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Aller au sommaire du numéro

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Résumé de l'article

The writings of Agnes Macdonald, the wife of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, represent an important but largely unrecognized contribution to the "narratives of nation" written by women. In her diary entries, which document both her own visits to the House of Commons and the incursions of politics into the Macdonald household, Agnes merges home and parliament, recalibrating the political playing field to one in which the domestic — the feminine — has a definite place. Her published sketches convey intimate details in an active and authoritative narrative voice, evincing her dynamic role in the political life of her husband, and, perhaps more importantly, in its remembrance.

"Good Housekeeping": Agnes Macdonald Writes About Home and Parliament in Nineteenth-Century Canada

ROBIN SUTHERLAND

HOURS AFTER THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND — and Canada's first prime minister[1] — Lady Agnes Macdonald momentarily set aside her personal grief and, thinking of the nation's loss, settled at her writing desk to compose a letter to Governor General Lord Stanley. In it, she "begg[ed] His Excellency, in the interests of Canada and of the Conservative party, to send for Sir Charles Tupper to form the new administration" (Pope, *Public Servant* 79). While her advice passed unheeded (Stanley chose to approach Sir John Sparrow Thompson instead), her political acumen apparently did not. Joseph Pope, Sir John A. Macdonald's personal secretary at the time, later acknowledged that

> whatever may be thought of the propriety of Lady Macdonald's course in thus volunteering her advice to the Crown upon a matter of this kind, there exists no doubt in my mind that her counsel in itself was sound and should have been followed. (79)

This historic episode illustrates the level of political sophistication and participation that some nineteenth-century Canadian women managed to acquire when they moved physically or intellectually within the political spaces of their world. Agnes clearly believed that she was, however indirectly, part of the political machinery of her country, and that her opinion mattered. Even Pope, a seasoned political "right hand," admits that while it may not have been a woman's place to direct political policy, it certainly was not inconceivable that a woman was capable of sound political reasoning.

Agnes Macdonald's letter to Lord Stanley also illustrates the extent to which she balanced her own self-interest and well-being with that of her husband's political (Conservative) party and her adopted nation, Canada.[2] In fact, all of Agnes Macdonald's personal and published writ-

ing reflects in varying degrees these two themes of nation building and national continuity. As the second wife of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, Agnes witnessed how a fledgling nation was conceived and governed; as a skilful writer, she is an important but largely unrecognized contributor to what I refer to as the "narratives of nation" written by women. Such narratives are important for several reasons. First, they articulate a woman's perception of the politicians and the policies that shaped a nation. This is interesting not only because it provides a relatively underexplored, gendered discourse about nation, but it also contributes to our sense of a national memory as it has been preserved by women. When Agnes writes, for example, she writes partly to preserve a deliberately constructed image of her prime minister husband and the nation he helped to build.

Such narratives additionally reveal the complex relationships that "women in motion" like Agnes negotiated between domestic and parliamentary houses, and between personal and public texts. Married to a man whose concept of "home" involved an entire nation, Agnes found that her own concept of home similarly expanded to include the spaces and responsibilities involved in building — and preserving — a nation. Many of Agnes's diary entries, for example, document her regular visits to the House of Commons, where she could watch her husband at work; they also make reference to the social obligations required of her public role as Lady Macdonald. Soon after her marriage to John A. Macdonald, Agnes realizes that, for her, home and parliament have become in many ways the same place. In a lighthearted tone during the days following Confederation Day,[3] Agnes jokes that "here — in this house — the atmosphere is so awfully political — that sometimes I think the very flies hold Parliaments on the Kitchen Table cloths!" (5 July 1867).[4] A year later, she realizes that her husband's political career intrudes in more disruptive ways. Her entry for 19 September, 1868, more contemplatively records

> a trying & rather Invalid week.… Storms in the Privy Council atmosphere always agitate home air, & living so completely as I do — in my Husband's circle of Interests, I cannot help being influenced by the Political Barometer.

In merging home and parliament, Agnes recalibrated the political playing field to one in which the domestic — the feminine — had a definite place, and a specific role to play. Esther Simon Shkolnik's research in *Leading Ladies: A Study of Eight Late Victorian and Edwardian Political Wives* focuses exclusively on prominent British political wives during

the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but its discussion of a woman's domestic authority and its relationship to a man's political authority is useful in helping us appreciate the similar reconciliation of space, power, and gender that characterizes several husband-wife relationships in the political world of nineteenth-century Canada. In helping launch or sustain her husband's political career, a woman was socially recognized as an important part of his success. In terms of the kind of role the political wife played, Shkolnik explains that

> women were supposed to influence politics indirectly, subtly, and in a behind-the-scenes manner, through their menfolk, by advising and sympathizing, and especially by inspiring through their innate purity and gentleness. Such was the ideal; as an ideal, however, it was infrequently realized. Women, even conventionally minded women, were unlikely to be content to act in so confined and circumlocuted a fashion. (22)

Not content to affect influence through "innate" means, Agnes Macdonald opted to write and publish political sketches.

Her contemporaries were no less involved. Some of the most memorable (or at least documented) examples include Lady Annie Thompson, who, despite being utterly devastated by the death of her husband, Prime Minister John Sparrow Thompson,[5] still managed to meet with the outspoken and tenacious Lady Aberdeen[6] to "talk over the political situation & to give advice" (Aberdeen 162). Lady Hariot Dufferin, not subject to the same protocol that prevented her Governor General[7] husband from attending sessions in the House of Commons, became his eyes and ears in this political arena. Sir John A.'s famous five-hour Pacific Scandal speech, for instance, was served to Lord Dufferin at the family breakfast table the next morning in a lively performance re-enacted by his wife (Creighton 177). Finally, Lady Elizabeth Glover preserved her husband's deeds and memory by writing what is considered the only authoritative biography about (Governor) Sir John Hawley Glover.[8] The interesting feature of this text is that the section about his life in Newfoundland is almost entirely composed of extracts from Elizabeth's own journal (Glover 242-62). As part of the greater context of nineteenth-century Dominion politics, these brief examples reveal the various ways in which women interacted with their husbands' public, political worlds — specifically, how they observed, analyzed, discussed, and, perhaps most importantly, transmitted their own stories about historical people and events.

While masculine authority may have undermined a woman's "mo-

bility" by preventing her from seeking office or voting, or by restricting her to an observer's seat in the Ladies' Gallery of the House of Commons (subsequently referred to simply as the "House"), a woman found herself empowered by the domestic authority of the Victorian wife and the public authority of the written word. Combined, these avenues of influence and self-expression enabled women to inscribe themselves and the domestic onto the masculine political spaces of their time, and to contribute to the literature and the memory of nation. I will now consider these authorities as they appear in the narrative selves of Agnes Macdonald's diary and one of her political sketches, particularly how they articulate the domestic in the political, and vice versa.

To some extent, Agnes Macdonald's diary reads as a type of "public relations" document that inconsistently records the years 1867-72, 1875, and 1883. An engaging record of current events, her diary is a self-consciously constructed narrative, in which its author will speak — and edit — from a domestic position of privilege, and also of political liability. Agnes admits that

> of course one keeps a Diary with a vague consciousness that at some time or another, some person or another, will read some part or another of that Diary. Now — in my case — that is rather an important consideration. Living as I do — in the atmosphere of 'headquarters' — visiting as I do naturally — familiarly & constantly — with the men who are now making part of the History of their country, I am always afraid of putting anything in these pages, which, in time to come, I may find ought not to have been written. It is not that I should *ever* insert anything that I had accidentally heard or anything that had been told to me … but still I fear that my impressions & remarks may be erroneous & lead me to false conclusions. There is no denying [that] Journal writing … is somewhat of a responsibility & circumstances make it decidedly so in mine. (17 Nov. 1867)

Here, Agnes informs us that she is privy — directly or indirectly — to important political information, and that because of this, her diary has value to an outside, and presumably male, readership. While she undermines her authority as political observer by suggesting that she may at times improperly understand (and articulate) what she hears, Agnes empowers her domestic situation as an active site of political negotiation and influence, in which she exists as an important political player. On one occasion, she confesses,

> it is extremely painful, being asked to beg John to interfere, in getting places for my friends … he is so just that I know it is distressing to him to be asked for what he does not think it right to give, & yet I cannot refuse to do all in my power — legitimately — for my good old friends. (1 Dec. 1867)

Agnes evidently felt strongly that her position, while it was to support her husband, also meant she was responsible for helping advance her male friends' political aspirations by exercising her own "power." Gerda Lerner discusses this kind of gendered political authority, arguing that although women have been excluded from political power for centuries, "as members of families, as daughters and wives, they often were closer to actual power than many a man" (351).

Yet the politics of Agnes's domestic world did not merely involve her conversations with history-makers, or her ability to promote friends' requests for political favours. As one of the most recognized ladies of the Dominion, Lady Macdonald was also obliged to run a respectable and morally upright household as an example to others. Agnes reveals that she was indeed conscious of this responsibility when she articulates a

> desire to record these things … here — so that, if these poor pages live, some feeble Brother or Sister, whose hands hang listless in their trouble — may see that one like themselves — only worse & weaker — found that by Lifting her hands up — she *prevailed*! (26 Apr. 1868)

What is interesting about this passage is the way Agnes shifts responsibility for "prevailing" from being a collective undertaking to being, in the end, a female burden. It is necessary to prevail, as Agnes shows us, because one aspect of Lady Macdonald's role was to help promote a properly prime-ministerial image of her husband. In his early biography of John A. Macdonald, J.E. Collins recognizes this, calling Agnes

> the crown to Sir John's social success … a model woman, [in] lavishing her tenderness upon an invalid daughter, keeping a household that might well be the envy of any circle; attending to Sir John at late sittings of the house, and … zealously guarding his health at home or while travelling. (507-08)

This domestic concern surfaces again and again in Agnes's diary, as she worries about her husband's well-being, and expresses a desire "to make his home cheery & pleasant, and to know that he is happy & at ease" (11 Jan. 1868).

Yet, as I have already suggested, Agnes did not always find the role of the proper Victorian wife an entirely fulfilling task, or a particularly easy path to follow. Even a few years into her marriage, Agnes seems anxious in her preparations to hostess a social function: "tomorrow, I must be ready to pour out tea.… I do this very untidily being like most women who dream of stars & [word unclear] scribbling, anything but neat over my tea-tray" (2 Jan. 1871). Elsewhere in her diary, Agnes often seems to struggle desperately to exemplify the mid-nineteenth-century womanly ideal, which embodied the "four cardinal virtues — piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter 152). Referring to herself as "a laborious Housekeeper"(3 Dec. 1867), busy with "domestic fussiness over accounts" and other household responsibilities (1 Feb. 1869), Agnes also obsessively records her (and her family's) church attendance, the prayers she makes, and her human shortcomings. For example, of the approximately 130 entries in her diary, Agnes makes reference to church-going in some thirty-five of them, prayers or appeals to God in at least twenty, and her human frailty or unworthiness in over a dozen. Discouraged when she (or Sir John A.) can't attend church, her despair comes close to self-loathing as she contemplates her unworthiness:

> That I may be able to set my Face against worldliness & forgetfulness of God! That his Holy Spirit may ever be present with me – in all my goings out & comings in. I need judgement, discretion, humility, forbearance, much very much … I want Boldness & fearlessness & an unworldly temper. Grant me these things. Oh! My Father. (12 Jan. 1868)

The narrative self in Agnes's diary, then, despite how "unorthodox" Agnes claimed she was (1 Dec. 1867), spends most of her time involved in prayer and good works for the strength to set a good example for others, particularly her family and other women.

Unfortunately, this preoccupation does not always produce entertaining or cheerful prose. Unlike the positive energy and wit that characterize Agnes's travel and political sketches, we often wrestle with passages of religious fervour and self-abasement in her diary, usually when Agnes tries to explain or expunge what she sees as human weakness from her home. As a narrative strategy, however, the effect of Agnes's moralistic writing acts as a kind of protective whitewash that she uses to enhance the public image of her husband. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald worked — and played — quite hard, something Agnes would despair of when his meetings pre-empted Sunday worship, or when he

indulged in the convivial good cheer for which he was famous. Instead of attributing this to any moral failing of her husband, however, Agnes often deflects the blame for weak or unacceptable behaviour from Sir John A. and onto others, and sometimes even onto herself. As Agnes writes,

> *People* [italics added] had the habit of making Sunday a day of Visiting & business with my Husband, & he, albeit not liking the arrangement, yielded to it & accepted it.… I prayed for Guidance, & lo! it was granted. My Husband almost never sees anyone except on very pressing business.… All go to Church, & the Sunday is at least outwardly sanctified. (12 Jan. 1868)

Referring to a separate occasion, when her husband misses church service, Agnes shifts from being Sir John's spiritual conscience and becomes his corporeal caretaker, suggesting that Sunday morning "is his only quiet time, his only time of rest — he could not — ought not to forgo it" (12 Jan. 1868). At times, Agnes even takes personal responsibility for her husband's "great spirits" and well-being, both of which rely on her "being cheery & smiling" (14 July 1867).

On other occasions, Agnes takes the lead in promoting the desired behaviour. For example, in dealing with the problem of her husband's drinking, Agnes reports, "I have given up Wine — this is for example's sake, & because I think it is unnecessary, therefore wasteful" (7-8 Feb. 1968). In setting her behaviour as the example to follow, unfortunately, Agnes essentially sets herself up to bear the responsibility for her husband's inability to follow it. Settling blame on Sir John A., however, is not an option for her, and so we find her realigning this responsibility between God and her husband: "One earnest Prayer I daily offer — may the all wise Disposer, see fit to give my Darling the strength needed — that will answer my Prayer" (11 Jan. 1868).

Agnes clearly believed her role as Lady Macdonald was above all to support her husband's political career, particularly by setting a virtuous example in the home, and by using such moral and spiritual virtue as a means of filtering undesirable behaviour from the image she wished to preserve of Sir John A. Macdonald — Christian man and prime minister of Canada — in her diary. However, this was not the only avenue Agnes explored as a means to support the career or the memory of her husband. Moving from domestic home to parliamentary House, and from genres of personal to published writing, Agnes realized that she could also preserve her husband's memory in a much more public way, by recording and publishing her accounts of his political career. As we

learn from numerous references in her diary, and from her contemporaries' accounts, Lady Macdonald attended the House whenever she could, "the best seat in the Speaker's gallery being always reserved for her, and no important debate takes place that she does not follow it to the final vote, though the daylight may be dimming the electric lights" (Jesoley 3). It seemed that, as an observer, Agnes occupied a distinct place for herself within this public space, and that someone obviously expected to see her there on a regular basis, too.

I have discussed how Agnes Macdonald was charged with the responsibility for affecting change through piety and good works, and how this domestic authority influenced her discussion of politics and politicians in her personal writing; now I will discuss the influence of domestic authority as it affected the content of her published writing.

A woman's place and influence in nineteenth-century Ottawa was not entirely restricted to the confines of her own home. Nor was her intellect. To the contrary, women could — and did — access public political buildings, and when they did, they proved that the Ladies' Gallery was much more than simply a place where women could passively observe the business of government. In addition, their presence in the House also seems to have been consciously noted, or even sought after, by some politicians: female visitors, seated in the Ladies' Gallery above and behind the opposition, provided a kind of visual reward for political winners seated across from them (Reid 61). While Sir John A. Macdonald once allegedly quipped that the worst thing about being in opposition was that he no longer had "a good view"of his wife, anecdote suggests that his idea of a good view meant that he could see the messages Agnes transmitted to him with sign language used by the deaf (Newman 10). In addition, while Agnes may have demurred privately that "if a woman gives too much attention to politics … she becomes too violent a partizan and is apt to ride her Hobby to death," she was not always able to practise what she preached (26 Mar. 1868). Following one particularly heated debate during the 1878 session, then-Prime Minister Alexander Mackenzie found himself distracted by a rather unladylike outburst when (as he reported to his daughter) "Lady Macdonald in the gallery, like the Queen of the day, stamped her foot and exclaimed 'Did ever any person see such tactics!!'" (qtd. in Thompson 322).[9] A woman's motion (or, in this case, emotion) within the House was obviously noticed, and the fact that visitors and politicians alike were conscious of each other's presence in this public space — and assessed it — raises interesting questions concerning

the impact a visual presence might have had on the conduct or perceived authority of either group.

Clearly, Lady Agnes Macdonald was passionate about her politics. Well read and bilingual, she was also intellectually well equipped to discuss political issues. It likely never occurred to her that a woman should be entitled to hold office or vote, but it did occur to her that a woman should be able to use her writing talents to discuss politics, and thus contribute to a published, public memory of them. As a talented writer, Agnes Macdonald found many different avenues through which she could preserve her — and her husband's — vision of the nation.

Aside from her diary and letters, three political sketches have been attributed to Agnes Macdonald, although two of these were published anonymously. The third, "A Builder of the Empire," appeared in an 1897 issue of *Pall Mall Magazine*, credited as the work of a "Macdonald of Earnscliffe," a known pseudonym Agnes used after being granted a peerage shortly after her husband's death.[10] Because of the function of domestic authority in this third sketch, as well as its role in promoting Sir John A.'s political contributions, I will concentrate on it in this section.

In addition to these political sketches, Agnes also drew upon domestic authority in her introduction to *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Sir John Alexander Macdonald* (the first biography of Sir John A., by Joseph Pope), in which she suggested that the competence of her husband's biographer would be assisted by the "special advantages" of "a close personal intercourse" with the subject (v). This kind of public writing draws attention yet again to the working relationship of the political couple, as well as to the importance of the domestic within that relationship.

When a woman like Agnes discussed or wrote politics, she needed to strike a careful, convincing balance between her intellect and her femininity. An article in *The Dominion Illustrated* recognizes Agnes as

> a remarkable woman, even in this age of remarkable women. Her mind has the masculine qualities of breadth and grasp and accuracy and logic, yet she is capable of the tenderest expression of womanly sympathy, the finest tact and the keenest feminine appreciation. (qtd. in Newman 73)[11]

A woman who discussed politics also needed to find a way to situate herself respectably within what has been described as a fairly unruly environment: memoirs and news reports of the time indicate that the early days of Dominion parliamentary life were rather a "wild west" of governance.

Aside from cramped and poorly ventilated quarters, and a well patronized basement saloon, the House was often a turbulent place simply because the institutions, policies, and procedures required of a new country were still evolving (Ward 431).

This obviously presented a challenge for Agnes, as woman and as writer. Returning again to what she knew best, Agnes drew upon a domestic source of authority in order to help mitigate the negative effects of politics on herself and her husband. Her political sketch "A Builder of the Empire" exemplifies this mainly by acknowledging the important role a woman played in a politician's life, especially as the source and transmitter of the true facts of his life and politics. This sketch, written and published a few years after Sir John A. Macdonald's death, essentially pays tribute to his life and career as Canada's first prime minister.

In "A Builder of the Empire," Agnes promotes the role of observer as a key source of insight into the life of Sir John A. Her narrator asserts that "I, who watched him … know well what work, early and late, what long nights and anxious days [Confederation] cost him" (351). This confidence empowers the narrator as the foremost authority on her biographical subject. Such narrative authority emerges most triumphantly, however, when Agnes positions herself as key — and sole — eyewitness by claiming that, "no one can testify better than I to the enormous pressure of business he was capable of and managed so effectively and brilliantly to do," or "none knew better than I with what dogged perseverance, aided by the colleagues and friends he trusted in, Sir John fought the Canadian Pacific Railway question from first to last" (350, 353). Agnes substantiates her claims either by making detailed reference to political events, or by informing us that she has obviously been a political observer from the beginnings of Sir John A.'s career, writing, for example, that "it was during one of the fierce discussions arising later out of this question that I saw Sir John for the second time, and first heard him speak in the Legislative Assembly" (350). Such references help convince us that Agnes is a credible eyewitness and reporter.

Yet such insight, Agnes informs us, does not come merely from observing the political man in the public House. As expert eyewitness, Agnes reveals that she also acquires her information from the "most intimate conversation[s]" with the Prime Minister, which don't occur in parliament, but in settings which identify explicitly with home or with Agnes (352). For example, Agnes excerpts dialogues between herself and John A. in carriage rides home after late night sittings in the House, as

well as on the Canadian Pacific Railway during his campaign in 1886, a journey Agnes took with him (351, 353). Narratively, this positions Agnes — the feminine — as confidante, thus increasing her credibility as someone who was capable of processing political information and was a worthy recipient of it.

As recipient, Agnes transmits the story of these intimate conversations into a sketch in which she exercises full control over the act of memory and what is remembered. Stylistically, she accomplishes this through the obvious act of writing, but she also controls the function or direction of memory by situating herself as interrogator. Agnes does not simply describe the political events of Sir John A.'s political career, but at times she engages in a dialogue, between herself and the prime minister. As a narrative strategy, this has a paradoxical effect on how Agnes positions her femininity in a very masculine political and literary environment. On the one hand, asking questions demands that the narrator take control over the direction of a public discourse, which is decidedly unfeminine. On the other hand, by asking questions, she displaces the responsibility for providing content (or political discussion) onto a man, thus distancing herself to some extent from directly articulating political content. On eight separate occasions, Agnes invites Sir John A. to participate directly in shaping the memory of his career: he comments on the poverty of his childhood (347-48), his loyalty to Britain (348), and makes more general asides on, for example, what the average Canadian expected of the Canadian Pacific Railway (351). Agnes also incorporates direct dialogue to address issues that she may have believed were best articulated by her husband. She calls upon him to defend his use of "bad language" in the House on one occasion, to which he replies:

> 'I spoke in defence of a friend, you know, and the bad word didn't count!'… Very strong must have been his provocation, for Sir John's dislike to strong language in or out of parliament was always evident. (350)

In structuring part of her narrative with dialogue between herself (as wife, as writer), and Sir John A. Macdonald (as husband, as prime minister), Agnes emphasizes that she is a dynamic part of the political life her husband lived, and, perhaps more importantly, of the remembering of that life.

Working alongside the interrogative features of her sketch, Agnes also uses the phrase "I remember" on several occasions, which places her in full and feminine control over the act of remembering and transmit-

ting the memory of Sir John A. In fact, a strong female presence directs the reader throughout this piece, both through Agnes as interrogator and through the brief passage in which Agnes accesses information about John A.'s past: "a weary journey, as the eldest daughter told me fifty years afterwards, of many, many weary days" (347). Here memory, and access to the past, resides with the female and is sought and transmitted to others via another female. The female figuratively embodies the site of knowledge and the means by which that knowledge is shared with others.

Building upon this sense of domestic authority, Agnes establishes Sir John A. as a fifteen-year-old paterfamilias who became the head of the Macdonald family of mother and two sisters when his father's fortunes and health declined. While she does not explicitly connect his ability to attend to the "network of family cares, claims and responsibilities" of the Macdonalds to the macrocosm of a nation, she does imply that the young pioneer and family protector moved easily into the role of pioneering and protecting a country, suggesting that "it is no exaggeration to say that the nation he was building up now looked to him and him alone for the development and perfecting of the scheme he had pioneered and carried through amid countless difficulties" (347, 350).

The narrator in "A Builder of the Empire" also uses strong, active verbs, which stylistically position her in direct control of the action in the sketch. The use of active versus passive verb patterns has been discussed in other types of women's writing, particularly travel journal letters, where the passive voice narratively — and strategically — distances women from action or behaviour that they do not wish to be connected with. Kathryn Carter convincingly shows how this works in her examination of the journal letters of Frances Simpson and Isobel Finlayson, two sisters who travelled through Canada with their husbands, officials with the Hudson's Bay Company.[12] Because Frances Simpson avoids using verbs that implicate her in direct action or making judgements, she depicts her narrative self "as an empty vessel awaiting information or as a transparent eye-witness," and almost always undermines her experiences by using passive verbs (Carter 90). Agnes's narrative self, however, is neither transparent nor passive. Often situated as the subjective "I" in the main clauses of her writing, Agnes as narrator typically aligns herself with definite actions or judgements. In addition, Agnes uses assertive verbs such as "I believe," "I knew" (350), "I … know well" (351), and "I remember" (351), or she offers her readers her own speculations about analyses of Sir John A. and/or his politics. Combined, these narrative positions all exert a control over

the subject matter of the sketch. In a tribute that discusses the highest elected authority in the Dominion, the image of a woman in narrative control over the depiction of that authority is significant. In narrating the action in — and out — of the House, Agnes essentially controls what action will be preserved for future generations to read about.

Agnes also assumes considerable interpretive or analytical control over the political events she reports on, as the following examples illustrate. When Agnes writes, "only by inference can I judge further of the struggles in those first years" (348), or "Sir John undoubtedly considered that the most important as well as the most arduous section of his life's work lay between his election in 1844 and the year 1867" (349), or "When he showed anger I believe it was used as a weapon, and very seldom because he could not help it" (350), she takes considerable licence in representing the thoughts and actions of a prime minister. Since these impressions or interpretations are also part of a published sketch about a public figure, Agnes actively inscribes her presence onto a text about nation. While she may sometimes default to other authorities to help substantiate her own interpretations — "Those who remember Sir John later as a thorough man of the world … must marvel, as I often did, at the mental power and marvellous adaptability which led to such results after so humble a beginning" (348) — this merely emphasizes the extent to which Agnes aligns herself with, or interacts with, masculine intellectual authority. Within the political landscape, within a definite historical "national epic" perhaps, Agnes may be very well seen as manipulating a distinctively male story.

While it is true that nineteenth-century Canadian women were unable to access all parliamentary chambers, and had controlled access to others (for example, a separate Ladies' entrance, and visitors' gallery), they did actively participate in the world of politics. A woman's apparent immobility as observer merely prompted her to seek innovative outlets for her intellectual mobility. In Agnes Macdonald's case, she found such an outlet in writing. Her diary, letters, travel sketches, and political commentaries transmit the unique experiences of one of Canada's foremothers, who witnessed the process of nation-building. As such, they make an important contribution to the articulation and memory of nationhood. In addition, Agnes's public presence also signified the powerful influence of the domestic as it existed within, and alongside, public structures. Busily moving from household to Parliament, where she attended family and prime minister, Agnes soon realized that a "good housekeeper" promoted the interests of family and nation, no matter what house she happened to be in.

Long after her days as the prime minister's wife, Agnes continued to write about Canadian politics. In the extensive correspondence she maintained with Joseph Pope from 1891 to 1914, while he was executor to the Macdonald Estate, Agnes kept him up to date on what she thought of British-Canadian relations, Wilfrid Laurier's politics, and how the Borden Administration should best approach Tariff Reform. In exchange for her political insights, or perhaps to keep them equally as informed, Pope kindly forwarded Agnes the latest Hansard Reports.[13]

Not one to forget such a good friend, it is hardly surprising to find Agnes in 1896 once again settling down with pen and paper to let Prime Minister Charles Tupper know "in the strongest English [she] could get off the tip of [her] best pen'"that he should appoint Joseph Pope the next Undersecretary of State (qtd. in Reynolds 153).[14] Surely, as Pope must have agreed, this was wise counsel, and maybe political "impropriety" in a woman wasn't such a bad thing after all.

NOTES

[1] Sir John A. Macdonald passed away on 6 June 1891 at his home in Ottawa.

[2] [Susan] Agnes Bernard Macdonald was born in Jamaica in 1836 to a family of landowners. When the family's fortunes dwindled, she first emigrated to England in 1851, and then to Canada in 1854.

[3] July 1, 1867 was referred to as "Confederation Day" in a special supplement that appeared in *The Globe* on that day. See "Confederation Day!"

[4] Agnes often capitalizes common nouns in her diary, which I have not altered in my own transcription.

[5] To clarify, Sir John Sparrow Thompson was prime minister from 1892-94, having initially refused Governor General Stanley's original offer to form the government in 1891.

[6] Lady Aberdeen, wife of Governor General Aberdeen (1893-98), was by all accounts a formidable political wife. In his introduction to her *Canadian Journal*, John T. Saywell writes, "While both the law and the conventions of the constitution are silent on the point, Lady Aberdeen might well be graced with the title of Governess-General. Like Victoria's Albert she was a power that could not be overlooked. Her strategic position, as well as her political interest and insight, make her *Journal* a most valuable political and constitutional document" (xxxii).

[7] Lord Dufferin was Canada's Governor General from 1872-78.

[8] Sir John Hawley Glover was Newfoundland's Governor twice: 1876-81, and 1884-85. Elizabeth's journal records events that occurred during the first appointment.

[9] I quote from Dale C. Thompson, who excerpts this passage from a letter Alexander Mackenzie sent to his daughter. See Mackenzie.

[10] During her widowhood, Agnes signed most of her letters to Joseph Pope as "Macdonald of Earnscliffe." The introduction she wrote to Pope's *Memoirs of John A.* (1894) also included two variations on her peerage title: it is signed "By the Baroness Macdonald of Earnscliffe" at its beginning, and "Macdonald of Earnscliffe" at its conclusion.

[11] I have not yet been able to find the original text of this tribute to Lady Macdonald. Lena Newman writes that a reprinted version of it appeared in the *Dominion Illustrated* (8 Dec. 1888); the original version was printed in an uncredited Washington newspaper.

[12] For a full analysis of these two women's journal letters, refer to chapter three of Carter's Ph.D. dissertation (75-107).

[13] For specific details, see chapter 13 of Louise Reynolds's *Agnes: The Biography of Lady Macdonald*, which contains excerpts of these letters.

[14] Here, Louise Reynolds excerpts a letter written by Agnes to Pope, 30 Jan. 1896.

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