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Book Review: Canadian and American Women: Moving from Private to Public Experiences in the Atlantic World

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Canadian and American Women: Moving from Private to Public Experiences in the Atlantic World. Valeria Gennara Lerda and Roberto Maccarini, eds. 2002. Milan: Selene Edizione. pp.329. \$20.00, paperback.

Reviewed by Linda J. Quiney¹

The papers included in this volume were drawn from a 1999 conference of scholars in history, politics and literature who sought to illuminate the emerging public profile and developing sense of self-definition of North American women in the industrializing era. In focussing on the historical development of Canadian and American women, these international researchers bring a thought provoking reappraisal of critical themes in women's evolution from the private and domestic into the public and political arena, from the mid-nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries.

The first section on "journeys and memories" explores women's experience of travel and observation in mid-nineteenth century Mexico and Canada, and during the upheaval of the American Civil War. Examining the recorded impressions of Anglo-Victorian women travellers to pre-Confederation Canada, Algerina Neri identifies a discourse of "colonial imperialism" governing this genre of women's writing and brings insight to the varied narrative strategies employed by Victorian women, who were eager to publish and distribute their observations, but forced to navigate "the discursive pressures of production and reception" (56-57). Class informs the impressions of these "gentlewomen" travellers, but race is equally critical to Sylvia Hilton's discussion of Fanny Calderon's published observations of early nineteenth century Mexico. Although Calderon's monograph, *Life in Mexico*, was criticized in Mexico for its outspoken views, it was widely acclaimed in England and the United States. Catherine Clinton and Lee Ann Whites further expand our perceptions of race and gender, but in the context of the American Civil War and its cultural legacy. Clinton's article acknowledges how black women's voices bring a new understanding to women's experiences of the war through their personal writing. Lee Ann Whites puts the Civil War into a contemporary context by examining the role of the United Daughters of the Confederacy as "cultural arbiters" (p. 86) in their 1935 dedication of a memorial to white Confederate heroes on the campus of the University of Missouri (86). Whites vividly illustrates how the "Confederate Rock" ultimately became the centre of national controversy in the 1970s, fuelled by the intersection of the equal rights and women's movements in the southern United States.

The second section, on women's paid labour, concentrates on eastern and central Canada in the early twentieth century, and the working and living conditions of the primarily unmarried, post-adolescent female workforce in the burgeoning textile industries. Cultural tensions, including those of language and religion, inform Phyllis Le Blanc's study of early twentieth century female boarders in Moncton, New Brunswick. Le Blanc's article illustrates "the relationship between economic transformations and cultural traditions" during women's integration into the new urban, industrial society (103). Focussing on conditions in the workplace, Tiziana Gaggino reassesses women's protest movements in Quebec textile factories in order to gauge the evolution of gender

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dynamics and women's social and economic roles. Barbara Azzarelli examines the broader implications of "fashion" as an economic determinant for women immigrants to central Canada, addressing the "multi-ethnic" dimensions of this new female economy, and its consequent effect on women's place in the family. Each of these studies cites cultural background as a dominant influence on the immigrant woman's experience of the early Canadian workplace.

The third section concentrates on the individual "portraits" of four women who represent a range of public identities over the course of the twentieth century. Valeria Lerda's biographical study of Irene Parlby offers insights into the life of the renowned Canadian reformer and activist, and examines the influences that gave passion to Parlby's cause. The life experience of "cow-girl" Florence La Due is a fascinating juxtaposition to the middle-class world of Irene Parlby. Both were newcomers to the Canadian west in the early twentieth century and challenged the status quo, but from divergent perspectives. Giovanni Migliara's study of La Due reinforces the critical influence of class and culture on the historical development of North American women. Recounting the experience of her own volunteer work in Nova Scotia, Sharon Macdonald brings the dissonance between women's private and public lives into sharp personal focus, setting the contemporary against the backdrop of the historical, and highlighting the potential of the auto-biographical source. The conflicting demands on women's lives are further underscored in the "portrait" of Doris Fleischman, the dynamic American public relations pioneer of the mid-twentieth century. Ferdinando Fasce analyzes the diverse aspects of Fleischman's life as businesswoman, activist, wife and mother, and the sometimes divergent attitudes she espoused in each of these roles, as evidence of the tensions confronting the emerging "professional" businesswoman.

The final section, on "professions and associations," returns to examine how women's collective identities established an authoritative voice in critical social movements and pioneered new professional fields. Simona Arigolas considers the disjunction between the longevity of the temperance movement in Canada, and its waning membership in the aftermath of the Great War. Ruby Heap examines the new professional opportunities for women in physiotherapy and dietetics during the inter-war era, and illustrates the evolution of women's public role in health and social issues from female volunteer to that of paid, trained professional. The three remaining essays explore the development of the peace movement. Alessandra Anteghini's article emphasizes the importance of feminist women's associations in giving impetus to early international women's peace activism. Elena Gastaldo moves to the 1960s and 1970s, articulating the history of Canada's "Voice of Women" movement, and its continuing role as an effective peace organization for the new millennium. Judith Fingard provides a fitting conclusion in considering the meaning of the peace movement for Canadian women, and "what might be distinctively Canadian and gendered about female peace activism" (312). In doing so, she traces the evolution of Canadian women's journey from the private to the public arena of women's activism over the past 150 years.

Despite a sometimes uneasy arrangement of these essays within their thematic categories, and some typographical deficiencies, this volume is a fine collection that remains true to its editorial intent to provide specific case studies for exploring the "boundaries" of women's ascribed roles in the historical development of North American

society (18). As such, it is a valuable contribution to the growing field of international women's studies, and a welcome tool for student research and discussion.