to fight as Newfoundlanders in the name of the British Empire, and for its glory and honour. During the course of the war, Newfoundland sent over 12,000 of its young men to the battlefields of Europe. Ultimately, the war took a devastating toll on an entire generation of Newfoundland men. Sixty soldiers died in the first three months of 1915 (O'Flaherty 273), a number which paled in comparison to the 685 dead and wounded as a result of the fatal battle of the Somme at Beaumont-Hamel on 1 July 1916 (Bishop- Stirling and Webb 107). All told, some 25% of the Newfoundland soldiers sent to the battlefield never returned, while slightly less than 10% of the naval reservists died. The losses affected virtually every family on the island. But while the price was high, O'Flaherty points out that mixed in with grief was a deep and defiant pride in the knowledge that the young men of Newfoundland had made the ultimate sacrifice: "The men had given their lives for what was thought to be a great common cause, one far removed from the entrenched sectarian infighting of civilian life in Newfoundland" (O'Flaherty, 2005, 278). Wartime propaganda presented these men as heroes whose deaths served the dual ideals of nation and empire. In the words of Harding: "Dying for their country on 1 July 1916 ... enabled Newfoundland soldiers to achieve immortality" (11). This, too, was the approach taken by Duley, for whom true manhood could be proven through the dedication, courage, honour and duty of Newfoundland's sons.

Duley's stories follow the pattern displayed in the aforementioned poetry of Way and Miller. They examine war from the perspectives of sisters, daughters, mothers and lovers. They stress women's isolation from wartime decision-making and appear to emphasize the power of femininity in the furtherance of the war effort. Though both protagonists briefly step outside the boundaries of normative feminine behaviour — Mary, by putting a photo in a sock, and Anna, by questioning the price of masculinity — each tale affirms established gender roles. In the process they reassert the rightness of the war itself. In this sense, both are conventional works that, as Jane Potter has observed, "by providing encouragement in the face of loss and uncertainty, were, in effect, vehicles for the dissemination of patriotic ideals and models of appropriate wartime behavior" (91).

It seems likely that such stories were designed not only for the women on the home front, but also for the men who had not yet enlisted. Nicolette F. Gullace (1997) points out that the British propaganda machine actively deployed normative concepts of gender to assert the war cause. Women were not only objects to defend, they were also prizes to be won, desires to be realized, should the men fulfil their noble cause (183). In "A Pair of Grey Socks," the war hero, Irish Bob, gains the love and ministrations of Mary Within, the virtuous heroine of the home front. Through

her many pairs of skilfully knitted grey socks, Mary has already proven her dedication to the care and comfort of the soldiers and enlisted men. Significantly, however, Duley insists that Irish Bob must first *earn* Mary's love through his courage and bravery. As he looks at Mary's photo, Irish Bob "fancied that she would be just the kind of girl who would want a chap to be a man" ("Grey Socks" 8). Normative masculinity, with its links to strength, loyalty and Empire, was as prized as conventional femininity, with its emphasis on constancy, patience and moral virtue. Both masculine and feminine social roles were seen as integral to the success of the war effort; neither took precedence.

Another intriguing aspect of the two stories is Duley's engagement with the idea of touch. Santanu Das (2005) has remarked that touch might be seen as an organizing metaphor for the battlefield experience. He has pointed to the power of touch in war narratives, from the ministrations of nurses, to the care and camaraderie of soldiers in the trenches and the physical experience of the slime and muck of WWI trench warfare. Touch, he argues, is not only "fundamental to our ideas of self" (21), but is also intrinsic to understanding the ways that men and women experienced the visceral brutality of the war. While Das has written about battlefield experiences, I suggest that something similar is at play in the fictional works of Tryphena Duley. In Duley's stories, touch can be seen as an organizing metaphor, a way of defining and shaping the parameters of individual existence, and of making sense out of what was essentially a chaotic and uncertain time. Duley uses the metaphor of touch in three ways. She uses it to delineate gender by demonstrating the social and cultural roles of women. She then develops this idea further, using the idea of touch to acknowledge the powerful rupture caused by the war. In a real sense, war severed touch. Finally, touch brings closure to both of her stories, suggesting that the rightness of war can only be asserted through the restoration of touch.

Both stories define touch as existing within the sphere of the feminine. For Duley, the tactile world of touch is the sensory world of women. It is women who wring their hands, women whose maternal arms reach for the children whose presence is lost to them, women whose half parted lips promise sensuous pleasures, and women whose tear-streaked cheeks break down the spaces between individuals. Women's war experiences, governed by what is seen as naturalized feminine emotion, are imprinted on their bodies: arms, eyes, hearts, mouths that physically manifest their fears, joys and hopes. As the protagonist of "Mothers of Men," Anna Carleton "gathered [her son] up in her arms, kissing him passionately." Tightening her arms "around the boy who cuddled sleepily against her breast," Anna feels pride of possession in her sons' bright futures, "her heart [thrilling] with ... wonder" (11). In "A Pair of Grey Socks," meanwhile, touch emerges most evocatively in the form of the knitting fingers that manifest the love and care of the women for the unknown soldiers of the Newfoundland Regiment. But touch is also seductive: while Mary Within's younger brother, still too young to sign up, dreams hopefully about the adventure of war, Mary "fingers the silk blouse length [her older brother]

had sent and wished she could see the glorious shops” (4). The brutality of war is remote; as readers, we are entreated to experience the sensuality of silk fabric, and with it, the riches and wealth of the motherland. In contrast, the masculine world of the soldier (to be) is found within the camaraderie of men: from the memories of Jack Within’s British-born grandfather, to the enthusiasm of the war-bound young men, to the stoic gravity of the older men of Sweetapple Cove. The men’s decision to go to war is one from which female family members are entirely excluded and to which they must quietly submit.

Touch is evident in the form of quivering lips, shadowed faces, and tears (“Socks” 2-4), all of which herald the disruptive nature of war and its separation of men from women, sons from mothers, husbands from wives. The hands that longingly stroked a bolt of silk, for example, can also be “clasped together convulsively” (“Socks” 1), thus evoking the fear and worry of war. For Anna Carleton, touch emerges in the form of tears and sweat as she struggles to work through her fears and to deal with the grief of sending her children to war. Hers is a body physically marked by emotions: the deaths of her sons easily visible to the observer:

It required only one glance at her to see that a very tempest of grief had swept over her, leaving her physically frail, and painting the deep shadows under the closed eyes. True, the storm had passed and resignation reigned, but the lips of the sweet mouth still quivered and the handkerchief which she claspe[d] in her hands was wet with recent tears. (“Mothers” 12)

In Duley’s fiction, severed touch is associated with grief, loss, loneliness and isolation. It is associated with the brutality of a war in which a visit from the local priest brings fear, and tear-streaked cheeks are an all too frequent reminder of the finality of death.

In each of these cases, touch provides narratives of rupture, loss and mourning. Such an approach would appear to undermine the propaganda value of these works, for if touch resides in the female body and in the feminine experience, and is disrupted, troubled and destabilized by the advent of war, then how can Duley make her patriotic points? If her work is indeed patriotic propaganda, and it appears to be intended as such, then it becomes necessary for her to reconcile the world of touch — the sphere of normative femininity — with the reality of disrupted touch, the world of war and battle that separates loved ones from one another. Is it possible to enact such a reconciliation? Is it possible to imagine touch in a world that seems impervious to it? Duley suggests that it is, and offers the possibility not only for restored touch, but also, for a reaffirmation — through the recuperation of touch — of the patriotic imperative.

To address this, I focus directly on the transgressive femininity in the stories. Heroines Mary Within and Anna Carleton both experience moments of moral weakness. Interestingly, it is these disruptive moments that propel the narratives

forward. Mary's impetuous decision to include a photograph and poem in a sock — a minor act of feminine impropriety that nevertheless causes her to blush — is the act that allows the romance to unfold. Anna's questioning of the war and its toll, a direct challenge to the patriotic constancy required of the dutiful wife and mother, is what gives her access to the City of Perfect Things and allows her to see her sons one last time. These acts enable a restoration of touch, a reassertion that is not manifest through the female body, but rather mediated by external forces.

Mary's socks end up on the feet of a cheerful young Irish soldier named Bob, a close friend of Mary's brother Jack ("Socks" 6-8). In this instance, touch is mediated through the grey sock. The material entity that manifests the care and love of the women of Newfoundland enables touch in numerous ways. The sock literally brings individuals together, from the bargain struck between Irish Bob and Jack, to the relationships that developed between patriotic Newfoundland women of disparate social classes who worked together in the production of comforts ("Socks" 15). But the sock also, significantly, acts as a conduit for the romance. It is the sock that enables Mary and Bob to 'touch'; for Bob to carry Mary close to his heart (in the form of the photograph); to dream about her "half-parted lips" (8); and finally, for him, to travel to Newfoundland as a wounded war hero to claim the love — and the touch — that sustained him during periods of profound darkness, misery and pain (10-11). While touch has been disrupted, the happy ending — made possible by Mary's transgressive femininity — suggests the potent restorative power of recovered touch, and reaffirms the importance of the war to the regeneration of society and the strengthening of the empire. The story's epilogue showcases Mary, Irish Bob and their two children grouped around the now tattered sock. The happy family can be seen as a metaphor for the renewed and rejuvenated Empire, thus confirming and extending the patriotic values that underpin the work as a whole.

"Mothers of Men" is a more challenging case. In this story, the severing of touch comes in the form of two letters from the War Office informing Anna Carleton of the deaths of her sons in battle. Death, of course, is the ultimate divider. How then, might touch be recovered? Is it at all possible to insist on the necessity — the rightness — of the war in the face of such profound grief and loss? The answer to these questions, I believe, lies in the conditions surrounding the story's publication and in the epigraph that introduces the work. "Mothers of Men" appeared in the 1917 edition of *The Distant*; its publication coincided with the celebration of Easter. During Easter, death becomes life; sin gives way to redemption. That Easter must have been poignant for Newfoundlanders, recovering as they were from the losses of so many young soldiers the previous year. But Easter was also a powerful and strategic propaganda tool, an opportunity for church and political leaders to link the deaths of its soldiers with Christian notions of duty and sacrifice. As Sean Cadigan observes:

the commemorations of loss took on messianic overtones of sacrifice, resurrection, and redemption ... Newfoundlanders had developed a new sense of identity as their

country seemed to have been baptized in blood at Beaumont Hamel. (*Newfoundland* 188)

Such, too, was the approach of the anonymous editor of *The Distaff*: “Who can think of Easter without gratitude, even tho’ the heart is too heavy for rejoicing?” she asks:

The war cloud hangs low: we have borne our grief and loss, walked in the shadow, and know what it is to long for the “touch of the vanished hand and the sound of the voice that is still,” yet as the mist lifts before the rising sun, so our hearts respond to the pledge of Easter. Love teaches again that the soul is immortal and that the rainbow evermore gleams through the rain. Our hearts go out to those who mourn for the brave lads who have given their lives so nobly for the great cause, nevertheless, Easter comes to every home with hope, inspiration, and faith. It comes with a promise of restoration and a hand clasp of comfort to the household of mourning; it gives hope for our reunion beyond the veil. (1)

“Mothers of Men” takes up this rallying cry. Duley’s story opens with the epigraph, “Heaven shall make perfect, our imperfect life.” This is a paraphrase of I Corinthians 13:10, which entreats Christians to show unconditional love, and argues that love is the foundation for eternal life. In the story, Duley turns to Christianity and the concept of metaphysical touch. The intervention of the divine, in the form of a youthful angelic messenger who takes her to the City of Perfect Things, enables the protagonist to put her demons to rest, secure in the promise of redemption and eternal life offered to her by the noble sacrifices of her sons. By engaging the idea of metaphysical touch, Duley followed a popular path. Claire M. Tylee (1988) points out that: “wartime propaganda aimed at the civilian population idealised soldiers as Christian heroes redeeming the corruption of their society by the noble sacrifice of their lives ... Soldiers were presented as modern Christs, displaying ‘Greater Love’ by pouring out ‘the red sweet wine of youth’” (201). Indeed, Duley uses her story to evoke the Passion story and to offer the possibility of redemption through crucifixion.

If Anna Carleton is to take up her role as a mother of men, she must first renounce her own sin. As a mother, Anna has sought to possess and control her two sons, to shape them to *her* desires rather than releasing them to their divine callings as men. As Duley writes:

In the years that followed, often [Anna] was troubled that the clay which she was striving to mould into such perfect shape should so often prove inflexible. Physically her second son was not the robust boy of her dreams ... and sometimes a fear clutched her heart that he would never be a man and would never reach the world. A strange joy, which she hoped was not wicked, possessed her that he was wholly her own, was so dependent on her. (“Mothers” 11)

Anna's moral weaknesses, experienced as the physical severing of touch and the empty arms of the loving mother, are presented as earthly weaknesses that can only be redeemed through divine intervention. These sins of maternal weakness, selfishness and possession, all of which are antithetical to the docility, benevolence and constancy of the maternal ideal, are subsequently washed away by the metaphysical touch in the form of the blood shed by her sons. When Carleton is allowed a glimpse of eternity — in the form of the City of Perfect Things, a heavenly space of peace, tranquility, happiness and hard work — she is able to acknowledge her weaknesses and claim the redemption offered by the deaths of her sons. Through this process, Anna is absolved and becomes worthy of being a 'mother of men.' To be a 'mother of men' is to accept the impossibility of touch; to recognize, as Das has observed, that touch "dies with the person" (27), but at the same time, to pledge allegiance to the promise of eternal life, and from there, to the regenerative power of war. As the messenger explains:

In the world called Earth a terrible war rages. Strong nations have forgotten God. [The young men in the City of Perfect Things] are they who have given their lives to right great wrongs and who have died for others. Our King has decreed that they come to us to continue the lives so well begun. ("Mothers" 13)

Touch is restored through a faith that encompasses not only the foundational tenets of Christianity, but also the ideas of duty, nation and empire. Touch is recovered and the war reaffirmed.

These two short stories merit attention as cultural artefacts. Their tone, content and style reveal much about how women imagined the war and how they understood their position and role in it. As such, the stories offer glimpses into gendered relationships during wartime. They affirm Newfoundland women's commitment to the war effort and to broader ideals of patriotism, Empire and religious belief, not only through their voluntary work in the W.P.A., but also through their supportive roles as wives, mothers, and daughters. Furthermore, they demonstrate a close allegiance to normative gender roles and a belief in the rightness of such socially and culturally sanctioned ideologies to the success of the war effort. Duley uses the metaphor of touch to link these ideas together. Touch is the sensory quality that grounds the complex web of gender relations. Just as women's thrilling hearts, quivering lips, clasped hands, tear-streaked cheeks and ever knitting fingers confirm their adherence to conventional understandings of femininity, so too do these behaviours enable their brothers, lovers and fathers to become men: strong, brave, honourable soldiers whose actions on the battlefield serve not only to affirm the rightness of war and Newfoundland's commitment to the Empire, but also to cement the nation's position on the world stage.

## Acknowledgments

I thank the three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful and extremely helpful commentary and suggestions. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the *Eighteenth Atlantic Canada Studies Conference*, in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in May 2009.

## Works Cited

- Acton, Carol. "Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women's War Writing." *College Literature* 31.2 (2004), 53-79.
- Bassett, Jan. "'Preserving the White Race': Some Australian Women's Literary Responses to the Great War." *Australian Literary Studies* 12.2 (1985), 223-233.
- Bibbings, Lois. "Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War." *Social & Legal Studies* 12.3 (2003), 335-58.
- Bishop-Stirling, Terry and Jeff A. Webb. "The Twentieth Century." *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador*. Ed. Newfoundland Historical Society. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's: Boulder Publications, 2008, 103-140.
- Buck, Claire. "British Women's Writing of the Great War." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent B. Sherry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 85-112.
- Cadigan, Sean. "Whipping Them into Shape: State Refinement of Patriarchy among Conception Bay Fishing Families, 1787-1825." *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage*. Eds. Carmelita McGrath, Marilyn Porter and Barbara Neis. St. John's: Killick Press, 1995, 48-59.
- Cadigan, Sean. *Newfoundland: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
- Coates, Donna. "Myrmidons to Insubordinates: Australian, New Zealand and Canadian Women's Fictional Responses to the Great War." *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory*. Eds. Patrick J. Quinn and Steven Trout. Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001, 113-42.
- Cohen, Debra Rae. *Remapping the Home Front: Locating Citizenship in British Women's Great War Fiction*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002.
- Cooper, Helen M. et al, eds. *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender, and Literary Representation*. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Cullum, Linda, Maeve Baird, and Cynthia Penney. "A Woman's Lot: Women and Law in Newfoundland from Early Settlement to the Twentieth Century." *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Ed. Linda Kealey. St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1993, 66-162.
- Cullum, Linda. "'A Woman's Place': The Work of Two Women's Voluntary Organizations in Newfoundland, 1934-1941." *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage*. Eds. Carmelita McGrath, Marilyn Porter and Barbara Neis. St. John's: Killick Press, 1995, 93-108.
- Das, Santanu. *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.



- Dudink, Stefan, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, eds. *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004.
- Duley, Margot Iris. *Where Once our Mothers Stood We Stand : Women's Suffrage in Newfoundland, 1890-1925*. Charlottetown: Gynergy, 1993.
- Duley, Margot Iris. "'The Radius of Her Influence for Good': The Rise and Triumph of the Women's Suffrage Movement in Newfoundland, 1909-1925." *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Ed. Linda Kealey. St. John's: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1993, 14-65.
- Duley, Tryphena Chancey. "Mothers of Men." *The Distaff*. Ed. Mabel W. LeMessurier. St. John's: The Royal Gazette, 1917, 11-13.
- Duley, Tryphena Chancey. *A Pair of Grey Socks*. St. John's, 1916.
- Facey-Crowther, David R. "Home Is Where the Heart Is: The Correspondence of Newfoundland Soldiers in the Great War." *Aspects: A Publication of the Newfoundland Historical Society* 38.2 (2003), 32-39.
- Forestell, Nancy. "Times Were Hard: The Pattern of Women's Paid Labour in St. John's between the Two World Wars." *Their Lives and Times: Women of Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage*. Eds. Carmelita McGrath, Marilyn Porter and Barbara Neis. St. John's: Killick Press, 1995, 76-92.
- Goldman, Dorothy with Jane Gledhill and Judith Hathaway. *Women Writers and the Great War*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- Goldman, Dorothy, ed. *Women and World War I: The Written Response*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Grant, Julia. "A 'Real Boy' And Not a Sissy: Gender, Childhood, and Masculinity, 1890-1940." *Journal of Social History* (2004), 829-85.
- Grayzel, Susan R. *Women and the First World War*. New York and London: Longman, 2002.
- Grayzel, Susan R. *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Greztic, Brenda. "Between Life and Death: Fisherwomen in Newfoundland and Labrador." *Weather's Edge: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Eds. Marilyn Porter, Linda Cullum and Carmelita McGrath. St. John's: Killick Press, 2006, 58-69.
- Gullace, Nicoletta F. "White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War." *Journal of British Studies* 36.2 (1997), 178-206.
- Harding, Robert J. "Glorious Tragedy: Newfoundland's Cultural Memory of the Attack at Beaumont Hamel, 1916-1925." *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* 21.1 (2006), 3-40.
- Harling Stalker, L. Lynda. "She Seeketh Wool: Newfoundland Women's Use of Handknitting." *Weather's Edge: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Eds. Marilyn Porter, Linda Cullum and Carmelita McGrath. St. John's: Killick Press, 2006, 209-218.
- Higonnet, Margaret R. et al, eds. *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987.
- Higonnet, Margaret R. "Another Record: A Different War." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 23.3-4 (1995), 85-96.

- Hiller, James K. "The Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914." *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador*. Ed. Newfoundland Historical Society. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's: Boulder Publications, 2008, 77-102.
- Kealey, Linda, ed. *Pursuing Equality: Historical Perspectives on Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1993.
- Keough, Willeen. *The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750-1860*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.
- Keough, Willeen. "The 'Old Hag' Revisits St. Brigid: Irish-Newfoundland Women and Spirituality on the Southern Avalon." *Weather's Edge: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Eds. Marilyn Porter, Linda Cullum and Carmelita McGrath. St. John's: Killick Press, 2006, 11-22.
- Khan, Nosheen. *Women's Poetry of the First World War*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988.
- LeMessurier, Mabel, ed. *The Distaff*. St. John's: The Royal Gazette, 1916-1917.
- Longenbach, James. "The Women and Men of 1914." *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation*. Ed. Helen M. Cooper et al. Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989, 96-123.
- Martin, Melanie. "Sisters, Students, Teachers: A History of the Contributions of the Presentation Congregation in Newfoundland." *Weather's Edge: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Eds. Marilyn Porter, Linda Cullum and Carmelita McGrath. St. John's: Killick Press, 2006, 23-32.
- McGrath, Carmelita, Marilyn Porter, and Barbara Neis, eds. *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage*. St. John's: Killick Press, 1995.
- Miller, Phebe Florence. "The Knitting Marianna." *The Distaff*. Ed. Mabel W. LeMessurier. St. John's: The Royal Gazette, 1916, 10.
- Newfoundland Historical Society, ed. *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador*. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's: Boulder Publications, 2008.
- O'Flaherty, Patrick. *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843-1933*. St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2005.
- Ouditt, Sharon. *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Patriotic Association of the Women of Newfoundland. *Patriotic Association of the Women of Newfoundland Statement*. St. John's, 1917.
- Porter, Marilyn. "'A Tangly Bunch': The Political Culture of Outport Women in Newfoundland." *Through a Mirror Dimly: Essays on Newfoundland Society and Culture*. Ed. Maura Hanrahan. St. John's: Breakwater, 1993, 95-118.
- Porter, Marilyn. "'She Was Skipper of the Shore Crew': Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland." *Their Lives and Times: Women in Newfoundland and Labrador: A Collage*. Eds. Carmelita McGrath, Marilyn Porter and Barbara Neis. St. John's: Killick Press, 1995, 33-47.
- Porter, Marilyn. *Place and Persistence in the Lives of Newfoundland Women*. Aldershot: Avebury, 1993.
- Potter, Jane. *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
- Roper, Michael. "Maternal Relations: Moral Manliness and Emotional Survival in Letters Home During the First World War." *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering*

- Modern History*. Eds. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004, 295-315.
- Sharkey, Michael. "‘But Who Considers Women Day by Day?’: Australian Women Poets and World War I." *Australian Literary Studies*. 23.1 (2007), 63-78.
- Smith, Angela K. "The Pankhursts and the War: Suffrage Magazines and First World War Propaganda." *Women's History Review*. 12.1 (2003), 103-118.
- Tector, Amy. "A Righteous War?: L.M. Montgomery's Depiction of the First World War in *Rilla of Ingleside*." *Canadian Literature*. 179 (2003), 72-86.
- Tosh, John. "Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender." *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*. Eds. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004. 41-58.
- Tylee, Claire M. "'Maleness Run Riot' — the Great War and Women's Resistance to Militarism." *Women's Studies International Forum* 11.3 (1988), 199-210.
- Tylee, Claire M. *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-1964*. Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1990.
- Warren, Gale Denise. "The Patriotic Association of the Women of Newfoundland: 1914-18." *Aspects: A Publication of the Newfoundland Historical Society* 33.2 (1998), 23-32.
- Warren, Gale Denise. "Voluntarism and Patriotism: Newfoundland Women's War Work During the First World War." MA Thesis. Memorial University, 2005.
- Watson, Janet. *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Way, Marie E. "Glorious Khaki." *The Distaff*. Ed. Mabel W. LeMessurier. St. John's: The Royal Gazette, 1917, 10.