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Katherine Hale: "But now another one has come"

by Samara Walbohm

> Expansive puppets percolate self-unction
> Beneath a portrait of the Prince of Wales.
> Miss Crotchet's muse has somehow failed to function,
> Yet, she's a poetess. Beaming, she sails
> From group to chattering group, with such a dear
> Victorian saintliness, as is her fashion
> Greeting the other unknowns with a cheer —
> Virgins of sixty who still write of passion.
>
> • • •
>
> Really, it is a most delightful party.
>
> F.R. Scott,
> "The Canadian Authors Meet"[1]

By engaging her readership in a common sensibility expressed in familiar and colloquial ways, Katherine Hale enacted a poetry of inclusion which contrasted to the severe and isolating political gestures of the conventional (mostly masculine) community of Canadian modern poetry. Instead of seeking to separate the experience of art from the audience, Hale sustained a shared community of writing and reading which legitimated a feminine intellectual discourse at the onset of Canadian modernism. As a builder of and catalyst for women's cultural communities and literary networks and as a writer whose work powerfully ruptures the (unofficial) gender boundaries of avant garde modernism, Katherine Hale challenges ideas about sentimentalism and feminine writing tradition and troubles any supposed depiction of her as one of Scott's "virgins of sixty." In fact, the highly sensual and sexual quality of her most mature work (which first appears in *Morning in the West* (1923) when she is forty-five years old) determines her to not only be part of Canada's modernist community, but surprisingly forward-thinking.

Born in 1878 in Galt, Ontario, Katherine Hale conveniently qualifies as one of F.R. Scott's chattering "poetesses" referred to in his 1927 poem. Although he explicitly criticizes members of the Canadian Authors' Association (of which Hale was an active member, and her husband, editor John Garvin was President), Scott's representation also gestures to the larger

established literary community which adhered to Canada's outmoded and Victorian poetic tradition rather than embrace the more modern, innovative and cosmopolitan ideas of making it new. Such gender-driven criticism had already surfaced some fifty years earlier by American novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hawthorne's much quoted remarks equating women writers and sentimental fiction did much to formulate critical and canonical views of American literature at the advent of modernism: "America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash" (qtd. in Mathiessen xi). By overtly targeting "scribbling women" and "chattering poetesses," Hawthorne and Scott couch a crisis in literary history in terms of gender. For Scott specifically, this gendered literary transition was a shift into Canadian modernism. While many male poets of the time were also writing in the sentimental tradition (including Arthur Stringer, Duncan Campbell Scott, Robert Norwood, and Robert Service), Scott specifically directs his scorn towards women poets. In so doing, Scott explicitly defines women's writing as the antithesis of a newly emerging modernism: he severs the future of Canada's literary narrative from a sentimental past which was dominated by a community of women poets and feminine writing.

But it is important and interesting to look retrospectively at the sentimental poetics of women writers such as Katherine Hale (among others) both as part of the literary trajectory from which accepted versions of modernism originated and also as a challenge to such definitions, (especially those like Scott's), which were conceived at the time and sustained until only recent critical interrogation. In her seminal book, *Sensational Designs*, American critic Jane Tompkins argues that nineteenth-century sentimentalism is not only crucial for feminist criticism as a means for the empowerment of women's writing, but also as a way to confront established and exclusive definitions of modernist literature. Exploring how sentimental fiction enacts cultural work, Tompkins looks in particular at Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as an effective and powerful shaper of American cultural history. Exploring the work of American poets Edna St. Vincent Millay, Emma Goldman, Louise Bogan, Kay Boyle and Annie Dillard, Suzanne Clark expands Tompkins' position and sees the sentimental as not only counter to modernism, but "as part of the complex discourse of modernism and … women writers are the key to understanding the ideological struggles of avant-garde modernism and the affiliated struggles over subjectivity" (5). Women writers are important, Clark suggests, because as intellectuals and cultural revolutionaries they also had to

confront and work against the powerful modernist rejection of the sentimental. In other words, transitional and modern women writers had to "see the struggle over the subject from the beginning" (5). Because women writers such as Hale maintained an ongoing attachment and/or link to their strong sentimental history and even to the idea of sensibility itself, their work exposes an inherent contradiction within modernism or at least to its traditional definitions.

By looking at the sentimental as a literary binary–as simultaneously prosaic and transgressive–Hale can be seen to embrace contradictions of modernism and in fact, she becomes a modernist pioneer. Because she worked against the widespread revolt against the sentimental, writing from within this tradition actually became a form of political challenge. According to Clark, "popular appeal" was in itself "risky" and "the risk of shaming and exile was especially daunting when the female readership was middle class, bourgeois, and sentimental and when the values affirmed had to do with love and motherhood" (4).

Born and educated as Amelia Beers Warnock, Hale attended Glen Mawr School[2] and later moved to New York City for operatic studies. She toured throughout North America and Britain as a singer. Hale's performances were distinguished by the accompanied informative, entertaining commentary on her songs. From New York, Hale wrote articles on Wagnerian opera for Toronto's *Mail and Empire* and she later became literary editor of the paper. In 1912, Hale married John Garvin, an editor already well known internationally for his Canadian poetry anthologies. They had no children and Hale died in Toronto in 1956.

Although little known today, Katherine Hale's active involvement in Toronto's club culture throughout her life marks her as an optimal choice for the exploration of cultural figures within the institutional networks and affiliations to which they belonged. Hale was a past president of the Women's Canadian Club (now Canadian Women's Club), a member of the Canadian Women's Press Club, and the Canadian Authors Association. She was a lifelong member of the Lyceum Club as well as the Women's Art Association and P.E.N. and an honourary member of the Institute Heraldique of France and a founder, president and lifelong member of the Toronto Heliconian Club.

In Hale, we find an exemplar of the modernist woman whose writing and life activity define her as a crucial contributor to the making of Canada's modernist infrastructure and its modernist literary evolution. Katherine Hale's writing looks forward from a Victorian sentimentalism towards an avant garde modernism: her poetry alternatively articulates and

acknowledges a feminine sentimentality while offering a subversive challenge to a male defined Canadian modernism. Her poetry moves between the comforting rhythms of feminine sentimental technique and the structural poetic experimentation of so-called "high" modernism. In this way, as simultaneously forward thinking while rooted in Victorian ideals, it is perhaps appropriate to consider Katherine Hale as a "progressive sentimentalist."

Notably, Hale did not begin writing until after her marriage to John Garvin and it is possible to speculate that her poetry was perhaps partially influenced, at least at some time in her career, by her editor/anthologist husband and/or his literary circles. Hale's first collection of poetry, *Grey Knitting and Other Poems* (1914) was well received both in Canada and the United States. This collection, mainly its popular title poem but including "You Who Have Left Us," "When You Return," and "In the Trenches" marked Hale's initial efforts as part of the patriotic work of the First World War and also link her early poetry to a widespread predominantly sentimental conventional literary tradition which included Agnes Maule Machar, Charles Sangster, Wilfred Campbell, Ethelwyn Wetherald, Robert Service, Jean Blewett among many others. While "Grey Knitting" elicits a predominantly sentimentalist reaction, the poem also hints at a preliminary movement away from sentimental emotionalism. Hale writes of:

> A tiny click of little wooden needles,
> Elfin amid the gianthood of war;
> Whispers of women, tireless and patient,
> Who weave the web afar.
> (*Grey Knitting* 3)

Although the poem clearly articulates a gendered emotional response to World War One, the passage also speaks to issues of women's cultural production at the beginning of the last century. Hale's whispering collaborative group of women both exists apart from the world of men while contributing to it and yet simultaneously expresses the ownership and creativity of their own cultural work, however elfin it may appear. Despite this strong sense of a women's liberating "web" of cultural production presented in "Grey Knitting," Hale's articulation of women's role in the war was not always supportive of the cause nor empowering for the women left at home and she can lament "I can see the ghosts that women come to greet" ("When You Return," *Grey Knitting* 5). Similarly, *The White Comarde* (1916) and *The New Joan and Other Poems* (1917) were decidedly patriotic in flavour.

Mostly lyrical in structure, these early collections also reflected popular criticism of the time which read Hale as a "colour" poet, a label which integrated her increasing interest in theosophy and her growing poetic sense that idealism was found in transcendental interpretations of nature, both of which characterize the more sophisticated poetics of her later collections.

In both *Morning in the West* (1925) and *The Islands and Other Poems* (1934), Hale imagines a highly emotive and spiritualized Canadian landscape which, combined with a more innovative poetic structure, informs her most progressive work and fully transitions her writing from the sentimental tradition towards an experimental modernist paradigm.

While this study will primarily focus on selections from the more avant garde *Morning in the West* and *The Islands*, it is important to note that Hale published another later poetry collection, (mainly a selection of previously published work), *The Flute and Other Poems* (1950), as well as documentary and social histories, children's fiction and a biography. In fact, Hale's *Life of Isabella Valancy Crawford* (1926)[3] was the first account of Crawford's life and the project (importantly) sees Hale as identifying, documenting and thus legitimating a history of women's writing which she herself was both part of and influenced by. Hale's description of Crawford as "a flaming but solitary figure, singing through the somber Ontario of the seventies and eighties of the last century strange and brilliant songs" (Isabella Valancy Crawford 1) celebrates her as some sort of traveling poetic crusader whose valuable life and work are miraculously recovered:

> … eighteen years had passed since the death of Isabella Valancy Crawford. There was not a trace of her work … save a few copies … there was no body of opinion to create a sense of its value. Many of her poems were lost in the old files of the Toronto Daily Newspapers [sic].
>
> Then, almost unannounced, there appeared in 1905 a collected edition of her poems. It was gathered by Mr.John W. Garvin … Miss Ethelyn Wetherald wrote a delightful Introduction…. (*Isabella Valancy Crawford* 95)

Of course, Crawford's literary angel was Hale's own husband. And ironically, Hale could have been speaking of her own future literary circumstance. After her death, she was eliminated completely from twentieth-century poetry anthologies and a collected edition of Hale's poems has yet to appear.

Hale's interesting and informative social histories and documentaries were, most probably, inspired by her extensive lecture tours across Ontario and Canada and include *Canadian Cities of Romance* (1922), *Canadian Houses of Romance* (1926), *Legends of the St. Lawrence* (1925), *This is*

Ontario (1937) and *Toronto, Romance of a Great City* (1956) of which the publishing contract was signed only hours before Hale's death. In her obituary, journalist, friend and Heliconian member, Lotta Dempsey recalled: "Katherine Hale had so much of the ageless quality of women of great inner vitality that her death came as an enormous shock. Those of us who had seen the manuscript excerpts from her forthcoming book [*Toronto, Romance of a Great City*] felt that here indeed, is the triumphant fruition of a life of literary integrity and adventurous discovery of her own country which could not but stir and strengthen all who would read it" (Dempsey 14). Hale also wrote several chapbooks for Ryerson Press's *The Makers of Canadian History Series* including *Pierre Esprit Radisson* (192?) and *Jeanne Mance, 1606-1673* (1930) and contributed a volume for *The Canadian Pacific Railway* series.

What makes Katherine Hale such a valuable figure in the exploration of Canadian modernism is how her poetry embodies a progression from the sentimental tradition towards an experimental modernist aesthetic. Further, because this transition moves from within a feminine poetic, Hale's writing reimagines an empowered space for women's writing within an exclusive and predominantly male interpretation of modernism. Interestingly, much of what I see as Hale's "progressive sentimentalism" and innovation stems from those very qualities for which she was celebrated at the time, and for which she was later dismissed as a serious or modernist writer. Hale's contemporaries most often praised her "delicate, charming, fairy-like" verses and "rich poetic beauty" which, to a later audience, diminished and devalued her contributions to Canada's literary history. Indeed, even her husband John Garvin labeled Hale as "an adornment to the literature of our Dominion" (Garvin 323) which further strengthens the idea of women writers as bejeweled trinkets which are pinned on and collected rather than critically interpreted. Poetic decorations, sentimental poems written by women are excluded from any serious literary project.

While her works did not have a publicly recognized influence on a conventionally defined Canadian modernism, Katherine Hale's use of sentimentalism as a form of literary power and transgression redefines poetic modernism and promotes a rethinking of how it emerged as a literary phenomenon in Canada. Looking at Hale's sentimentalism helps to imagine a distinct, highly emotive and sexually charged space for women's writing at a time when self-proclaimed proprietors of modernism severed themselves from narratives of feeling and subjectivity. Informed by her Theosophical intellectualism, Hale's writing embarks on a project of poetic change which counters familiar versions of modernism and sees the Canadian

modern landscape imbued with haunting spirit, emotion and subjective value. However, Hale too is a modern radical whose experimentation with poetic structure aligns her writing with the work of Canada's celebrated modernist poets, including A.J.M. Smith, Dorothy Livesay and F.R. Scott.

In her 1923 collection, *Morning in the West*, Hale's poems begin to express a female subjectivity and eroticism which reframe her work within an alternative tradition of women's writing and link her to a feminine poetic lineage that includes Isabella Valancy Crawford, Pauline Johnson and Marjorie Pickthall. In fact, Hale consciously wrote herself into this poetic ancestry with her biography of Crawford and a short poem entitled "To Marjorie Pickthall." Both texts suggest Hale's loyalty to and view of these women as possible exemplary models or poetic "foremothers." Almost elegiac in tone, "To Marjorie Pickthall" commemorates Pickthall the poet and emphasizes Hale's loss and sense of abandonment at her death. But the poem shifts towards the articulation of a surreal bond between the two poets as Hale remembers, "When you and I found bloom beneath the snow,/I sent you happy thoughts across the world." It is through an experiencing of Pickthall's poetry that Hale is able to survive her mourning: "Shall sudden feel you on the face of earth." Through Pickthall's poetry Hale is able to move forward with her own writing and feel secure that Pickthall herself will live on like "Immortal Song" (*Morning in the West* 41).

Like many of Pickthall's, Hale's poems speak to the tension between woman as poet and woman as desireable/desiring subject. Pickthall's revisioning of particular moments in the history of female subjectivity articulates a space for a female voice which has been suppressed in familiar masculine mythic traditions. In a frequent reworking of standard myths (such as the Siren in her poem "Sea Witch"), Pickthall ruptures ideological restrictions to reveal a concealed or untold story of female subjectivity and empowerment–that of a marginalized female language and erotic power. Like Pickthall, the often conservative poetic of Hale's work frequently masks a more rebellious content of sexuality, eroticism and subjective authority. Hale's poem "Poetesses" explicitly reinforces this tension between the woman as writer and the woman as a desiring and desirable subject. And notably, in the poem Hale also celebrates and acknowledges her intellectual debt to a feminine sentimental tradition. She self-consciously sees herself as working from within–and then breaking away from–sentimentalism:

> You who loved all lovely things
> And wrought in jeweled lines;

You have gone your gracious ways
That are patterned in dim stones
Of perfumed, faint hued words;
You were a thing so feminine
That even of war you sang in tender notes.
But now another one has come,
Who is herself at war.
Her songs are keen and glittering,
For she has felt the magic fire
That you did long ago;
But now the fire has burnt clean through
And forged a sword of steel.
That gleam as hard as diamonds do,
And mean to cut tradition.
(*Morning in the West* 44)

Acknowledging her creative ancestors, Hale's acute sensitivity to readings of her work (and that of her foremothers) as "wrought in jeweled lines" is what enables her ultimate break from such restrictive definitions of her poems. Articulating a new movement in female writing, Hale's explicit use of war imagery is reminiscent of her earlier work, "Grey Knitting," which I introduced earlier as an articulation of a united women's front towards an alternative vision of feminine cultural production. But in this later poem, Hale's more direct address and free-verse pattern calls attention to her, the poet, as a cultural warrior. She holds a diamond strength sword forged from the magic fire of her poetic ancestors and with it, she does "mean to cut tradition." While Hale acknowledges her participation in and the influence of a widespread (and since vilified) literary phenomenon, it is Hale's conscious point of departure from the sentimental tradition which makes the poem such an important one, both in Hale's own literary career and in the transition towards modernism more generally. Interestingly however, Hale's image of a severed tradition differs distinctly from the high modernist aim to make it new. Hale imagines a shifted feminine poetic voice, but one linked to an inherited past and still nourished with the same "imprisoned" but "ancient magic" of sentimentalism:

And yet those jeweled lines!
Strangely the ancient magic works,
Strangely the same fire lurks
And burns imprisoned there
In your dim, opaled words,
That run like paths in heaven

> Paved in mosaic of sweet stones,
> And make a scented highway for our feet,
> Who wield these swinging swords.
> (*Morning in the West* 44)

The poetic transition which Hale imagines, and that which she is herself a crucial catalyst of, is a gradual, gentle voyage along a "mosaic of sweet stones … a scented highway."[4] Notably, Hale's choice to use her mother's maiden name "Hale" as her pen name rather than either her own, or her husband's further highlights an attention to matriarchal heritage and female authority.

A continuing but increasing sense of the erotic, a central current of Hale's progressive sentimentalism and power as a transitional modern, surfaces dramatically in the poem "She Who Paddles." The poem recalls the sexually charged dynamics of Hale's foremothers in Crawford's "The Canoe" (1884) and Pauline Johnson's "The Song My Paddle Sings" (1892) or "The Idlers" (1895).[5] Like these earlier poems, Hale's "She Who Paddles" is an articulation of female agency and desire. Similarly, in all poems the canoe becomes an emblem of female freedom, independence and feminine sexuality. According to Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, Johnson's poem "celebrates the physical prowess of a solo woman canoeist fearlessly making her way through a sensual and wild landscape that hums with its own vitality, but whose challenges invite collaboration (the paddler and her canoe become 'we') rather than the confrontation that colours the conquest typical of men's poetry" (153). And Johnson's canoe offers a distinctly feminine erotic tryst, between the woman paddler and a sensualized nature: "The river rolls in its rocky bed;/My paddle is plying its way ahead;/Dip, Dip,/ While waters flip/In foam as over their breast we slip." Similarly, Hale's poem articulates a distinct and powerful act of female liberation and sexual experience. However, the relationship is not a transcendental (and/or sentimental) link between a solitary, independent woman and the natural world. Rather, Hale's poem describes a mysterious and enlightening interlude between two people made possible *within* the natural world. While Johnson's poem describes a courting of natural landscape which stimulates a sexual release for the female canoeist, ("I have wooed you so"), Hale's narrator instead claims that "none of these things have wooed me" (*Morning in the West* 30). While Johnson's first-person narration empowers the oral and performative power of the poem, Hale's "She Who Paddles" begins as a passive third person observation and shifts to include a first person narrator/voyeur who intimates about a hidden or "tabu" tryst with a "lithe and brown" and emphatically sexual partner. Ini-

tially, Hale's narrator gazes upon an exotic Other woman, she/he is separate from her but clearly filled with longing. Yet the speaker confides a shared experience within and inspired by natural landscape,

> Bound me close by a mystery
> Made her eternally mine.
> For we have found still places
> Deep in the wood;
> Climbed a ledge of grey rock
> Where a pink-legged heron stood;
> Heard the distant loon's cry;
> Watched a lonely bird fly–
> * * *
> In no great need of men.
> (*Morning in the West* 30)

Hale's poem tells not of a relationship *to* nature, but one that is mysterious, liberating, sexual and wholly feminine, *within* nature. The erotic experience is further highlighted with a manipulation of sexual convention, playful rhythm and free verse elements–the poem is at once structurally conservative and freshly modern. It is interesting (and perhaps not unimportant) to note that hints of such powerful lesbian overtones may not have been exclusive to Hale's poetry alone. A letter dated December 12, 1916, from an unidentified Lara K. Chauff[?] reads: "Do you think we shall ever recapture that first free careless rapture when, in a burst of confidence, we confessed our love? Well I hope so and perhaps before long … I read your beautiful verses … and indeed I love you." [6] Similarly, another letter dated April 29, 1929, and signed simply "Carolyn" reads: "Darling, I wish I could fill your arms with Sicilian roses. The garden is overflowing, walls, balconies embowered. Instead I put my arms around you and hold you close, ever–C." [7]

Nonetheless, "She Who Paddles" serves as a useful portal through which to read Hale's transitional modernism or progressive sentimentalism. A reconfiguration of women's relationship to and within nature as invigorating, liberating and sexually fulfilling continues the trajectory founded by Crawford and Johnson. Hale's re-imagining of women and Natives as central (and particularly independent and desiring) subjects in her poetry qualifies her work as more forward thinking and certainly modernist in outlook. Looking at Hale's most anthologized poem "Cun-ne-wabum" (later published as "Portrait of a Cree"), Susan Atkinson's essay,

"Challenging Exoticism: Race, Gender and Nation in the Poetry of Katherine Hale," describes Hale as:

> a shrewd and sophisticated observer of the Canada in which she lived. Her poetry conveys her concern with those players on the stage of the developing nation who were most often consigned to the political and social chorus. Until very recently, the recorded history of Natives, racial minorities, and women in Canada has been primarily that of individual exceptions to the general rule of local colour or requisite utility. However, Hale challenges prevailing notions of the exotic or the Other in Canada's history and creates an alternative vision of the subjectivity of those on the margins by imagining ordinary women, people of colour, and Natives into the center of her poems. The result is a smoothly contiguous view of Canadian National identity which ignores the arbitrary periodic divisions based on Acts of Parliament or Prime Ministers' terms in office, much favoured by some historians. (157)

While this essay does not specifically focus on evolving definitions of "Nation" and I certainly do not find this as an overly conscious concern on Hale's part, I do see her poetry presenting an alternative vision of Canada's poetic and socio-geographic landscape. In particular, Hale's poetry is peopled with women, Natives and a transcendental spirit, vision and appreciation for the past which I see as emerging from a backdrop of sentimentalism. Hale's reworking of the Canadian historical "imagined community" presents alternative ideas about who played what role in the making of Canada's socio-cultural narrative. While histories of "the margin" have only become part of mainstream literary scholarship in the last few decades, much of Hale's writing emphasized the importance and the historical and cultural value of those "consigned to the political and social chorus" (Atkinson 157). This emphasis combined with a powerful emotive element in Hale's work distinguishes it from that of her objective (male) modernist contemporaries and suggests a more seamless transition from the Victorian literary tradition into Canadian modernism.

However much Hale's poetry is indebted to and reflects a sentimental literary history, her life and work were also substantially influenced by the teachings of Theosophy. Michele Lacombe's essay, "Theosophy and the Canadian Idealist: A Preliminary Exploration," suggests that Theosophy is one of the least explored moments in Canada's social and cultural history. Although little known today, the movement was highly influential within Canada's modernist arts, intellectual and political communities. Notably, Theosophy directly influenced the visual aesthetics of Lawren Harris, Arthur Lismer, Frank Carmichael and possibly Fred Varley and Emily Carr

as well as other members of the Arts and Letters Club such as Fred Housser (husband of Heliconian artist Yvonne McKague Housser and author of *The Canadian Art Movement: a Story of the Group of Seven*), Bertram Brooker and various members of the Heliconian Club including Isobel McLaughlin, Yvonne McKague Housser, "Babs" Cogill Haworth and Rody Kenny Courtice. In addition to Brooker, other writers were actively involved in Toronto's Theosophical Society (unofficially founded in 1892 at the home of Dr. Emily Stowe, feminist, suffragist and Canada's first woman doctor). Guided by the transcendental poetry of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Canadian writers Bliss Carman, Wilson MacDonald, Tom McInnis, Annie Charlotte Dalton, Algernon Blackwood, Albert Durant Watson and of course, Katherine Hale, were also followers of Theosophy's notion of "spiritual evolution." Notably, Theosophists Roy Mitchell and Carroll Aitkens inspired much of the Toronto Hart House Theatre group's modernist dramatic experimentation. As Lacombe notes, "In Toronto during the 1920's, key figures in the dramatic arts turned to Theosophy for a theory and to the Irish Literary Renaissance for a model of nation literature in the making … Herman Voaden identifies two major influences upon the 'creation of a Canadian Drama an the Art of the Theatre': Walt Whitman and the Irish Literary Renaissance" (110).[8]

In its most general sense, Theosophy refers to the wisdom or experience of the divine. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the central system of thought outlined by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, founder of the American Theosophical Society in 1875, is the "claim to a knowledge of nature profounder than is obtained from empirical science" (qtd. in Lacombe 100). Michele Lacombe also describes Theosophy as a fusion of Buddhist and Hindu principles "considerably modified by 'modern' concepts of evolution" (Lacombe 101). Members of the "modern" Toronto Theosophical Society differed both in their intellectual backgrounds and also in their individual rationales for following Theosophy. For example, the movement's aspiration for social welfare and sexual equality was shared by many advocates, but it especially appealed to feminists such as Emily Stowe and Flora MacDonald Denison. Lacombe notes that for them, "the promotion of 'universal brotherhood,' which extended to both sexes as well as to all creeds and nations" was appealing and useful in their political ventures (105). Because the idea of Theosophy was created and predominantly disseminated through two female prophets, Blavatsky and her successor, Fabian socialist, feminist and reformer, Annie Besant, it "boasted an impersonal, asexual deity [and] rejected the notion of a paternalistic, omnipotent male God" (Lacombe 106). For visual artists, Theo-

sophical principles outlined aesthetic concepts of divine and neoplatonic beauty and offered the idea of the artist as prophet or medium to the divine. For writers, emerging out of a Canadian Theosophy was a sense of national pride that combined with transcendentalism and divine adoration to produce "a 'modern' experiment in free verse" (Lacombe 108). Lacombe acutely states that "for artists and writers of a country just emerging from the colonial stage, Theosophical notions concerning evolution were attractive because they predicted the birth of a native art and literature in Canada" (104).

Katherine Hale's later collections, *Morning in the West* and *The Island*, express a sophisticated combination of the three main Theosophical ideals. Emerging from within a theosophical perspective and linked to her sentimental literary roots, Hale's work voices a liberation of feminine desire and independence, sees the poet-prophet as means to access the divine in nature and articulates a moment of national and literary history in the making, however alternative it may be to familiar modernist examples. But in addition to the more abstract Theosophical principles reflected in her writing, Hale's links to Toronto's Theosophy community were many. A direct poetic reference to Hale's affiliations appears in her poem, "The Rock at Bon Echo" (*The Island* (1934)) which refers to the Theosophist retreat property owned by Flora MacDonald Denison. Adhering to the Theosophical goals of Whitman concerning social and spiritual enlightenment, Denison transformed her rural property into a "combination summer hotel and avant-garde spiritual community" (Lacombe 104) at which Hale (and probably her husband John Garvin) were most likely frequent guests.

The Garvin's were also members of the Muskoka Assembly of the Canadian Chautauqua Association which was first organized in 1921 at the Epworth Inn on Tobin's Island in Lake Rousseau by Rev. Charles Sinclair Applegath. According to Sylvia DuVernet's account, the *Muskoka Assembly of the Canadian Chautauqua Association*, the institution was intended as a "visionary undertaking intended to combine a Muskoka holiday with spiritual and cultural enrichment … a summer recreation resort but also a literary center which seeks to interpret the best in Canadian thought and ideals" (5). In existence until 1932, the Muskoka Assembly was modeled after the New York Chautauqua institute but remained independent of it, namely because of the strong theosophical influence in the Canadian group. Included in the Canadian Assembly was a unique literary series which featured "The Reading Circle," "Canadian Authors' Week" and a "Summer School of Canadian Literature"; a drama program entitled "The Little Theatre in the Woods" which was consistently associated with Tor-

onto's Hart House Theatre; and a special program for children and culture (DuVernet 40-60). Notable participants of the Muskoka Assembly included Roy Mitchell, Lorne Pierce, Wilson MacDonald, Bliss Carman, Charles G.D. Roberts, Margaret Marshall Saunders, Dorothy Livesay, E.J. Pratt, Dr. Albert Durrant Watson and Katherine Hale and her husband John Garvin, most of whom were also members of the Toronto Theosophical Society. DuVernet notes that Garvin was frequently listed as one of the lecturers at the "Summer School of Canadian Literature" at the Canadian Assembly and that Hale was listed as attending the Muskoka Assembly for Canadian Authors' Week in August 1928, when she gave two recitals with piano accompaniment; "Quebec in Song and Story" and "Poems of Childhood" and several literary lectures (177-8).

In her essay, Lacombe notes that the Toronto Theosophical Society's membership was dominated by academics and people in the arts. However, the movement appealed particularly to psychologists and physicians because of "the attention paid to occultism and the psychic phenomenon" (104). While not an official member, Toronto physician Dr. Albert Durrant Watson regularly attended and addressed meetings of the Toronto Theosophical Society. And most interestingly, Katherine Hale wrote the Introduction to Watson's *Love and Universe: the Immortals and Other Poems* (1913), a treatise on Theosophy's poetics in its own right:

> … When Poetry first walked out of the early woods of this world, there were brambles in her hair and the dew of wet grasses at her bare feet. She was the living embodiment of the earth-spirit and the gods had wakened her from a long sleep. Through the ages of myth and legend she wandered until with the coming of a new and strange religion she met Pain and Liberty for the first time. Then her heart seemed to stop beating and her step grew slow. Hereafter, throughout the middle ages and almost until the dawn of the twentieth century this spirit was a force at war with itself. Growing, like music and religion, out of the earth-ritual, having her first expression in pure paganism, Poetry was destined to develop a soul, which–in embryo at least–does not always fare happily with beauty…. Therefore the great masters of the past who came under the Spell, were forever trying to reconcile the earth and the sky … [Milton, Dante, Browning].
>
> Then Walt Whitman came singing through the land the chant of the Universal Good and God in everything and after him arose a perfect flood of the new song in which Poetry found herself at last a being not more of earth than air, not less of God than man, but fashioned like the Earth which bore her for the uses of evolution, to be created by the thought of men's hearts, passing from one revelation of truth to another… (*Introduction* x)

Hale's lengthy description of the "birth of Poetry" suggests how Theosophy aided New World writers who were both struggling to emerge from a colonial influence and identification as well as beginning to attempt new literary enterprises in the name of Modernism. When Hale suggests that Watson's collection (although unheard of now) is "a theme exceedingly modern in its conception and treatment. It is a great dream of the possibilities contained in a spiritual evolution which counts body, soul and spirit as one force working together with God" she articulates the Theosophical ideal while anticipating a transcendental poetic birth or "evolution" of a native Canadian art and literature at the advent of modernism.

Published in *The Island* (1934), Hale's poem "Before Birth" embodies the contradictions inherent in her work which characterize her as a transitional modern Canadian poet. A powerfully erotic visual personification of the Canadian Prairie landscape, the poem explores the simultaneous possibilities of Hale the woman poet, Hale the Theosophist poet-prophet and Hale the modernist. In the poem, an unnamed female narrator-voyeur describes the sensual and at times sexually violent interaction between a feminized, pregnant and erotic prairie earth and an imposing, authoritative male night sky. Hale's narrator, a divining poet figure, tells her reader,

> Sombre, relaxed and supine
> I saw the prairie lie,
> Heavy with unborn April
> Under the wintry sky;
> Her tent, her mirror, her husband,
> Her lord and master, the sky.
> (*The Island* 55)

Drawing on elements of the sentimental tradition, "Before Birth" articulates a subjective and highly emotional response to landscape. In fact, the feminized prairie *becomes* the sentimental subject in the poem when Hale describes, "[a] thousand raptures in her breast." Rather than succumb to the "barbarous lord" (the sky), Hale's prairie uses feminine desire to negotiate her male counterpart in the ultimate creation of a new (and distinctly Canadian) world: "I saw him bending down/In the curve of an arching bow/And her shimmering response." Hale's Theosophical perspective sees and interprets a Canadian prairie landscape at the magical transcendental moment just prior to spring. Describing the mystical processes of spring's period of metaphorical birth, Hale's reference to and reverence of a "magic old and bright" reflects the "ancient magic" of her sentimental foremothers in the earlier poem "Poetesses." Hale's sentimental roots articulate this poetic

moment with highly emotional overtones and regular rhyming sextets. But an expression of female liberation and erotic female desire interpret it as a sexual tryst ultimately invigorating and empowering the female body as the metaphor and catalyst for a newly birthed Canadian landscape:

> It is immortal love,|
> Passion of air and earth,
> Melting of sky and land,|
> Blossoming giant birth;
> Silently bearing the seed of Spring
> Back to the waiting North.
> (*The Island* 55)

In direct contrast to the exploitive and (masculine) tyranny over landscape frequently recognized in more familiar modernist poetry (such as that of F.R. Scott, E.J. Pratt and A.J.M. Smith), Hale's work celebrates a more forgiving and harmonious feminine perspective. The simultaneous presence of a sentimental past, a Theosophic mysticism and a sense of modern possibility suggests the power of Hale's new poetic vision. In a letter to John Garvin, Bliss Carman alludes to Hale's importance as part of the modernist project to "make it new:" "The truth is you can't put the West in a sonnet nor capture Canada in the meshes of any mincing measure. These things of Mrs. Garvin's are a break-away in the right direction. Splendid!" [9] Later in the same letter, Carman describes Hale's work as simultaneously emotive and unique, as both sentimental and new:

> I think it vastly exceeds in value everything else that she has written. It shows a great move onward, and there are poems in the volume which show her to be wholly original, entirely human, with a spiritual charm worthy of the best that has been done by anybody anywhere. I know something about the West. I love it; the grim prairie, the mountains, the rivers, the everlasting wheat-fields, the storm and the sunshine … [and her poetry] gets one where one is tender … and carries me into the field where thought and free spirit free themselves to soar. Well done Katherine Hale.

Interestingly, because Carman praises Hale's poetry for the very qualities which excluded her from Canada's central modernist project; namely her emotion, humanity and "spiritual charm," he sees Hale's writing as "a great move onward" *because* she also looks back. Although Carman himself was one of the writers from which modernists sought to distance themselves, his recognition of Hale's poetic "breaking-away" does much to link her to these new trends in writing. As Susan Atkinson suggests, "Hale pushes

towards new ways of seeing–both poetically and politically–in little surges, yet is unwilling to leave behind entirely the structures that gave/ give these ideas shape" (161).

Although the innovative and sexually liberating ideas articulated in "Before Birth" are poetically contained within a more conventional and regular poetic structure, several of Hale's poems manipulate and explore concepts of form. Most particularly in *The Island*, poems found in the subgroup "Backgrounds of a Country" and "Rocks" such as "Portrait of a Cree," "Buffalo Meat," "Giant's Tomb," "The Rock at Bon Echo," "Autumn Pool" and "White Slumber" contain structural inconsistencies which help to define Hale as a transitional modern writer. These poems vacillate, often irregularly, between experimental free verse form and occasional consistent patterns to see Hale as both participating in a more modern initiative while at the same time reasserting an inherited poetic. In particular, "Autumn Pool" was the subject of controversy at a poet's gathering of the Canadian Authors Association when it was read as an example "in which the best elements of the free verse question were exemplified."[10] Succinct and almost Imagistic in tone, yet decidedly feminine in rhythm, "Autumn Pool" describes an abstract Death in the reflections of a forest pool in autumn. However "modernist" the poem instinctively feels, it is grounded in a sentimental subjectivity which softens its subject matter through gentle repetition linking the poem to Hale's sentimental literary past: "All the green walls of your silence/Hung with crimson/Even you, dark pool–/Even you feel death./On your soft brown surface" (*The Island* 78).

The more explicit structural and thematic manipulation in Hale's later work, including her long narrative poem "Going North," acutely embraces this fusion of sentimental, Theosophical and feminist elements in an exciting and innovative poetic journey which both re-interprets Canada's northern landscape and reflects Hale's own intellectual transition. Much of what distinguishes Hale from her Canadian modernist contemporaries and the Group of Seven, is not necessarily her poetic subject, but how she portrays the Canadian landscape as an emotional place and repeatedly offers a landscape with figures in it. Ultimately, to recall Atkinson, Hale's poetry expresses a "concern with those players on the stage of a developing nation … and creates an alternative vision of the subjectivity of those on the margins" (157). Considerations of Katherine Hale as a modern poet are further confounded by much of the critical reception she received while she was writing. Although introductions to her work in various anthologies of the time were positive enough, their emphasis on Hale as a "musical"

"women's writer" (Logan and French 292) diminished her importance as an experimental poet working within a modernist aesthetic. As Susan Atkinson notes:

> First, the particularly diminutive cast to the descriptors used serves effectively to reduce the seriousness of Hale's contributions to the contemporary literary scene. Secondly, as women moving into the latter half of the twentieth century rejected these kinds of reductive labels and the limited social, cultural and political influence they imply, the poetry associated with such labels has been dismissed as obsolete. (158)

As suggested, while Hale's "public" image defined her in such a "diminutive" light, private correspondence suggested that many of Hale's peers considered her writing to be much more avant garde. For example, a letter from Charles Mair dated November 8, 1923, writes:

> … I think I detect, however, a tendency towards the "New Poetry" in this collection, the poetry of speed. If I should particularize I should call your Going North suggestive of it. The quick eye glances at Nature, the keen eye en passant observations [sic] indicate the poetic motorist, not the rambler on foot. Something is gained by this, something kaleidoscopic as if nature and life were viewed through a swiftly tuned optical instrument.[11]

Similarly, a Francis Pollock writes about Hale's *The Island*:

> I will confess that it has startled me…. It strikes me that there is no living Canadian poet who can show a volume of such quality. You unquestionably have the divine fire and that is a quality at once unmistakable, and for which there is no substitute … curiously, I can hardly see any trace of the influence of any other poet in your work, except possibly just a suggestion of TS Eliot– an influence that anybody might be proud to own. I think you like him. I remember you once gave a series of lectures on him, which I wish I could have heard.[12]

And in a letter describing Hale's collection *The Island*, Bliss Carman writes: "There is all too little of it but what there is, is of the very best…. The pieces more or less free in form … are as fresh and wondrous as new fallen snow…. Such faithful realism linked to a very true poetic feeling and exquisite taste is beyond praise, and make me almost swear never to turn another formal stanza."[13] Such seemingly incongruent descriptions of Hale voicing a "true poetic feeling and exquisite taste" that is "more or less free in form" testify to her precarious status as a modern woman writer, a "con-

dition" which Suzanne Clark defines as a "doubleness as well as a double bind" (8). While Hale was celebrated for (and celebrated) writing within a community of woman readers and writers, she was simultaneously excluded from the avant-garde modernist revolution. Writing with authority from within her own tradition, she was critically ignored as a modernist poet. Looking at writers such as Hale discovers how the modern woman writer seized opportunities to rupture confining categories of gender and feminine identity as well as to reconfigure ideas about Nation building. The existence of this type of literary and cultural work suggests the value in exploring women writers and especially women writers in the sentimental tradition as examples of modernist revolutionaries.

This essay has suggested ways in which to look at previously disregarded women writers as important contributors to Canada's modernist literary aesthetic. Exploring the lives and work of women writers such as Katherine Hale shows that while modernism defined itself in opposition to domestic culture and rejected the increasing influence of women's writing, ultimately "discrediting [a feminine] literary past and especially … sentimental history," (Clark 34) the persistence of sentimentalism, especially in its more transgressive forms, identifies a transitional pre-modern period and sees the rise of modernism as a more seamless, less abrupt phenomenon than has been conventionally determined. As Suzanne Clark notes, "[h]igh modernism meant that the works of a few male writers stood for a whole period of literary history, with a definition of literature that would seal off the anarchic forces of the revolution of the word. It left women out of the canon and it made *sentimental* a term of invective" (35).

However, a study emphasizing the valuable qualities of sentimental writing within a modernist aesthetic does in no way negate or diminish the clearly innovative work of women writers already established within Canadian modernism. Rather, the transgressive poetics of feminine desire evident in the writing of Katherine Hale anticipates the more formal modernist practices of Dorothy Livesay, and later Ann Wilkinson, Miriam Waddington, Jay MacPherson and P.K. Page. However, as Celeste Schenk astutely reminds us, critical work in this period "must also include greater attention to comparison among women writers, especially across the Modernist barrier of form" (243). For example, Schenk suggests that scholars must continue to read the poetry of H.D. in the context of other women poets, and not merely as "that Pound-fashioned founder of Imagism resultingly isolated from other less 'fashionable' women poets" (245). Similarly, in Canada the time has come to look at how our own "isolated" female Imagist, Dorothy Livesay compares to the many other women poets writ-

ing alongside her. Katherine Hale's revisionary theosophical poems, for example, many of which contained conventional expression, need to be read alongside Livesay's sexualized Imagism or Marjorie Pickthall's feminized mythologies. Indeed, the writing of careers of Pickthall and Hale progressed almost in parallel (Pickthall's *The Drift of Pinions* appeared in 1913, *The Woodcarver's Wife* in 1922 and *Little Songs* in 1925). Similarly, Livesay's two central Imagist collections, *Green Pitcher* and *Signpost* appeared in 1928 and 1932 respectively. Hale and Livesay were writing and publishing contemporaneously, and they both, in their own ways, reconfigure what Schenk has called "similar strategies for revisiting inherited mythologies." Ignoring the rich critical possibilities of such comparisons, suggests Schenk, "enforces a Modernist prejudice against the practice of all but experimental form." Instead, looking at the,

> Differences among women modernists, particularly as established across the divide of poetic form, encourage us to think of genre, not as a bare, hypostasized, aesthetic category, but instead as a highly textured, overdetermined site of political contention, a literary space constructed ex post facto from the conflicting materials of critical, political, social and sexual bias. (243)

Emphasizing the importance of looking back in literary time, this paper is part of a larger project exploring the sentimental literary tradition as a viable and significant women's writing community from which such transitional modernist efforts could emerge. Reclaiming the work and lives of women such as Katherine Hale discovers a large and interactive community of women intellectuals and aids scholars in a reconfiguration of Canadian modernism within a cultural infrastructure that included women. Importantly, sentimentalism in the writing of Hale (and many others) and the socio-cultural activity which grew out of her cultural affiliations links modernism to a feminine literary and intellectual tradition which has been left out of conventional readings of our literary and cultural history.

Notes

1. Francis Reginald Scott, "The Canadian Authors Meet," *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* Eds. Donna Bennett and Russell Brown (Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 2002), 336.
2. Dorothy Livesay also attended this prestigious girls' school.
3. Katherine Hale, *The Life of Isabella Valancy Crawford* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1926).
4. See also Susan Atkinson's discussion of this poem, 163-4.
5. Isabella Valancy Crawford, "The Canoe", Pauline Johnson "The Song My Paddle Sings," "The Idlers," *Canadian Poetry: From the Beginnings Through the First World*

War. Eds. Carole Gerson and Gwendolyn Davies (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994), 136; 301; 306.

6. "Letter." Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Fonds. Collection 20016, box 32 file A Queen's University Archives.
7. Ibid.
8. Further, Heather Murray has since established that Emma Scott Raff's Margaret Eaton School was one of the first groups in Canada to import and mount productions of the Irish Literary Renaissance.
9. Bliss Carman, "Letter to John Garvin" 19 Dec. 1925. Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Collection 20016, box 32 Queen's University Archives.
10. "Authors Discuss Free Verse" news clipping n.d. Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Fonds. Collection 20016, box 32 Queen's University Archives.
11. Charles Mair, "Letter to Katherine Hale." 8 Nov. 1923. Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Collection 20016, box 32 file M-O. Queen's University Archives.
12. Francis Pollock, "Letter to Katherine Hale" [n.d.] Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Collection 20016, box 32 file P-N. Queen's University Archives.
13. Carman, Bliss. "Letter to John Garvin" 19 Dec. 1925. Hale/Garvin Papers. Lorne Pierce Collection 20016, box 32 Queen's University Archives.

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