"For the joy of the working": Laura Elizabeth McCully, First-Wave Feminist

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> And no one shall work for money,
> and no one shall work for fame,
> But each for the joy of the working.

These words precede Laura Elizabeth McCully's biographical sketch in the University of Toronto yearbook, *Torontonensis*, for her graduating year, 1907. It is likely she chose the words herself. They reveal a great deal about the kind of woman she already was, and wanted to be, and seem also to place her in her historical context.

McCully emerges as a feminist of her time, an educated woman who viewed "work" as almost a mission and certainly as a central feature of a productive life. Work can be viewed as a metaphor for commitment. First-wave feminists pursued commitment to careers, to causes, and to each other. McCully epitomized such commitment, rendered all the more intense because it was pursued in the face of personal tragedy and ill-health and in the context of a relatively brief life.

During her lifetime McCully was known in Toronto, where she lived, as a poet of some repute, an ardent suffragist, and a staunch supporter of Canada's role in World War One. Yet following her death McCully was effectively forgotten. The explanation for this may apply to many women like McCully. Until recently the study of Canadian history touched on only a handful of the most prominent Canadian women and their issues. Without the benefit of the kind of national profile that women such as Nellie McClung and Emily Howard Stowe had, McCully's contributions were not strong enough or sufficiently well known to allow her a place in this history. It is only as historians begin a more detailed analysis of women's issues that women such as Laura McCully re-emerge.

Studying women like her is critical to both enhancing and challenging the scholarship which currently exists on first-wave feminism in Canada. Much of the secon-

dary literature on the subject has drawn a distinction between those women who were "maternal" feminists and those who were "natural rights" or "humanist" feminists. The former have been described as predominantly white, middle-class, educated women who sought and rationalized greater rights for women based on their special role as the bearers and nurturers of children. The Canadian suffrage movement has been portrayed by some historians as having been composed primarily of these maternal feminists who, by virtue of their approach to women's rights, have been called conservative. They are often contrasted with what are seen as more radical women who viewed the vote as one facet of a larger claim for social equality based on women's status as human beings.[1]

Yet the evidence which exists on McCully's life should compel an examination of this maternal feminist/humanist feminist dichotomy. How easy is it to pigeonhole women like McCully into one group or the other? What does the label really address in any event? That she was born into a middle-class Christian family is indisputable. That this reveals something critical about who she was and what factors drove her analysis of issues is, however, an unsatisfying premise made more so by what research actually reveals.

In her attitudes to suffrage militancy and women's rights she may be viewed by some as more radical than those seen as maternal feminists. Yet she also spoke of saving the Christian race from being swamped by foreigners and white slavers, an attitude which has been interpreted as conservative and racist. In her support for World War One some may discern a conservatism which accompanied her class. Yet her view that women should be able to become soldiers may be interpreted as the quintessential argument for women's control of their own destinies. Her middle-class, educated background places her squarely in the "conservative" profile ascribed to the majority of first-wave feminists by some present-day historians. Yet as an unmarried woman McCully was, by definition, in defiance of the image of acceptable womanhood, a fact which could not have helped but affect her political views.

The mere fact that women like McCully viewed themselves as radical cannot, of course, preclude an objective analysis of their attitudes and approaches. It would be ironic, however, if by dismissing middle-class female reformers of the early twentieth century as a group, historians returned the individual women comprising the group to the kind of anonymity for which traditional historical scholarship has been increasingly criticized.

McCully defies generalization and causes us to grapple with difficult questions about her place in the movement of which she was a part and, more globally, about the interpretations we place on the pieces of women's pasts we retrieve. As a member of the suffrage movement her beliefs and activities may also reveal more information about the membership of suffrage organizations and about so-called middle-class reformers.

In the end, her energy, eloquence of expression, and pain reveal something valuable of a woman's life which we should note and remember.[2]

Laura Elizabeth was born in Toronto on 17 March 1886 to Samuel and Helen McCully. She had an older sister, Mary, and an older brother, Kenneth. She also had a half-brother, Rolph McCully, who would appear to have been her father's son from an earlier relationship. McCully's family had some claim to significance in Canada's history. Her great-uncle Jonathan McCully of Nova Scotia was a father of Confederation and her mother was a descendant of James McBride, a farmer, magistrate, and successful pioneer in Ontario's history.[3]

McCully's parents married in 1875. Her father had been a physician since 1868. Although little information is available concerning his medical practice, McCully's own obituary in the *Toronto Star* referred to him as an "eminent Toronto medical man of his day."[4] If at first glance McCully's family appears to have been a prominent, established, and comfortable one, a closer examination reveals something far more complex. Some time in the late 1890s her parents separated. It is not entirely clear which of her parents initiated the separation. In one account given by Helen McCully, her husband left her and the children, entered into a relationship with another woman whom he may have married, and moved to Texas. In a subsequent discussion of the separation, however, Mrs. McCully indicated that she lived with her husband for twenty-three years and then left him when he became addicted to cocaine.[5]

Whatever were the true circumstances surrounding the breakdown of the marriage, it appears that Dr. McCully did not provide voluntary financial support for his wife and children following the separation. It is difficult to know how Helen McCully supported herself and her three children. Mary and Kenneth were about seventeen and sixteen years old respectively when their parents separated and their sister Laura would have been nine. The family appears to have continued to live in Deer Park, an affluent part of Toronto, and to have been able to afford to vacation out of the city during the summer. During this period Mary McCully inherited a farm property which brought in a yearly rent of $400. Kenneth and Laura were also entitled to share in the rent, as well as to share one-quarter of any sale price the property may have brought during Mary's lifetime.[6] Perhaps the income from this property provided assistance for the family's support.

It is difficult to imagine that her parents' separation would not have an emotional impact on Laura McCully's life. Marriage breakdown was a rare and socially unacceptable phenomenon in the 1890s. For McCully there would have been the added factors that she was so young and had had so much less of her father in her life than her siblings. Whatever was the long-term effect of the separation, however, it did not interfere with McCully's early accomplishments. Perhaps it spurred them on. Before

her parents' separation she had already demonstrated an interest in writing poetry. She is credited with having written her first poem at the age of eight, apparently inspired by her older sister's efforts at poetry. The poem, though somewhat melodramatic, illustrates the degree to which McCully was already ahead of her years. It was about the levelling effect which death has on all human beings regardless of social status or importance.[7]

When McCully was twelve years old she began sending her poetry to the Toronto *Mail and Empire*'s column known as the "Children's Corner." Her poems and correspondence appeared regularly through 1898. The *Mail and Empire* column provides an interesting introduction to McCully, leaving an image of an enthusiastic, motivated, and talented child who had already revealed the intelligence which would underpin her adult life.[8] In 1899 the American magazine *Harper's Bazaar* included an article on McCully, describing what made her so noticeable.

> Her work, of course, is at times crude, but the poetic feeling that runs through all her verse is true, and displays a thoughtfulness and philosophizing turn of mind most uncommon in one of her years . . . Except for her poetical turn of mind, Laura is quite like any other child. She loves to roam about through the woods, is fond of fishing, and delights in dressing dolls after original designs . . . She is a very diligent student, and her favourite studies are mathematics and physiology. Though she seems to lean toward the weird and sombre in her poetical utterances, she occasionally strikes a brighter and happier note.

After completing public school at Deer Park Public School, McCully attended the Collegiate Institute of Jarvis Street. Remarkably, during this period she also worked as one of the "lady editors" on the *Toronto Daily News*.[9] Upon graduating from Jarvis in 1903, McCully entered University College at the University of Toronto. Although in 1903, and for some years after that, women in Canada still encountered obstacles to obtaining higher education on the same terms as men, by 1900, 11 per cent of college and university students were women. The increase in female enrolment at the University of Toronto was demonstrated by the opening of two new women's residences, Annesley Hall in 1903 and Queen's Hall in 1905. Most of the women in universities were undergraduate students in arts and education but a few were in graduate studies.[10] McCully would go on to do graduate work in 1907 which would suggest that she had the approval and encouragement of her family to pursue higher education. It must also have been economically possible for McCully to undertake such a long course of study. Perhaps the rent from her sister Mary's farm property or scholarships made this possible.

As an undergraduate McCully focused her studies on English and history. She was active in university athletics, was a regular contributor of poetry to the university paper *The Varsity*, participated in the executive committee for her class as class

"poetess" in 1904, and was a member of the Women's Literary Society. During this period she was clearly beginning to develop the style that would mark her adult poetry and, in fact, a few of the poems published in *The Varsity* would appear in slightly modified form in her first volume of poetry published in 1914.[11] She wrote often of the fleeting nature of life, of coping with the absence and loss of loved ones, of the loss of innocence, and of the impact of fate on human existence. The mood of such poetry is particularly striking when one considers that McCully was not yet out of her teens when she wrote much of it.[12]

While at the university McCully faced a tragedy which must have had an enormous impact on her life. During the summer of 1906 her sister Mary was drowned in a boating accident at Sparrow Lake. The *Toronto World* reported that Mary had gone canoeing with her sister and brother on the Severn River. The canoe capsized going through the rapids and although Laura and Kenneth were rescued, Mary was lost. She was just twenty-eight years old.

McCully returned to the University of Toronto as scheduled for her senior year. There is no direct information about the immediate impact of Mary's death on her, but one of her poems, "In Autumn Time," which was printed in *The Varsity* on 11 October 1906, may have been about Mary. Separated from a loved one the poet longs for night:

> . . . Then, my beloved, do time and space but seem
> Vague, ghostly shadows fall'n twixt thee and me.
> I would that night might quench their feeble gleam
> Might I but longer, sweeter dream
> Of thee.

McCully's first published volume of poetry, *Mary Magdalene and Other Poems*, appeared in 1914 and was dedicated to Mary. In the last poem of the volume, entitled "To Mary," McCully works through her unresolved emotions of grief and guilt about her sister's death. In a dialogue between sisters, Mary comforts those left behind. The loss of Mary's voice, beauty, and presence torments her sister. Laura asks:

> . . . And shall you be forgot, my dear,
> And yours an unknown grave
> Because your love and worth to us
> Not to the world you gave?
>
> "Nay, I shall live while the rose may live,
> "And sing till the birds be dumb,
> "And the thought of me in the memory
> "Like a sweet, old scent shall come."

"In your joy and pain, in your loss and gain,
"In your song shall I have part,
"And keep my home, and find my room
"Forever in your heart."

It is revealing that McCully worries that her sister will be forgotten because she did not have a chance to make a contribution in the world beyond her family. To what extent was McCully herself driven by a fear of obscurity and the overwhelming sense that a life of value is one dedicated to service of some kind?

Whatever may have been the long-term effect of Mary's death on Laura McCully's emotional health, the profile of the young woman that emerges from the fragments available on her undergraduate years seems similar in approach to the earlier twelve-year-old girl. She was disciplined, involved, and respected by others for her maturity of thought, intelligence, and humour. Her biographical sketch in the 1907 *Torontonensis* reported, "In a class distinguished by the uniformity of excellence of its members, one to whom the word genius may be most rightfully applied is Miss McCully . . . [She] has been an honor to the pre-eminently literary course of the College, English and History."

Continuing without interruption following the attainment of her bachelors degree, McCully enrolled in and completed the masters program at the University of Toronto for the academic year 1907–8. Her thesis was entitled "A Critical Reply to Milton's Theory of Divorce." In the thesis McCully appears to be working through some of her own attitudes on marriage, divorce, and women's status and rightful place in society. Read in the context of her first-hand experience with marital breakdown, the essay takes on a highly personal tone. At the same time it contains the kernel of McCully's developing views on women and society and reveals particular concern with that aspect of Milton's argument which viewed women as subordinate to men.

Milton's work, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: Restored to the Good of Both Sexes," was presented to the English Parliament on 1 August 1643. Trapped in what he viewed as a hopeless marriage, Milton has no grounds for divorce except adultery. He sought to persuade Parliament that civil law flew in the face of the Scriptures' clear descriptions of marriage as a necessary source of comfort, as opposed to an institution created primarily to legitimize physical relationships. Despite the title of the treatise, it is clear that his primary concern was with ensuring that only men be relieved of onerous marriages, rather than both men and women. McCully's analysis is largely in response to this attitude.[13]

McCully saw marriage as a commitment to be taken seriously. Her own view seemed to be that if the marriage tie were easier to sever, people might enter into the institution with less forethought. She was particularly critical of Milton's failure to deal with the effect which the birth of children should have on arguments in favour of

more easily obtained divorce. In her view, Milton's thesis assumed a woman's place as a wife was merely as the adjunct to a man. McCully viewed this as a dismissal of the separate and meaningful identity which women acquired in marriage as nurturers of children.[14]

While the language McCully uses in her thesis presents an almost messianic characterization of women's role as mother, it would be inaccurate to assume that she viewed this as women's only true calling. Similarly, although some women viewed liberalized divorce laws as critical to women's equality,[15] McCully's opposition to divorce should not be interpreted as betraying her own feminism. Rather, her analysis must be seen in the context of opposing Milton's thesis, which supported liberalized divorce for reasons of male convenience and assumed female subservience. As she expressed it, "Milton's view of woman's position in the case is so inadequate."[16]

At the completion of her masters degree McCully was twenty-two years old. She was in Toronto for the next year. There is little information on her financial circumstances, nor is it clear whether she entered the workforce. What is evident, however, is that McCully was becoming seriously involved in the movement to improve women's rights. Her scholarly analysis indicated that she was working through her philosophy on these issues and her actions demonstrated a commitment to immediate change. In an article written some time after 1912 entitled "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada," McCully recounted the story of her recruitment to the cause.

> Not yet out of college, I had scarcely time enough to think of the question, and was correspondingly amazed to find myself at the table of honour where sat the speakers of the evening. I was struck with two or three faces of the many, and upon asking learned that a handsome, grey-haired woman, with a touch of the leonine in face and bearing, was the wife of Mr. Jas. L. Hughes. Beside her sat Mrs. Flora MacDonald Denison, the well-known author and business woman, her hair and eyes matching her black jet dress, and a fire of energy in her changing expression. On the other side of the table sat Dr. Gordon, broad-minded with a keen sense of humor, a motherly woman, kind as she is radical, - one who wears her passport in her countenance.
>
> As the meeting progressed I learned that I was to be called upon to speak as a representative of the college women of Toronto. As I had never made a public oration before, I said what I thought rather than what I intended to say, so that when I sat down I found that I was a member of the Suffrage Association, and so have remained and probably shall.[17]

From early on, McCully aligned herself with those who viewed the issue of suffrage in its broadest sense - as a fundamental component of women's right to equal treatment in society. It is also clear when reading McCully's suffrage comments that she had sympathy for the British militant and radical suffragettes. In the same article in which she describes her first involvement with the movement she speaks with great admiration of a Miss Helen Cunningham, president of a Canadian group known as the

Women's Political Club, the "militant section" as McCully described it. McCully wrote about Cunningham's willingness to "torment members of parliament, march through the streets in long procession, or raid a sleepy legislature" in order to press home women's claim for the vote. What was for McCully so impressive about Cunningham, whom she described as "scarcely more than a girl in years," was her devotion to the suffrage movement, her "steady enthusiasm," and her untiring energy. Added to this political commitment, Cunningham also possessed a certificate in music and a degree as an optician. For McCully, Cunningham must have seemed to have all the characteristics she strove for in herself - perhaps to the breaking point.

In the summer of 1908, under what she described as Helen Cunningham's leadership, McCully addressed various "patriotic and civic societies in the open air" at Toronto and Orillia. Writing about these speeches some years later, she remarked with pride that these were "so far as we know the first outdoor meetings which have marked the suffrage propaganda in Canada."[18]

On 10 August 1908 the *Mail and Empire* printed a report on one of these meetings under the headline "Orillia Invaded by Suffragettes." The report described an event which appears to have been an outdoor gathering of some seven hundred former citizens of Orillia, whom the paper referred to as Orillia's "Old Girls and Boys from Toronto." The report went on to describe an unexpected feature of the program when McCully, a "suffragette," asked for and was given permission to address the crowd.

> ... To the consternation of the committee and the amusement of the crowd she at once launched into a plea for fair play for the cause, which she declared was being traduced and persecuted in the Old Country. She was given a more or less patient hearing for about ten minutes. Miss McCulloch [*sic*], who is young and prepossessing, was backed up by a little committee of Suffragettes, who talked up the cause amongst the crowd.

The tone of the newspaper report is revealing of the general attitude towards women's suffrage. The emphasis is on the amusement of the crowd and its patient, but brief, forbearance of McCully. By describing her physical appearance, the article leaves the impression that the audience's tolerance had at least something to do with the speaker's attractiveness. At best the reaction of the audience and press can be seen as polite, at worst condescending and somewhat dismissive.

McCully appeared in public more than once that summer and may have done so in other years as well.[19] It must have taken enormous courage for her, only twenty-two years old, to speak before large audiences on a issue which, in 1908, still had few Canadian supporters. The movement had won few victories, continued to attract poor press coverage, and had few male supporters to lend it credibility in the public's eye. The National Council of Women did not formally endorse women's suffrage until 1910.[20] Private members' suffrage bills were easily defeated and supporters of the

The "young and prepossessing" Laura McCully, seen here in a studio portrait, *c.* 1919
Photo: Ontario Archives

movement were often met with more than just condescension to test their commitment. The isolation of suffragists at this time made their stand that much more noteworthy.

During this period the British movement received significant coverage in the Canadian press and Canadian suffragists knew that they were often judged by events in England. Depending on her particular perspective, a Canadian suffragist saw British women as an inspiration or a danger to the cause. Some believed the militant tactics of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which included heckling politicians, smashing windows, and engaging in hunger strikes, were inappropriate for women and counterproductive to the cause. McCully was never of this view. It is not coincidental that in her first volume of poetry her one suffrage-related poem is a tribute to the British suffragette Emily Wilding Davison who, in June 1913, to publicize the cause, died when she threw herself under the hooves of the king's horse in the Derby.[21] McCully's tribute to Davison concludes:

> And thou who bravedst the whole world's scorn
> Meeting thy death in sordid wise
> To keep a cause before their eyes

And flaunt a flag that fools have torn,
I deem thee knight of high emprize,
Dear comrade, whom with tears we mourn.[22]

The kind of commitment to a cause which Davison's sacrifice symbolized appears to have been enormously attractive to McCully. British suffragettes had been ridiculed, patronized, and ignored, and were no longer willing to use political language to press their point. These women viewed themselves as akin to soldiers. They were willing to die for a cause that was righteous, and they clothed their cause in military rhetoric. That women could fight where necessary against strong odds, could stand firm against injustice, and could make critical sacrifices was an inspiration to McCully and, in her view, further justified their right to equal treatment.

McCully did not confine her suffrage agitation to public speaking. On 3 August 1908 the *Toronto World* published her letter under the heading "Taking up Cudgels for Women's Rights: What the Fair Sex Wants is Candor, Justice and Self-Control, says Miss McCully." She refuted the claim that women's rights could be left safely in the hands of men by asking whether, in the days of slavery, the "cause of the black [could] have been safely left in the hands of the white." She went on to comment on the arguments against women's suffrage:

Your correspondent goes on to define woman's sphere. That is always a dangerous and somewhat speculative venture, and to my mind he succeeds no better than most. Each human body is provided with hands as well as head, feet as well as lungs; obviously then it was meant to do as well as think, and to walk as well as breathe. In total disregard for man's view on this point, Providence has gifted women in these details as well as man. Obviously she was meant to think, breath [*sic*] freely, work with her hands and finally, walk to the polls!

. . . Now for women's influence! Does it become a creature endowed with common sense, intended to walk upright, self-respecting and honorable in the fear of God only, to cringe and plead, beg and borrow and steal from another? That is what a woman does when she makes her husband vote her way against his personal judgment.

. . . The time is past when woman is to be "pleased with a rattle" or even with a halo. The former is infantile, the latter obsolete. What we want from man is candor, justice, self-control: what we offer is help - a "help meet for him."

What is perhaps most noteworthy about this excerpt from the letter is the emphasis McCully places on women's right to equal citizenry simply because they too are human beings. There is no safety or security in relying on others for justice. The right to control over one's own life would remain a paramount concern for McCully in all her arguments for women's rights.

In a reply A.R. Hassard, Barrister, writing under the heading "Woman v. Man," ridiculed her position. First praising her literary skill, he went on to undermine her ability to argue a political issue.

> Miss McCully very wisely refrains from argument, contenting herself merely with deprecation. Ridicule is always a safe refuge from a fact... Miss McCully is to be commended for the fearless intrepidity which is one of her engaging qualities but the refinements of literature fit her finely cultured nature better than the harsh grossness of a career devoted to advocating woman's political rights. It is to be hoped that the more ladylike calling of literature, which won her earliest love, will soon find her again among its first disciples.[23]

Hassard manages to insult McCully's intelligence, disparage the suffrage movement in general, and even trivialize the meaning of a career in literature by stamping it a "ladylike calling." If, however, McCully was bothered by this and other personal attacks, they did not interfere with her commitment to women's suffrage. She wrote some of her best work on the subject in the following years and remained active in the cause well into the period of World War One.

While there is little information on McCully's financial situation during the year after she obtained her masters degree, it is clear that her interest in academic pursuits and writing continued. She contributed poetry to the University of Toronto Alumni Association magazine *University Monthly.* With the apparent assistance and recommendation of David Keyes, one of her professors at the University of Toronto, she obtained a fellowship to study the Anglo-Saxon language at Yale University. On 2 October 1909 the *Toronto World* published her picture on the front page with the announcement that she had been awarded "a fellowship at Yale ... an honor that university has rarely accorded to a woman. During the currency of the fellowship Miss McCully will prosecute her special studies with a view to graduation as Ph.D. and will also lecture."

It is not clear why she returned to Toronto after a year at Yale without completing her studies. It is true that during this period her mother and father were involved in a lawsuit over the farm property which had been owned by Mary. Dr. McCully sought to have the property sold on the basis that he was entitled to a portion of the proceeds. The court denied his claim. During this period Helen McCully also sued Dr. McCully for support. Although she was awarded support on a preliminary basis in the amount of $16 per month, Dr. McCully appears not to have paid it. The tone used by the judges who ruled on the lawsuits suggested a lack of sympathy for Dr. McCully's actions. It is interesting to note that Mrs. McCully was represented by one of the city's prominent barristers, William Laidlaw, KC.[24] There may have been other reasons which brought Laura McCully back to Toronto, but in any event the litigation between her parents must have brought up painful memories of their separation and of Mary's death.

Laura McCully would remain in Toronto for nearly all the rest of her life. Her return marked the beginning of the most active and public period of her life, both from the perspective of her literary career and her political profile. The details of her working life are few. Biographical summaries report that when she returned to Toronto she joined the staff of the *Sunday World* at the time when Flora MacDonald Denison, whom McCully knew and admired, was writing her suffrage column, "Under the Pines," for the paper. McCully also appears to have worked for a period on the editorial staff of the *Toronto News.* In 1912 she was apparently involved in the production of the Eaton's catalogue and in 1913 was assistant advertising manager of the Robert Simpson department store. In 1915 she spent nearly a year working in Ottawa as the advertising manager of the A.E. Rea Company.[25]

Meanwhile, her involvement with the suffrage movement continued. Evidence of her membership in the Canadian Suffrage Association survives. The 1911 membership book lists her name along with other notables such as Flora MacDonald Denison, who was president, Augusta Stowe-Gullen and [Alice] Chown.[26] Two of her suffrage articles, one published in 1912 and the other sometime later, provide the most complete picture we have of McCully's view on women's place in society, their needs and their aims, and her views on militancy in the suffrage movement. She believed the movement for women's suffrage and rights was essentially radical in nature. Throughout her writing she uses "radical" and "militant" as adjectives of praise. In her view the radical nature of the movement came from its goal of winning for women rights they had never had before.

> Against the suffrage movement, essentially radical, is bound to be arrayed the opinion of the cautious people who are found in the rear instead of the van of every reform.
>
> Not that we disparage our conservative women. They are the ballast of the community, and are as much a bulwark against our sliding back as against our going forward. Every self-respecting movement must aim to respectfully convince them of its respectability, without resentment of the fact that the very stability of their position is founded on the achievements of the radicals of yesterday.[27]

She recognized the types of problems the movement had in winning support from other women. The largest group to oppose women's suffrage was, according to her, the "privileged upper class." In addition, she felt the movement had the disadvantage that it was primarily urban and laboured under a stereotyped image born of ignorance.

> It is often asked why, if women in general desire the vote, motions to that effect are not passed at meetings of National Women's Councils. The answer is that franchise work is mainly metropolitan in scope, whereas women coming up to the Councils have seldom studied the question and are surprised to find that suffragists are not uniformly unattractive unmarried women well

over forty. Regarding Mrs. Wells, the British suffragette who has been "touring the colonies" and lecturing on her experiences in Holloway gaol, the remark was heard, "Who would have expected to see a stunning woman in a Paris evening gown after that cut in the paper?" The offending cut was one of Mrs. Wells in prison garb, and she is prouder of it than of her best portrait.[28]

McCully believed it was essential for the movement to educate the public in the reasons for women's suffrage. In her view, having won the right to be educated, women now wanted the right to participate fully in society. This was an inevitable by-product of their education: "... women realized that however important education and the emancipation of the body, no human being is complete without the legal status of a citizen, and that the absence of citizenship entails on a mature, ratepaying subject of all sorts of obligations without corresponding rights and privileges. Redress of grievances is hard to obtain."[29]

She thought there was still time to educate the Canadian public and governments to support change, but her fascination with, and understanding of, the reasons for British suffragette militancy continued to grow. Speaking of conditions in England, she made clear that there was no justification for opposing militant tactics on the basis that women should not engage in such unfeminine behaviour. The fight for the extension of manhood suffrage had resulted in violent behaviour when there appeared no other way.

There is no particular reason why a woman whose life is spent between child bearing under adverse circumstances and labor in a sweatshop should be either too refined or timid to throw stones at windows. Her disabilities, over and above those of men of the same class, are such as would warrant her in trying to improve her position at the cannon's mouth. Such cases are legion in England, and women who are fighting them, however better placed in the social scale, cannot but feel that the desperate condition justifies radical methods.[30]

McCully did not extend the discussion of British social conditions to the Canadian experience. The implication was that women in Canada did not need to resort to militant tactics because, among other reasons, working-class women did not suffer the same indignities as they did in England. Perhaps on a relative scale this was true. Industrialization in England was significantly more widespread and had been established for longer than was the case in Canada. McCully may simply not have had enough experience with the Canadian working class to discuss its problems.

It would be unfair to assume, however, that McCully had entirely no interest in the social conditions of the working class simply because her written work on suffrage does not focus on them. To the extent that her poetry can be seen as a mirror of her views, one poem in *Mary Magdalene*, called "In the Wilderness," can be read as an expression of her uneasiness with her own middle-class comfort and society's refusal to deal with

inequality. In the poem she contrasts her own comfortable life with that of the young mother who cannot provide for her child and whose spirit is trampled by her burden. McCully is ashamed of receiving any praise from this woman for her kindness or love and seeks to redress her inadequacies.

> Call me not fair nor good! What shame is mine
> To hear those words! I have not hungered once,
> Nor, save as I choose, laboured beyond my strength.[31]

She exhorts those with material possessions to make changes, asking how they can prosper while so many perish and warning them that they will one day bear the consequences of such social disparities. She concludes by announcing her commitment to change.

> But as for me, I am become a voice
> Of protest in this gloom, I am consumed
> With inward fire and feel and know that flame
> But a reflection of the unrisen dawn.

The language is evocative of imagery used by the militant suffragists in expressing the almost transcendent nature of their mission. If the poem can be seen as autobiographical, it reveals McCully's understanding of the added burdens poor women bore. What is also revealing is her belief in the power of the individual voice to make a difference. How she envisioned redressing the inequality between classes of women is unclear. Perhaps she hoped the vote would pave the way not only for reducing the difficulties which all women faced, regardless of class, but also for raising the standards of living for working-class women and children.

McCully understood many of the major rationales, both principled and cynical, for withholding the vote from women. She sought to address and refute them. Dealing with the prevailing view that a woman's place was in the home, she discussed population statistics that made this attitude impossible to maintain. "It is a pity in a monogamic community like ours that at least a million more women than men should insist upon arriving at years of maturity. This is the case in the British Isles, and, they now say, in America also. Indelicate as it is, the fact remains, and there is nothing for the extra women to do but work."[32]

She went on to criticize the inequality of opportunity which women faced in all walks of life, from farming to law. The expectation that women will marry and have children has always created pressures on those who do not conform. This pressure was even more significant in a society in which it was only beginning to be respectable for middle-class women to work outside the home. Much of society viewed unmarried

middle-class women as "redundant,"[33] having no meaningful place in the world. McCully grappled with this attitude in her poetry. In "A Barren Stock" she describes Elizabeth I's description of herself as set out in the poem's title.

> . . . her bitter cry
> Seemed to exemplify the loud mouthed creed
> That heralds woman's mission but to breed,
> The res angusta all her ministry.
> Then I bethought me of the great queen's toil
> And how her wit was pivot to the world,
> Her single minded zeal a gift from God.
> I saw her mightier motherhood, impearled
> Her regal robes with blessings, free from soil
> Of self, and in her hand a blossoming rod.[34]

The poem is important because, although it reveals McCully's view that a woman could make a critical contribution to society at large, it still reflects a certain pressure to paint that role in motherhood terms. At least one favourable reviewer appreciated McCully's theme. The *Canadian Annual Review* noted that "Mother-love and mother-life is not, in one poem at least, the great end of woman."[35]

In her examination of suffrage opposition McCully discussed the fact that "liquor interests look on the enfranchisement of women as their deathknell." But instead of lamenting the impact of liquor on society and the need for women to have the vote to eradicate this scourge, she pointed out that women were less than united on the issue.

> Many temperance workers are Suffragists, but the reverse does not follow. In this case there is an extreme probability that the matter would be placed *in status quo* at once. Whatever private views on Temperance, it should be understood once for all that the questions have no logical connection whatever, and that differences of opinion exist inside as well as outside the Canadian Suffrage Society on the subject of how best to discourage drunkenness.[36]

Comments such as this are important to our greater understanding of the suffragists. If McCully's views represented those of even a sizeable minority in the movement, they may put in some doubt the analysis which has drawn a clear link between the membership of the Canadian suffrage and temperance movements and has posited the view that suffragists saw the vote more as a tool to accomplish reforms such as prohibition than as a fundamental human rights goal.[37]

Like many middle-class suffragists, McCully viewed prostitution, or "white slavery" as it was often called, as a serious social evil which only women could eradicate. She was of the view that those engaged in the white slave traffic were diametrically

opposed to women's suffrage and represented a significant lobby group. The fear which the issue generated among the middle class in particular appears also to have been tied to a concern that this evil was imported into the Christian nation by non-Christian immigrants. McCully drew a distinction between women who were forced into prostitution and those who, because of a moral inadequacy, chose prostitution. She expressed the view that laws restricting a woman's right to sell herself should be repealed since they were ineffective and simply profited those who afforded legal and political protection to such women. She does not appear to have examined social causes which might force a woman to choose prostitution, leaving the impression of the existence of a clear distinction between types of women - the innocent and the corrupt.[38]

McCully's fear of the destructive influence of prostitution was also tied to the difficulty which women of her time and class had in dealing with sexuality and the constraints which were placed upon even discussing the subject. Single women felt themselves particularly vulnerable. Not only was there fear of being forced into an immoral life because of the absence of male protectors but there was, as well, a valid concern that a single woman was more likely to be criticized for, or suspected of, unseemly behaviour.[39]

McCully was not different from most other suffragists in believing that women would use the vote to improve society in many areas in which men seemed to have little interest. Like many, she tied these different priorities to the fact that women had a sensitivity born of the capacity to bear children and an interest in making the world a better place in which those children could grow. Women's views were unrepresented without the vote and as such society laboured under a serious disadvantage. But this view should not be interpreted to mean that McCully's aims for women were limited. That she believed women would use the vote in particular ways because of a particular world view did not undermine her views on equal rights for women. Her belief in the power of the vote may in retrospect be viewed as naive, but her conviction that women could act together to effect change has distinctly modern overtones.

The pre-World War One period appears to have marked McCully's most active suffrage involvement. The war would have a critical impact on her life and cause the focus of her activities to shift. If, however, she ceased to be as active a participant in the events which led to the granting of the vote to women, her life continued nonetheless to reflect the beliefs of a woman who sought equality of treatment.

World War One required the suffrage movement to examine some of its fundamental concepts. Could the movement support its country's participation in a world war whose inevitable result would be the death and injury of thousands of Canada's young men? Should the suffrage movement relax its pressure on governments in view of such a national crisis? Should suffragists become involved in war work or raise their voices

in protest? If they did become involved, what should that involvement entail? Ultimately, only a small minority of women opposed the war, maintaining that nothing was solved by military response and in varying degrees placing the blame for the war on the behaviour of governments all over the world. Some saw socialism as the only method by which conflict could be avoided in the future. Others, unwilling to go this far, saw the solution in a renewed Christianity which would persuade people to use reason rather than force.[40] For most women, however, the immediacy of the perceived threat to the Canadian way of life excluded opposition as a choice. Most suffragists viewed the war as a sign of the failure of male politics, but saw no alternative but to support the efforts to defeat the Germans. For many, support went hand-in-hand with the message that if women were given the vote, war would not happen again.[41]

It is clear that McCully accepted the view that German aggression was a threat to democracy and civilization as Canadians generally understood it. What made her different from the mainstream of suffragists who supported the war effort was her belief that women should have the right to bear arms during the crisis, or at least train as an auxiliary military force. In 1914 McCully apparently turned down a job offer in New York City in order to stay in Canada. Whereas American neutrality in the conflict attracted several well-known pacifist suffragists such as Francis Marion Beynon, Laura Hughes, Alice Chown, and Lillian Beynon Thomas to move to the United States, it may have strengthened McCully's resolve to remain at home where she could help the war effort. [42]

Both her poetry and her activities reflected her firm belief that every Canadian must become involved in the war. Of twenty-six poems contained in her second volume of poetry printed after the war, ten focus on war-related themes. Because the poems do not contain an indication of when each was written, it is impossible to know whether there was an evolution in McCully's thoughts on the war. Overall the poetry reflects her belief in fighting, and even dying, for the cause of freedom. The poetry was an exhortation to those whose loved ones had died as well as those who had not yet become soldiers to view the war in this light. At the same time, however, McCully did recognize the war as a failure of civilization and of Christianity. In the poem "Cross Roads" she wrote of Christ watching the world from a battered and blackened cross.

His shadow falls across the Crime,
It broods upon the sinner's soul,
And till the wounds of the world be whole
Shall darken every page of time.
Re-crucified, his sad eyes scan
The sick and maddened soul of man.[43]

McCully's belief in the war effort went beyond her poetry. In 1915 she joined a group whose goal was to train women in the more military aspects of war with a view to

relieving men who had been in the Home Guard for active duty. The group which McCully joined was led by Jesse McNab, whose aim was to enlist one thousand women for the Women's Home Guard. They would learn nursing, first aid, shooting, and military drill. They were to have military style uniforms. The women were assisted in their training efforts by Lieutenant-Colonel J. Galloway, who was also the secretary of the Toronto Citizens' Recruiting League. McNab's home was to serve as the training camp.

Although there were early signs that the Women's Home Guard might attract a significant following, it appears never to have been more than an oddity. Internal difficulties arose which created a rift between McCully and McNab and split the organization. The resulting press coverage undermined the group's legitimacy. McCully, who was treasurer of the organization, resigned in protest against what she perceived as McNab's desire to control the money coming into the organization without accounting for what she did with it. She said she was determined that the organization must be above reproach particularly since "men say women are absolutely unbusinesslike in the way they conduct their clubs."[44] McNab, for her part, depicted McCully as a somewhat hysterical troublemaker who was displeased because McNab ran the organization.

It is not entirely clear whether McCully stayed on as a member of the Home Guard after resigning from the executive. The internal problems continued and by December the organization was so seriously split that the two sides were litigating over the release of funds. Some research suggests the organization disbanded after these battles. McCully, however, wrote that once the difficulties were sorted out, women continued to enlist in the organization.[45] As late as July 1916 what may have been members of the Women's Home Guard appear to have been part of a Dominion Day march of three thousand women calling for more recruits and demonstrating the role of women in the war effort.[46]

The reactions the organization engendered point out once again the use of ridicule and condescension to undermine women's goals. The organization received a good deal of adverse coverage during 1915. McCully's military uniform was described as if it were intended to make a fashion statement: ". . . very smart she looked in her khaki uniform of Norfolk cut. The coat and blouse and skirt were all of khaki and with this she wore a bright green tie. The cap looked very smart."[47] Some favourable press emphasized that women were freeing up men for overseas service. Galloway was quoted as saying he didn't mind if the women were suffragettes. In his view what mattered was that they were organizing for service. Some reports described the women participants as "amazons," while others considered the women's "toy movement" as an insult to the seriousness of the world situation.[48] Even those journalists who appear to have found the movement interesting did not view it as symbolic of women's desire for more direct involvement in world affairs.

McCully's response to critics of the movement and of herself displays both a feminist and nationalistic rationale for supporting women as soldiers. In a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Daily News* on 16 November 1915, she responded to an earlier letter from a reader signing as S.R.W., which had ridiculed both the Women's Home Guard and McCully's dispute with McNab. McCully criticized Toronto and Ontario, in general, for their derision of "the unheard radicalism of the movement." She wondered why S.R.W. wasn't in uniform and asked whether there were not better things for journalists and others to do than to laugh at women's efforts.

> But, never mind that - here is a parcel of foolish women actually aping solders. Come on you corner loafer; come on, you sneaking spy; and you, too, you paldid [*sic*] nameless sinner, and you whose pockets bulge! Now, all together, a rousing ha! ha! ha! Why, this is better than the moving-picture shows; better than watching the other fellows parade; better almost than Rome's idleness and free bread, which are surely coming . . .
>
> Meantime a new field of war opens. It may be that part of the great navy will have to move to the Mediterranean. Will the remainder suffice to keep the enemy bottled? Will never the boom of a hostile, skull-and-crossbones flying ship be heard in the waters called American? "On with the dance," there's much still to laugh at, and war contracts make good times for the moment. . . . Are there not still on the firing line hosts of grey-faced volunteers, shivering in water up to their knees, but standing between you, "S.R.W." and the Germans? Then have out your little laugh. Women soldiers, forsooth! when there are brave fellows like you to protect the women! Ha! Ha! Ha!

The letter is replete with McCully's anger. Adamant in her belief in the righteousness of the war, she could not understand men who would not enlist. While at times her criticism of men out of uniform had a fanatical ring to it, this should not be read in isolation from her frustration over her own inability to enlist. The subordinate and marginalized roles of knitting socks and comforting the sick were impossible for McCully to accept as her only contribution.

In 1916 she published an article in *Maclean's* magazine entitled "The Women Soldier: A By-Product of the War." In the article McCully used history to bolster her views on the appropriateness of women as solders. She used references to the ancient Amazons of Greece and the women of Gaul to dispel the notion that somehow the agitation behind women's call to be involved in the war stemmed entirely from the militancy of the suffrage movement. She pointed out that the suffrage movement was by no means united on the point. Some of the most ardent suffragists were pacifists, while some of the non-militant suffragists supported the war effort. Further, many of the women involved in the military movement were in her view indifferent to the question of votes for women.

To legitimize further the Canadian women's military movement, McCully described the use to which British, Russian, and German women were being put by their countries, pointing out that some Serbian women were actually fighting in the ranks as fearlessly as any man. She tried to explain why it was reasonable that many women would want to become involved in the fight. Like her rationale for giving women the vote, her views combined a belief in women's right to be able to participate in any aspect of society they wished with an analysis of the perspective they brought to the issue because of their sex. She wrote, "It is always invidious to draw lines of sex distinction where they are not essential. Yet it is true that man most resents the destruction of property, which is his personal product, and woman that of human life." She believed that when it came to fighting against the oppression which Germany symbolized, women could summon the same ability to fight that they demonstrated when protecting their young. As well, she emphasized additional reasons why women would want to fight.

> That there is a great impatience among those who feel physically fit for service, and have devoted many months to training can well be imagined. The call for recruits is so urgent at the moment, owing to the situation in the Near East, and men are so hard to get in great numbers. Many women have lost all that made life worth living, and patriotism and vengeance alike inspire them to wish to lay down their lives to prevent the further progress of the enemy.

She noted that women took to discipline better than men and that already-trained women would be better sent into battle than male raw recruits. She refuted notions that women were not physically strong enough to fight, pointing out that advantages of weight and heft had given way to training and discipline of mind and coordination of body. Overall the article was argued on the assumption that no one could doubt the efficacy of using women as an active war resource.

Although McCully seemed to realize that in Canada women would at most be used as a recruiting force, she did not give up the notion that even in this task women could be trained as soldiers. The right to be viewed as a soldier was, in her mind, critical. To society at large military symbols evoked images of serious people able to translate purpose into action by sheer force of their organization, unity, discipline, and self-control. Drilling and learning to shoot would open up doors for women to undertake non-traditional tasks. McCully's own belief in the righteousness of the war led her to assume that others could be persuaded that it was only natural for all citizens to want to participate actively in the fight against oppression. The nature of what she espoused, however, made it unlikely that there would be widespread support for her views. Helpless and violated Belgian women and children were among the images used to persuade men to enlist. How popular could a movement which emphasized self-sufficient women be?

One can argue that McCully, like the majority of Canadians, held a naive view of both the causes of the war and the nature of German aggression which seriously undermined the validity of her commitment to the war effort. For pacifists, the sight of women like McCully handing out white feathers to men in civilian clothes and parading in soldiers' uniforms would have seemed the antithesis of everything women should believe and advocate. McCully's quest for women's rights on this issue may be seen by some as having lacked a fundamental analysis. Were such women striving for an equal place in a seriously flawed social structure and by so doing legitimizing it? Contemporary women continue to have this debate. For many, the reality is that until women have the right to pass through a previously barred entrance they cannot properly assess whether they should want to stay. Perhaps if McCully had actually been in battle she would not have written the kind of poetry or made the arguments she did. What should be appreciated about her stand, however, is her conviction that she and other women should have the right to make choices for themselves.

For McCully the war appears to have become all-consuming. In addition to her other activities she worked, in 1916 at least, at the Russell Motor Company in munitions production.[49] Sometime in that year it would appear that McCully's behaviour began to change noticeably. She was hospitalized in 1917 and would ultimately be diagnosed as suffering from "paranoid dementia praecox," or paranoid schizophrenia as it is now known.

What can only be the subject of speculation is what led McCully to her state of mind in 1917. If her condition was correctly diagnosed, perhaps she had a genetic predisposition which made the manifestation of her schizophrenia inevitable, with only the timing of its appearance and its severity left to be determined. Although McCully's mother's medical records noted that there was no history of mental illness in the family background, her brother Kenneth had also been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. He had violent tendencies and for several periods between 1916 and 1919 was a mental hospital patient.[50]

Modern literature on schizophrenia has examined the role environmental and social factors, including stress, as well as genetic factors play in the illness. Schizophrenia is seen as a heterogeneous syndrome with varying causes, symptoms, and outcomes for the patients.[51] In the face of such a complex picture, it is difficult to ignore the possible role which life experiences have on the manifestation of the syndrome and its severity.

By reading McCully's case files and the general literature on schizophrenia one can see evidence which would have supported the diagnosis her doctors made. At the same time, however, what makes her case files so important to us is the symbolic significance of the kinds of thoughts that plagued her and the extent to which they reveal the doubts and fears which existed in a woman who seemed so outwardly strong. Was she ridiculed

and made to feel an outsider too many times? It is possible she felt frightened by her own professional and personal insecurities and doubted the road she had taken. Perhaps McCully's breakdown and the accompanying hallucinations and delusions were at least in part the culmination of the pressures exerted on a woman who had sought to create and live a life for which precedents and role models were few.[52]

Interwoven with these pressures was a history of family pain caused by her parents' divorce, Mary's death, and Kenneth's illness. Finally, the role which her diabetes may have played is also important to consider. By 1923, when she was admitted to hospital, McCully was terminally ill with diabetes. The date of the initial diagnosis of the disease is not known. When she was admitted to the Reception Hospital for the Insane in 1917 she was already thirty pounds underweight, a classic symptom of diabetes. By 1917 she may have already begun to feel the serious physical effects of the diabetes which might have contributed to her psychological vulnerability at that time.[53]

The hospital records confirm that the Women's Home Guard experience was a stressful one. "She says she made herself conspicuous [in the Women's Home Guard] and then began worrying." The records indicate that her deterioration increased after she began working in the munitions plant.

> She afterwards began working in an ammunition plant, worried quite a bit, and says she received attentions from other workmen that were not at all pleasant. Finally she became the victim of auditory hallucinations and she used to hear these voices calling out to her, and making vile, vulgar suggestions. Fancied she was being hypnotized. She went to a doctor, who told her she was hypnotized. Finally, about a week before admission, she wrote a letter to the Chief of Police . . . The Police brought her to the Reception Hospital. She seems to be rather of a paranoid type, is easily excited, very positive in her opinions. Is a good talker. Is about thirty pounds under weight.[54]

The letter which McCully wrote to the chief of police is dated 9 February 1917. It begins with a description of the sexual suggestions that she claimed had been made to her by a number of people, including a foreman in the munitions plant and Sir John Carling Eaton.[55] She describes torture of small children and the threat of torture against her. She says that she had been threatened night and day with torture and "when I accused these people of being *white slave traffickers*, they tried to make me believe that I was being initiated into the secret service. My Doctor informed me that I had been hypnotized. For six months this was kept up, and the idea was to degrade me by amonimable [*sic*] suggestions into consenting to become a common prostitute."

The letter is also replete with references to her status as a poet, to people taking credit for poetry she has written, and to criticism by others of her ability. She ends the letter by saying: "Who would not pay to be rid of the hypnotist? But as I have not the

money to pay, and as I will not give my body or soul to degredation [*sic*], I will fight. You have a daughter of your own, sir - what will you do for me?"[56]

While there can be little doubt that the author of the letter is ill, yet the subject matter of her delusions is very revealing of women's vulnerability in general. Many feminists of McCully's day, particularly those who were single, might have had concerns with the same issues as McCully, albeit in more manageable and coherent ways. British suffragettes recorded instances in which men simply came up to them while they were distributing suffrage pamphlets and whispered " filthy language" to them. One such suffragette noted that "although she retaliated by chasing them down the street, she ended many days feeling depressed."[57] Perhaps McCully actually faced such harassment, both in her workplace and elsewhere, which then preyed on her mind.

By February the medical staff at Reception Hospital seemed pleased with McCully's progress. Her letter to the chief of police must have resulted in some type of criminal or quasi-criminal charge being laid because in March 1917 the medical director of the hospital provided the written opinion that a return to court would be detrimental to her condition. He requested that her case be disposed of without her presence.[58] McCully was discharged from hospital in April 1917 without a medical diagnosis being made. Although she may have appeared able to cope, her inner turmoil was far from gone. She was readmitted on 19 June 1917 after being found walking naked in the streets. The symbolic nature of this act for a "respectable" woman of McCully's time is difficult to ignore. But nothing is more evocative of the pressure which she felt society placed on her than the explanation given for her decision to remove her clothing. The hospital records describe the period leading up to her readmission. It is not clear who wrote the description but it may have been one of McCully's doctors:

> About a week previous she had been at Queen St. complaining and talking in a very erratic manner. She now says that while she was here before going around people were talking about her, saying immoral things about her, and they have continued doing so ever since. She gives two or three occasions when she had definite hallucinations, such as, one day when passing a carriage shop on Queen St. she heard them passing remarks about her morality, said they mentioned my name in connection with hers. The people down where she has been living have also been saying things about her and accusing her of having had a child. She finally became so worried about these things, and so anxious to prove that she had always been a good girl that she got the idea in her head that if she appeared on the street perfectly naked everyone could see that she had been perfectly good.[59]

She appeared exhausted and alternated between quiet and disagreeable behaviour. Her clinical record noted that on 20 June she requested clean sheets. She removed the mattress from the bed, put on a blanket and sheet and then "laid herself out." She

remained like this for some time "as if dead, crying bitterly." The next day she was noted as saying she "is not ashamed of anything she had done." Three days after her readmission to Reception Hospital she attempted suicide by slashing her throat with a broken glass jar. She succeeded in injuring her trachea, was treated as Western Hospital, and then transferred to the Ontario Hospital for the Insane, where she remained until 18 March 1918.[60] The records for her hospitalization on this occasion are very brief. The diagnosis of paranoid dementia praecox was made, and the clinical records describe a patient who alternated between cheerful agreeableness and constant discontent and criticism of everyone around her. There is no indication of the improvement in her condition which would have led to her discharge, but a notation in Kenneth's hospital record in September 1918 noted that his sister had been in the hospital but had recovered.[61]

There is not a great deal of information concerning how McCully lived in the years between 1918 and her final admission to the Hospital for the Insane in March 1923. She had been a free patient during her stay at Reception Hospital and the Hospital for the Insane, suggesting she would have had to work upon leaving the hospital in order to survive. It appears that in 1918 she attempted to study law at Osgoode Hall but was unable to continue for reasons of health. According to her medical records, she then studied real estate and, when well enough, worked in this field. She was apparently incapacitated for months at a time with what the hospital described as nervous sickness but what she identified as malaria. Kenneth's hospital record noted that in the months prior to August 1918 she had been teaching school.[62] It is a testament to McCully's extraordinary energy and intelligence that she was able to accomplish as much as she did during this period.

In 1919 her second volume of poetry, *Bird of Dawn and Other Lyrics*, appeared. It seems to have been printed in pamphlet form or through private publication and is dedicated to her mother. No publisher or printing date appears on the volume, but the preface by McCully was dated 12 December 1919. While the preface reveals something about the difficult times McCully had faced in the years preceding and subsequent to her breakdown, it is in many ways a cryptic and puzzling document.[63] In it she indicates that she has worked on the content of the volume from 1914 to the date of printing. During those years she had lost many friends. She pays tribute to people who inspired her and in particular notes John Garvin, the editor of *Canadian Poets* in which her poetry appeared, for whom she felt "a very personal feeling of kindness because of his tactful efforts to find me work when I was poor and dejected."[64]

The nature of the poetry included in the volume has been already been discussed. The last poem in the volume is worth particular mention, however, because it reflects McCully's prophetic recognition that her life is over.

MY CODICIL

Because my youth was spent in studious ways,
And all the gay sun-lovers passed me by;
While vexing cares absorbed maturer days
So breathless driven, I scarce reasoned why.
To all things young I make my plaint and cry,
To all that beauty which I loved to praise.
Lay me where summer winds and petals fly,
Let round-eyed children come with wondering gaze,
And girls with flower faces call and play
Above and round me all a summer's day.

Build me a little place of native stone,
With steps for lovers when the moon is high;
There where the bluff looks o'er the blue, alone
Save for the living, let me living lie,
For I shall sing your love and breathe your sigh
Whilst yet the lyric winds and trees intone.
And if my heart were dust it would be stirred
To hear again the immortal, whispered word,
And my pulse rise in ashes at the breath
Of glorious deeds and thoughts more permanent than death.[65]

At some point McCully's diabetes began to render her incapable of functioning. There would appear to have been no money to support her and her mother. By March 1923 McCully and her mother were barely surviving in an unheated room at 3 Fitzroy Terrace in Toronto in what was described as "a half starved condition." McCully, who was 5 foot 10, weighed eighty-two pounds on admission to the Hospital for the Insane. Her mother was also described as "emaciated."[66]

It appears that friends were attempting to assist in McCully's care but were unable to continue to do so. McCully and her mother were both admitted and certified insane by two physicians. The clinical assessment of McCully's mental state is particularly poignant. Whether it reflects the doctors' interpretation of her life or in part her self-assessment, it reveals the degree to which she struggled against society's image of womanhood. Acknowledging that at the age of ten years McCully was called "the girl wonder on account of her extreme cleverness and literary ability," the report then seems to reduce the history of her life into one sentence by stating, "From a child Miss McCully has been more or less of a 'freak.' "

McCully remained hospitalized for just over a year, during which time her mother was in constant attendance. The hospital records reveal the extent to which, on this

last hospital admission in any event, it was the ravages of her diabetes rather than her mental state which overtook her. They noted that "her chief ambition in life at present is to get sufficient food to satisfy her ravenous appetite."[68] Despite the fact that by 1923 insulin was available in North American and was particularly well known in Toronto where it had been discovered, McCully's case was not an example of the miracles insulin could effect. There is some suggestion in her records that she was suspicious of insulin treatment and accused the doctors of "trying to make a human wreck of her." She would apparently not keep to a prescribed diet, which would have been a critical component of her treatment. Such an attitude to the disease and treatment was not uncommon among diabetics and was one of the difficulties physicians had in treating it.[69]

The records document the devastation wreaked upon her personality and her body by the disease. Her only joy, and it was short-lived, came in the moments when she was eating. Despite this, she clearly continued to have flashes of insight into her life, interwoven with what the records describe as examples of her delusions. In one instance, while expressing a belief that she was a member of royalty, she reported that "she never got married because she was too highly educated for any average man, and because it would be necessary to employ several servants and any men she ever met could not afford that."[70]

In the end, McCully never left the Hospital for the Insane. She died there on 7 July 1924. She weighed sixty pounds. The balance of her estate remaining with the Office of the Public Trustee was $22.35. Her medical records had listed her occupation as "clerk."

Tributes to McCully were immediate and heartfelt. She was heralded as a literary figure of importance and unique ability. Her personal strength as a friend was repeatedly mentioned and her belief in justice and the value of spiritual things was praised. One tribute linked her death to the strain of wartime service. "Tragedy still pursues us in a so-called peace time. The early passing of Laura McCully is but another of these."[71] In his tribute to McCully, Albert R. Hassard quoted from a letter she wrote to him in which she talked about death.

> Surely it is well when the long labour is ended that we should return to mother nature again silently. I sometimes wonder if Heaven would be as desirable as the boon of ceasing to exist at all. For there are qualities which the world takes from us that even God Himself could not replace. We change utterly and irrevocably. And when the desires that made existence a joy and a hope, are gone, who can say that because with weary hands and faltering step we have still trodden the path of duty who can say that "it is well with our souls"? It is not well with them.[72]

Ultimately, when "the joy of the working" became impossible for McCully, life must have seemed devoid of purpose.

Throughout her brief life Laura McCully was an activist, a person who did everything with energy and decision. Consistently, from a very young age she sought to create, to accomplish, and to effect change. She seems never to have been voluntarily idle and interwove the various aspects of her life in a complex web. In the midst of her campaigning for the war effort, she undertook a metrical translation of the epic poem *Beowulf.* Her commitment to the improvement of social conditions found her, at one point, the honorary president of the *Toronto World* Children's Humane League. Her poems were published not only in Canada but in American publications such as *Harper's Bazaar* and the *New York Herald.* She appears to have been a member of the Progressive Club and been associated in some way with the Toronto Women's Press Club.[73]

Her life was everything that most women's lives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not. In a social order that predetermined much of a woman's existence from cradle to grave, Laura McCully and women like her stood apart, trying something new at every turn. Each choice must have carried with it enormous consequences, the impact of which we can only guess. McCully sought higher education and was not content to stop at one degree but kept on going. She never married and had children, but insisted on making a full life on her own. She spoke and wrote about her political views and did so in a way which often challenged people to change. In short, she seemed an unashamedly public figure as only a few women felt strong enough to be. Yet her family history and her breakdown reveal something of the complexity and difficulty of her life and of the choices she made.

How should we, from the perspective of the late twentieth century, assess Laura McCully? She was by no means the most radical of women, and examples can surely be found of women who advocated a more fundamental social reordering than she did. To our eyes she may seem to have laboured under some of the biases of her community. But she was also brave, strong, and committed, and she tried to improve and expand the roles to which women could aspire, both professionally and personally. We should not minimize the importance of context in assessing her contributions. In some ways she and her generation were trying to find answers to questions they themselves had only begun to articulate and define. She is important both because she is representative of certain women of her generation and because she speaks to us about the framework within which individual women who have preceded us have lived their lives. By appreciating both the accomplishments and frailties of women like Laura McCully we can better understand the complexity of our past.

Much of the primary research material for this paper is to be found in two locations, the Thomas Fisher Library at the University of Toronto and the Ontario Archives. The

University of Toronto holdings include McCully's university transcripts and master's thesis, as well as university correspondence and some newspaper clippings. McCully's suffrage article, "The Women Suffrage Movement in Canada," is found in the Flora MacDonald Denison papers. The Robarts Library at the University of Toronto contains all the newspapers relevant to this period on microfilm. The Ontario Archives maintain hospital records pertaining to Reception Hospital and the Ontario Hospital for the Insane and has the medical records of McCully, her mother, and her brother. The references in these notes to document numbers represent my own method of organizing the hospital material, since the material has not been separated into any particular order. Each document is given a number in the order it appears in the case file. The Ontario Archives also has the McCully family papers. The litigation between McCully's parents is reported in two law report series, the *Ontario Law Reports* and the *Ontario Weekly Reporter.* These can be found in the law library at Osgoode Hall in Toronto.

1 See Wayne Roberts, " 'Rocking the Cradle for the World': The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 15-45; and Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

2 For a thorough discussion on reclaiming and writing about women's lives, see the introduction to Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

3 John Garvin, ed., *Canadian Poets* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, 1916), 422. For information on Rolph McCully, see Ontario Archives (OA), McCully Family Papers (MCFP), box MU 3286.

4 *Toronto Star*, 9 July 1924, 19.

5 See *McCully* v. *McCully* (1911), 32 OLR (Div. C) 156 in which Helen McCully appears to have indicated that her husband left her in 1896 after twenty years of marriage. Her differing account is found in the medical records compiled during her stay in the Ontario Hospital for the Insane. See OA, Helen McCully, Hospital for the Insane, case file no. 16147, document 5. The two versions can, perhaps, be reconciled if Helen McCully's argument was that, although she physically left the marriage, her husband, by his behaviour, effectively deserted her and the children.

6 *McCully* v. *McCully* (1909) 14 OWR 788; *McCully* v. *McCully* (1911), 157.

7 "A Canadian Song-Bird," *Harper's Bazaar*, 4 November 1899, 942. A copy of a poem written by Mary McCully entitled "Liberty" was published in the *Toronto Sunday World* on 6 November 1921, 9, fifteen years after her death. See OA, MCFP, box MU 3286, envelope 3.

8 See *Mail and Empire*, 30 April 1898, 5; 25 June 1898, 5; 23 July 1898, 5; 6 August 1898, 5; 24 December 1898, 7, for examples of McCully's poetry contributions.

9 *Torontonensis*, vol. 9 (1907), 30.

10 Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 161-62.

11 See *Torontonensis* (1907), 72, and *The Varsity*, no. 3 (27 October 1904), 42. McCully wrote "Song" and "Nocturne" which appeared in *The Varsity*, no. 8 (1 November 1906), 67 and no. 7 (27 November 1907), 107, respectively. These were published, with minor changes, as "Song in the Mountains" and "Varsity Nocturne" in *Mary Magdalene and Other Poems* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1914), 88 and 55-56.

12 For examples of her poetry, see *The Varsity*, "A Toast," no. 9 (8 December 1904), 150; "Song of the Road," no. 15 (2 February 1905), 243, "Thanksgiving," no. 4 (26 October 1905), 55; "In Autumn Time," no. 2 (11 October 1906), 20; "A Song of Four Seasons," no. 8 (22 November 1906), 121; and "To One Absent," (4 March 1907), 311.
13 John Milton, "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce: Restored to the Good of Both Sexes" (1643), in Ernest Sirluck, ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), vol. 2, especially p. 475.
14 Laura E. McCully, "A Critical Study of Milton's Theory of Divorce" (MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1908), 12-13.
15 See Deborah Gorham, "Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminist," in Kealey, *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, 66; Crystal Eastman, *On Women and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).
16 McCully, "A Critical Study of Milton's Theory of Divorce," 14.
17 Laura E. McCully, "The Women Suffrage Movement in Canada," 374, Thomas Fisher Library (hereafter Fisher), University of Toronto, Flora MacDonald Denison Papers, (FMDP), box 8a. The meeting at which McCully spoke while still an undergraduate took place on 25 April 1907. See *Toronto Star*, 26 April 1907, 11.
18 McCully, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada," 374-75.
19 The section on McCully in Charles G.D. Roberts and Arthur L. Tunnell, eds. *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Trans-Canada Press, 1934), 340, indicates that she led an open-air rally in High Park in Toronto in August 1908, but this could not be confirmed in the newspapers of the period. Although the event appears by McCully's own account to have taken place, the date may be different than that suggested by Roberts and Tunnell.
20 Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 12.
21 Midge Mackenzie, *Shoulder to Shoulder* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975), 240-46.
22 *Mary Magdalene and Other Poems*, 52.
23 *Toronto World*, 6 August 1908, 3.
24 *McCully* v. *McCully* (1909), 788; *McCully* v. *McCully* (1911), 156.
25 OA, Laura E. McCully, Ontario Hospital for the Insane, case file no. 161148, document 7. Secondary sources indicate McCully worked for the *Toronto World* and the *Toronto Sunday World*, but the details could not be verified in the newspapers themselves. Similarly, her work at the Robert Simpson Company could not be substantiated.
26 See Fisher, FMDP, box 2. It is noted in the membership book that McCully sold $29 worth of tickets for a banquet and 55 cents' worth of suffrage buttons, and was selling tickets for the sale of a picture, all part of the association's fund-raising efforts. The buttons which McCully sold were probably the sunflower buttons of yellow and brown which members wore. The membership book noted that "The Sunflower symbolizing light and widsom is the Club's badge." In her introduction to the reissue of Alice Chown's *The Stairway* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), xxxvii, n. 57, Diana Chown confirms that the Miss Chown listed in the association's membership list was Alice. She left the Canadian Suffrage Association in 1912 to form the Toronto Equal Franchise League.
27 McCully, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada," 371.
28 Ibid., 375. This commentary may have been more apt for the period before 1910.

29 McCully, "What Women Really Want," *Maclean's*, January 1912, 281.
30 Ibid., 280.
31 *Mary Magdalene and Other Poems*, 32. In the biographical sketch of McCully in Garvin, *Canadian Poets*, 422, McCully is described as "an ardent advocate of the rights of women, political, professional and industrial."
32 McCully, "What Women Really Want," 283.
33 This is a term used by Martha Vicinus, in her book *Independent Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985) to describe the nineteenth-century attitude to middle-class unmarried women. Vicinus describes these women's efforts to counteract this view by creating societies of their own and making important social contributions despite opposition from family and strangers alike.
34 *Mary Magdalene and Other Poems*, 17.
35 J. Castell Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing Company Limited, 1915), 766.
36 McCully, "What Women Really Want," 282.
37 See Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, 69-85.
38 McCully, "What Women Really Want," 282.
39 For more in-depth analysis of prostitution, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), and Ellen Carol Dubois and Linda Gordon, "Seeking Ecstasy on the Battlefield: Danger and Pleasure in Nineteenth Century Feminist Sexual Thought," *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 1983), 7-25.
40 See Barbara Roberts, "Why Do Women Do Nothing to End the War," *CRIAW Papers* (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1985).
41 Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), and *The Next of Kin* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1917).
42 *Toronto Telegram*, 9 July 1924, 8.
43 Laura McCully, *Bird of Dawn and Other Lyrics* (Toronto, 1919), 13.
44 *Toronto Daily News*, 31 August 1915, 10.
45 See Barbara M. Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), lxxxviii; and Laura McCully, "The Woman Soldier: A By-Product of the War," *Maclean's*, April 1916, 35, for differing views on the fate of the organization.
46 *The Globe*, 3 July 1916, 9. The illustration shows McCully marching at the head of a procession of women in uniform.
47 *Toronto Daily News*, 27 August 1915, 4.
48 *Toronto Telegram*, 27 August 1915, 4; Hopkins, *Canadian Annual Review*, 1915, 336-37.
49 OA, Laura McCully, case file no. 16148, document 7.
50 Kenneth's history is a troubled one. He was unable to finish his course of study at the School for Sciences and thereafter worked irregularly in the mining camps and on the railway. His first hospitalization came after he locked himself in a room of the house where he lived with his mother and Laura. He remained in hospital from the end of December 1916 until January 1918. He was returned to hospital in August 1918 by Laura and two policemen after he became convinced his mother was trying to feed him rotten food and struck her. A hand-written sheet in his medical file said he was suffering from "homicidal [*sic*] mania and needs the restraints afforded by the Reception Hospital." Although Kenneth was admitted as a free patient, Laura agreed to pay maintenance in the amount of $5 per month. On 29 October 1919 he was discharged from the hospital and was noted as having improved. The only other information on him comes in a letter

from the records department of the University of Toronto and from Laura McCully's hospital file from her 1923 admission. In a letter dated 29 April 1922 the records department notes that Laura and her brother appear to have no address and together "move about from one place to another." The hospital records note that Kenneth McCully is "very nervous and peculiar." See letter from the Records Office, University of Toronto, to A.B. Fennell, Acting Registrar dated 29 April 1922; OA, Kenneth McCully, Ontario Hospital for the Insane, case file no. 13753, document Nos. 1, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 15; and ibid., Laura McCully, case file no. 16148, document 7.

51 Harold I. Kaplan et al., eds., *The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1980), 2: 1093 and 1168.

52 In *Writing a Woman's Life* Carolyn Heilbrun, in describing the task of biographies of women, writes: "Biographers of women have had not only to choose one interpretation over another but, far more difficult, actually to reinvent the lives their subjects led, discovering from what evidence they could find the processes and decisions, the choices and unique pain, that lay beyond the life stories of these women. The choices and pain of the women who did not make a man the center of their lives seemed unique, because there were no models of the lives they wanted to live, no exemplars, no stories" (p. 31).

53 See Kaplan, *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, p. 1928, in which it is stated that having diabetes "constitutes a formidable psychological stress that may exceed a patient's adaptive and coping capacities."

54 OA, McCully, Reception Hospital for the Insane, case file no. 1411, document 1.

55 She would appear to be referring to Sir John Craig Eaton, 1876-1922, who was her contemporary.

56 McCully, case file no. 1411, document 1.

57 Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 263.

58 McCully, case file no. 1411, document 11.

59 Ibid., document 1.

60 Ibid., documents 1, 13.

61 Kenneth McCully, case file no. 13753, document 10.

62 McCully, case file no. 16148, document 7; Kenneth McCully, case file no. 13753, document 9.

63 On page 2 of the preface, McCully explains her loss of weight and illness, attributing them entirely to an open swamp and cesspool which was located in front of her home in the Beaches area of Toronto: "When I had lost about fifteen pounds weight, my physicians diagnosed variously. My ideas had become lurid, incidentally. Some opined that my whole career had shown a defective mind; others said I was nervous . . . On account of all this I spent some time at the public expense three years ago in a hospital (euphemism!) especially designed for those not able to escape medical attention. How the daughter of the Philistine rejoiced! And the local authorities, on strike for a raise in pay, pointed the finger of scorn at the untimely fate of agitators with degrees. As a matter of fact, worse things than 'fever-an-ager' rage where there is no influence and plenty of work, but little food or coal. 'Live horse and you'll get oats' - and I have."

64 McCully, *Bird of Dawn and Other Lyrics*, 2.

65 Ibid., 28.

66 Helen McCully would remain in the Hospital for the Insane long after Laura had died, not because she was insane but simply because she had nowhere else to go. Throughout Laura's illness she cared for her and dealt with the many mood swings, both good and

bad, which her daughter's terrible physical deterioration caused. Despite clear evidence to the contrary, she believed Laura would recover. After Laura's death in 1924 the hospital administrators made efforts for years to find friends or relatives or old age homes which were willing to assist in Mrs. McCully's care. Finally, in 1928 she left the hospital. The clinical record noted, "This patient was taken out by Miss Lucy Doyle, representating [*sic*] the Women's Press Club, who have, I understand, raised a fund of some $14.00 [*sic*?] to look after Mrs. McCully in recognition of the ability of the late Laura McCully, daughter of this patient." Helen McCully died in 1931. See OA, Helen McCully, Ontario Hospital for the Insane, case file no. 16147, documents 1, 2, 5, 8, 18, 19 and 23.

67 McCully, case file no. 16148, document 7.

68 Ibid., document 7.

69 Ibid., document 7; See Michael Bliss, *The Discovery of Insulin* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 160, 243.

70 McCully, case file no. 16148, document 7.

71 *Toronto Telegram*, 9 July 1924, 8.

72 Albert R. Hassard, "Laura McCully," *Canadian Bookman*, September 1924, 192; OA, MCFP, box MU 3287, Scrapbook no. 1.

73 Roberts and Tunnell, *A Standard Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, 340; Garvin, *Canadian Poets*, 422.