

THE VISUAL POLITICS OF THE FEMALE FORM IN 1920S CANADA

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ABSTRACT

In 1920s Canada, new tropes of the female form emerged in response to evolving ideas of nation, modernity and the female body. Reoccurring use of images of women formed tropes that bolstered nationalism in their use as allegories for nation and their communication of ideals of citizenship, modern motherhood and propriety. The visual feast of female imagery that emerged in these years sprung from the intersections of modernity, nationalism and the female form in new and modern ways. At times artists expressed the modern in ways that spoke directly to popular international tropes and other times sought representations that were thought to be uniquely Canadian and nationalistic.

This dissertation examines these visual images, exploring how artists used of the female form in high art, magazines and feature films in 1920s Canada. It asks what political work did the female form do in an era when Canada was developing its own identity as a nation state on the world stage? Did 'woman' matter to constructions of nation when nation was being articulated through modernist forms or as a modern project and did it take particular national form as 'Canadian'? This research project explores how the female form was taken up by artists to express ideas of nation and modernity in the 1920s.

This project draws from hundreds of visual images of the female body produced across a number of mediums. An examination of paintings, sculptures, prints, high art photographs, advertisements and feature films created by Canadian artists form the source base for this project and provide a cross medium view of image production that illuminates the parameters and complexities of using the female form in different contexts.

DEDICATION

For mom, who taught me about the true image of woman.

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I'm grateful to many for helping me through this project. Thank you to Marie Lynn Hammond for allowing me to touch and use images of her flapper grandmother and read her personal writing. The experience was real and inspiring. To my mentor, Dr. Kathryn McPherson, Thank you for guiding, shaping, pushing and challenging me – as a woman and as an academic. Your influence on me has been wide and I am deeply grateful. My committee was patient, thoughtful and supportive and they have redefined for me the standard of female cooperation and encouragement and personal excellence. Thank you Marlene Shore and Anne Rubenstein. Thank you also, to my examination committee, (Jennifer Stephen, Ann Porter and Ilya Parkins) who challenged me to express my work more fully, especially Ilya Parkins whose meticulous notes helped me tidy my final submission. Thank you to Lisa Hoffman, Karen Dancy and the History Department crew who helped me navigate the maze of university life. We would all be lost without you. To Mandy, my schoolmate and friend-for-life - high-five, sister! Thank you to the Women and Gender Reading Group for your feedback and camaraderie. To my parents, my sister and my husband, who sacrificed time and energy to care for the kids so that I could plug away, I'm grateful, grateful, grateful! To my children, success is won through a balance of passion and persistence, but seldom alone.

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indifference and the should-be-obsolete type of femininity of the bulk of Canadian women.”¹ She continued,

“The average Canadian woman still loiters about the domestic hearth, still hankers after social prominence more than public service, and still fails either to understand politics or to grasp their fundamental importance, as a means to an end... What we lack is experience in practical politics, courageous leaders, and the will to take direct action. When, with the requisite knowledge, we have attained these, we shall have arrived in politics and public bodies to stay. But the day is not yet.”²

Artist Victor Child, who paid the better part of his bills illustrating for newspapers and magazines, was charged with the task of producing art for Perry’s article. Child turned to the classical allegory. ‘Canada’, the larger-than-life woman in Greco-Roman garb and ivy crown, conveys the strong and steadfast nation balanced and protected by her shield of public service while presiding over the ‘obsolete femininity’ of the three young moderns before her whose interest in sports, fashions and lipstick seemed enough for

¹ Anne Anderson Perry, “Stag Politics,” *Chatelaine* (May 1930): 10-11, 61. Illustration by Victor Child.

² *Ibid.*

Child to communicate that they have no interest in politics or national well-being. This commercial drawing is among thousands of images that circulated throughout the 1920s that expressed the controversies of nationhood through the bodies of women.

This dissertation examines these visual images, exploring how artists use the female form in high art, magazines and feature films in 1920s Canada. It asks what political work the female form did in an era when Canada was developing its own identity as a nation state on the world stage. Did 'woman' matter to constructions of nation when nation was being articulated through modernist forms or as a modern project and did it take particular national form as 'Canadian'? This dissertation explores how the female form was taken up by artists to express ideas of nation and modernity in the 1920s.

The concept of mimesis is important to this study, where art references or bears "family resemblance" to other art rather than imitating it, which viewers recognize as tropes with relational features.³ As such, this study relies upon a wide range of visual images, from films to sculptures to understand how images functioned across mediums and to interrogate how mediums shared common set of icons. The repetition of these images was so considerable that tropes could be seen to function allegorically. Just as

³ Grant Pooke and Diana Newall, *Art History : The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 9.

Barbara Melosh argues for 1930s New Deal public art in the United States, artists “relied on a common vocabulary of recurring images deployed for a range of rhetorical purposes.”⁴ In Canada, repetitive images of women formed tropes that bolstered nationalism as allegories for nation and their communication of ideals of citizenship, modern motherhood and propriety. The large amount of female imagery that emerged in these years sprung from the intersections of modernity and nationalism with the female form in new ways. At times artists expressed the modern in ways that spoke directly to popular international tropes and other times they sought representations that were thought to be uniquely Canadian and nationalistic.

The female forms produced in 1920s art were shaped by the complex intersection of the war's end, technological advances, first wave feminism, urbanization, a growing consumer economy and modernism. A number of female tropes emerged in these years, yet the flapper prevails almost exclusively in popular memory of the 1920s. Although the Modern Girl is arguably the most exciting and exuberant image that comes out of the decade, her popularity among academics and in contemporary popular culture eclipses the multiplicity of female images that existed, singularizing and oversimplifying imaginings of modernity at that time. This project identifies

⁴ Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture : Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater*, New Directions in American Art (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 4.

and examines the various tropes of the female image and how they functioned to constitute and discourse on nation.

The scholarship on women in the 1920s is a rich body of feminist work that has uncovered the vast array of women's experiences in these years. Among the canon works that address this period are Veronica Strong-Boag's social history of English-Canadian women over a lifespan⁵ and Andrée Lévesque's social history of womanhood and the state in Québec,⁶ which have set the stage for historians of the interwar years. Joined by Kathryn McPherson's social history of women's work in Canadian nursing,⁷ Suzanne Morton's study of domestic life in working-class Halifax,⁸ Carolyn Strange's wide-spanning work on law,⁹ gender and morality and Cynthia Commachio's examination of mothering and the state,¹⁰ woman historians have successfully and compellingly written women into the Canadian history narrative and focused the feminist lens that continues to inform the work of women and

⁵ Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," *Labour* 5 (1979).

⁶ Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules : Women in Quebec, 1919-1939*, Canadian Social History Series (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994).

⁷ Kathryn M. McPherson, *Bedside Matters : The Transformation of Canadian Nursing, 1900-1990* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁸ Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings : Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁹ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem : The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Cynthia Commachio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).

gender historians. This literature traces how older expectations of women and new ideas of femininity were being negotiated – and coexisted – in these years. It was in this context that visual images of Canadian women were reimagined as part of the modern.

Although examination of representations of women were taking place as early as the 1970s, evident in Mary Vipond's article on 1920s images of working women, it is only in the last twenty years that social and cultural historians have really taken up representations of women as serious sites of examination.¹¹ These include Sarah Carter's exploration of the visual politics of the Native Woman image,¹² Cecilia Morgan and Colin Coates' comparative study of the images of Laura Secord and Madeleine de Vercheres,¹³ Kathryn McPherson's deconstructive examination of the Canadian Nurses' War Memorial unveiled in 1926,¹⁴ and Lindsey McMaster's look at images of working girls in the West.¹⁵ These authors all seek to track the

¹¹ Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," in *The Neglected Majority : Essays in Canadian Women's History*, ed. Susan Mann and Alison L. Prentice (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977).

¹² Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women : The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*, McGill-Queen's Native and Northern Series (Montreal ; Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

¹³ Colin M. Coates, and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine De Vercheres and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Kathryn. McPherson, "Carving out a Past: The Canadian Nurses' Association War Memorial.," *Histoire Sociale* 29, no. 58 (1996).

¹⁵ Lindsey McMaster, *Working Girls in the West : Representations of Wage-Earning Women* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

political uses images of women. Two authors in particular assess the issue of modernity in particularly useful ways.

Jane Nicholas' dissertation on 1920s visual culture and Alexandra Mosquin's dissertation on Canada's international exhibition displays abroad offer a rich picture of how images contributed to understandings of gender, citizenship and nation. In her dissertation *Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture* Jane Nicholas takes a case study approach to examining how images of women's bodies were a site for social discourse. "Modern Urban Culture in the 1920s was a culture where the eye was frequently brought to rest on women's bodies,"¹⁶ she writes, and through her focus on events such as art shows, national celebrations and beauty pageants she offers up a solid picture of the importance of the female body to constructions and understandings of modernity, sexuality, gender, class and race. Alexandra Mosquin's dissertation is also an exploration of Canadian visual culture, but takes our attention abroad, focusing on how Canadian artists visually constructed the image of Canada.¹⁷ In Mosquin's work we see explicit attempts by Canadian artists to refine the national image through visual means and establish an image of Canada that was a departure from the Victorian imagery of staples

¹⁶ Jane Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture" (Dissertation, University of Waterloo, 2006), 4.

¹⁷ Alexandra Mosquin, "Advertising Canada Abroad: Canada on Display at International Exhibitions, 1920-1940" (York University, 2003).

in abundance to a more modern direction in displays that focused on economic power, tourism, business railways. Mosquin's focus on displays draws out the repetition of visual symbols that came to project a modern Canada outside of Canada – beavers, maple leaves, bilingualism, Mounties and maps. Together, these two studies paint a colourful picture of how imagery constituted the nation abroad and at home and how the nation was made modern through images. This study builds on Nichols' and Mosquin by exploring how Canadian artists working across diverse mediums took up discourses of modernity and change through the female form.

This study contributes to this rich body of scholarship by offering up an examination of the visual politics of the female form by exploring artists' use of the woman image in art for rhetorical purposes in 1920s Canada. It asserts that what counts as Canadian imagery is wider than art historians have suggested and it writes Canada into the international discourse on the female form and modern nation building. This work also extends the discussion of the image of woman in this decade beyond the Modern Girl. Although the Modern Girl as a trope was the ultimate visual expression of modernity, this study proposes that the flapper image was only one facet of the female image engaged in the discourse on modernity in 1920s Canada.

Method

This project draws from hundreds of visual images of the female body produced across a number of mediums. An examination of paintings, sculptures, prints, high art photographs, advertisements and feature films created by Canadian artists form the source base for this project and provide a cross medium view of image production that illuminates the parameters and complexities of using the female form in different contexts. Collecting images for this project began with a survey of Canadian magazines with large circulations produced in both French and English Canada, favouring magazines that professed to be women's periodicals or contained "women's pages": *Everywoman's World* (1914-1923), *La Canadienne* (1920-1923), *Chatelaine Magazine* (1928-1930), *Maclean's Magazine* (1918-1920) and *La Revue Moderne* (1919-1930).¹⁸ A page-by-page survey of each periodical resulted in a take-home collection of over 1000 images which were studied and organized into categories of analysis based on recurring tropes of female imagery such as mothers, classical allegories, and modern girls and also into

¹⁸ Although these magazines were all 'national' periodicals, they were all produced in either Toronto or Montreal and in some instances were direct relatives. *Chatelaine* for example, was the brainchild of *MacLean's* who was seeking wider readership and *La Canadienne* was actually a sister publication of *Everywoman's World*, edited in Toronto and they often shared the same content translated.

more specific categories based on reference points such as in motion, illness or corsets.

The homogeneity of images discovered in periodicals begged the question of whether there were images circulating that differed from those in other mediums. High art sources expanded the discussion considerably as the culture of fine art allowed for the expression of the modern in very different ways than commercial art. More than three hundred works of high art were found in digital and print catalogues, in secondary literature (particularly important in the case of works now owned by private collectors), and in art museums, galleries and in public spaces. These paintings, prints, sculptures and photographs were organized into categories as periodical images were, some sharing categories with commercial images and others requiring new categories of analysis such as the nude.

It seemed that including silent feature films as a source for this study was a logical choice given the quickly growing popularity of silent films in the 20s, the position films occupied as between art and the commercial world, and the indisputable modernness of the medium. Of the less than two dozen films that were produced and viewed in Canada in the 1920s, more than half have been lost or destroyed or only exist in segments. Eleven of those feature

films were screened and incorporated into this study.¹⁹ This triad of sources represents a great deal of the visual culture circulating in this decade. These were the images that men and women saw in this decade – the visual iconography that informed their perceptions of their nation and the people in it.

Photographs occupy a marginal place among the visual images addressed in this study mostly because they didn't appear in magazines until late in the 1920s, mostly in editorials and fashion pages. As a relatively new method of representation, photography took on the air of being documentary in nature and to some degree, indisputable, but photographers and stylists worked hard with angles and profile to ensure that photographs still projected the same fashionable silhouette as sketches. Portrait photography was not new to Canadian viewers but in 1930 artists began to dabble in photography of the nude which, as Stephen Brooke argues for the 1940s, "blurs the line between a number of categories: between nude photography and documentary photography, between public and private spheres, and between the psychological and the social."

²⁰ Nude paintings had already long established the tradition of the female

¹⁹ There are no known surviving films from French-Canadian production companies although we know that a handful of films were produced there despite fervent clerical opposition to filmmaking and viewing among French Catholics.

²⁰ Stephen Brooke, "War and the Nude: The Photography of Bill Brandt in the 1940s" *Journal of British Studies* 45 no. January 2006: 121.

nude subject and the male gaze, but photography would prove to disrupt the waters of debate in new and complex ways.

The social and cultural history produced about Quebec has demonstrated that differences in social and cultural climate resulted in different lived experiences for women in French and English Canada. In visual culture, these differences manifested in slight but interesting ways. The image of the bob-haired flapper, for instance, appeared in *La Revue Moderne* before it appeared in *MacLean's* or *Everywoman's World*. One of the earliest images found was of a young bob-haired modern girl drinking wine for health – an image that would likely have been shut down quickly in English Canada where prohibition was more fervently followed. Quebec's link to France may explain why French-language magazines featured modern fashions slightly earlier than other Canadian magazines. In particular, Montreal proved to be a hotbed of artistic exploration of the body, especially among the Beaver Hall Group of Painters where artists were encouraged by teacher William Brymner to paint the nude and the body in general in new ways. When one particularly contested nude had to be taken down in Toronto due to viewer complaints of its explicit eroticism, it was taken down and re-hung in Montreal where it displayed without consequence. On the other hand, Quebec artists had to contend with a powerful and opinionated Catholic community led by Lionel Groulx who outwardly condemned visual material that was thought to

be corrupting a young generation of French Canadian with visions of sexual desire and petty consumption. Movies fell under particular fire in Quebec and although we know that there were silent films successfully produced there, none have survived.

If it was through the images of women that the modern nation was imagined and projected, spreading ideas of gender, modernity and the relationship between the two, but fraught with symbolic metaphors, images of women require careful unpacking. Tani Barlow argues that images of modern women were ultimately historically deficient, “icons of mediated, or thought, conscious experience.”²¹ Their emergence marked the creation of what she refers to as “new historical objects,” made political in their claim to reality.²² She urges us not to take the evidence as historical fact but to decode it, for metaphors “obscure more than they reveal.”²³ Marina Warner agrees, writing, “meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women and they often do not include who she herself is.”²⁴ This study, then, makes no claim to understanding the “real” or “lived experiences” of women, but

²¹ Tani E. Barlow, “History and the Border,” *Journal of Women's History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 26.

²² *Ibid.*, 19; 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 331.

rather seeks to understand the visual landscape on which debates over women's "role" in modern Canada took place.

Modern Canada and Artistic Expression

The years following The Great War featured a shift from empires to nation states, reinforced by redrawing the map along national lines, and drew attention to the national economy in Canada, particularly as economic crisis plagued European countries like Italy, Germany, Spain and Russia.²⁵ For Canada, the War validated the nation, as it became a member of the Imperial War Cabinet (1917), The League of Nations (1919) and an autonomous signature on the Versailles Treaty at the Paris Peace Conference. Canada was coming into its own in international politics and working to build and international cultural and economic reputation through exhibitions that advanced a modern "staples vision of Canada."²⁶ The project of creating a sense of unified nationalism within Canada had to navigate a number of competing challenges and changes – not only Canada's new international status, but retreating British interests, growing American influences and a dispersed and disparate population of Canadians. This was a post-colonial period for Canada. Growing self-

²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 131-32, 38.

²⁶ Mosquin, "Advertising Canada Abroad : Canada on Display at International Exhibitions, 1920-1940".

confidence and optimism among Canadians encouraged a move toward national self-determination which promised to unite the people of Canada – to fill the void left by war and to bridge the divide between Canadians that war had drawn attention to.²⁷

Simultaneously, modernization brought on massive, far-reaching, high-paced change that forced new ways of seeing and living in the world. It might be useful to consider the terms modernization, modernity and modernism as a cascade effect, where modernization and the socio-economic changes it brought about (nation-states, industrial upheaval, demographic change, capitalism, desecularization, the culture of mass) fundamentally transformed the historical experience of space and time, what we call modernity. In turn modernism, or the cultural vision, was profoundly influenced until change was no longer a fear but a cultural necessity. All that comes out of this place, time and experience is modern. Even images and ideas deemed primitive in a paradoxical way fed the energy and definition of the modern.

Certain tangible things were undeniably modern – radio, mass print, mass production, films, new advertising techniques, jazz, increased mobility and the clean line aesthetic that dominated visual art. It was a brave new world of consumption where consuming was framed as a virtue and

²⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 374.

ironically, as a therapy for modern ills.²⁸ The shift of cultural power from Europe to New York²⁹ meant that Canada was now closer to the action, although this didn't mean that Canadian artistic trends automatically followed suit with what was popular across the border. In 1920s Canada the call for national art, particularly in painting and filmmaking, demonstrated a faith that images could define, unite and ultimately, constitute nation.

These were modern artists – made modern by their engagement with the commercial world of art, the technology of mass copy and movie-making, the internationalism of art exhibits and artistic trends and finally, in their representations of the world. Artists were key participants in the making of the distinctive domestic and international modern image of Canada - domestically through the production of art and exhibitions such as Canada's Diamond Jubilee and the CNE exhibit of 1927 discussed by Nicholas and abroad through exhibition pavilions like those discussed by Mosquin in her thesis *Advertising Canada Abroad* – and they had consciousness of their cultural role as visual meaning makers. As Molly Ungar argues for the social circle of artists and visionaries who gathered weekly in Montreal, “they saw

²⁸ Adele Heller, Lois Rudnick, ed. *1915, the Cultural Moment : The New Politics, the New Woman, the New Psychology, the New Art & the New Theatre in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 5.

²⁹ Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty : Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995), 21.

themselves as modern, and part of the avant-garde that would change the world."³⁰

International Context

Transformations being experienced in Canada were not isolated. A number of nations were undergoing modern transformations in this period, which resulted in similarities in uses of the female form imagery that emerged from these countries. Indeed the concept of nation as contained within borders requires reconsideration in a study such as this one for sign systems are often impervious to political boundaries. For Barlow, images of modern women for instance, stand in a metaphorical place she calls "beyond a boundary."³¹ We see the evidence of the permeability of imagery from the impressive international literature identifying the New Woman and Modern Girl worldwide. Anne Heilmann and Margaret Beetham's 2004 collection, *New Woman Hybridities*,³² the 2008 collection produced by the Modern Girl Around the World research group,³³ Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco's

³⁰ Molly Ungar, "The Last Ulysseans: Culture and Modernism in Montreal, 1930-1939" (York University, 2003), iv.

³¹ Barlow, "History and the Border," 9.

³² Ann Heilmann, Margaret Beetham, ed. *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

³³ Alys Eve Weinbaum and Modern Girl Around the World Research Group., *The Modern Girl around the World : Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

2011 *New Woman International* and the numerous individual projects examining New Woman/Modern Girl phenomena in various countries have successfully demonstrated not only that modern girl images emerged throughout the world in the 1920s but that these images shared particular similarities - her link to the city, to modernity and to consumer goods. A colonial figure, the modern woman image permeated boundaries across six continents often trumping national political ideology. That's not to say that variations did not exist between countries. National nuances were signposts for domestic politics. Ideologies from nation to nation influenced notable characteristic differences - the visual politics of race in particular functioned very differently nation to nation.³⁴ Strangely, Canada has remained unrepresented in the international discourse on the Modern Girl, which this study hopes to rectify, for as we see in Chapter 4, the Modern Girl was a vibrant and multifaceted visual tool for Canadian artists in communicating ideas of propriety, hope, anxiety and fear for the national well-being.

Just as Modern Girl imagery circulated nationally in commercial art, so too did high art trends. By the 1920s, representations of modern nation through woman's form were an international artistic trend which nations articulated differently depending on the particular social and cultural

³⁴ Kathy Peiss, "Girls Lean Back Everywhere," in *The Modern Girl around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization*, ed. Alys Eve and Modern Girl Around the World Research Group Weinbaum (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 350-51.

conditions in which they worked. Trends employed by artists in Canada were connected to artistic trends in other countries. Some artists in Canada shared in the nostalgic trope of women working in landscape with artists such as Fernando Amorsolo working in the Philippines, whose woman-in-landscape paintings have been interpreted as nostalgic and sentimental in their attempt to preserve an image of the traditional Filipina woman in a romantic rural landscape.³⁵ The climate for nostalgic art was favourable in this decade, despite the popularity of all things modern in commercial culture.

The majority of Canadian artists were exploring modern techniques and representations that projected the nation, and them as artists, as modern. They were exploring new representations of both male and female bodies that broke with gender and artistic conventions that dominated before 1920. Particularly in the case of the disenfranchised male nude figure, Canadian artists seemed ahead of a trend to reexamine masculinity visually, which emerged more widely during the depression. By the early 1930s high art photography in Canada by artist Harold F. Kells was catching up to the sexually explicit indoor nude photography produced by German photographer Germaine Krull in his series "Akte" in 1922.³⁶ But there is no

³⁵ Mina Roces, "Gender, Nation and the Politics of Dress in Twentieth-Century Philippines," *Gender and History* 17, no. 2 (August 2005): 365.

³⁶ Clare I. Rogan, "Acting the Lesbian: *Les Amies* by Germaine Krull," in *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s*

evidence that any Canadian artist was interested in connecting with the highly abstract work of photomontage artists in Germany and France who were using the female form as symbolic of modern commercial society, the fragmentation of the modern experience and the cyborg nature of the modern body.³⁷

Images of women produced in 1920s Canada were in conversation with emerging international tropes of the modern female form. There were, though, facets that made the Canadian project distinct. Firstly, the discord in imagery and artistic climate that existed between English and French Canada created a unique tension within Canadian images of women that illuminated differing perceptions of propriety, sexuality and the modern. In Quebec, the influence of France and concern over the loss of French culture to immigration and English Canadian dominance created a unique climate where the tensions of modernity were evident. Secondly, the influence of French fashions brought to Canada via Quebec as well as through artists studying abroad, articulated visually the flow of cultural, political and social influence and power from Europe. Third, the persisting colonial domination of

through the 1960s, ed. Elizabeth and Vanessa Rocco Otto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

³⁷Matthew Biro, "Hannah Hoch's New Woman: Photomontage, Distraction, and Visual Literacy in the Weimar Republic," *ibid.* Elizabeth Otto, "Paris-Dessau: Marianne Brandt and the New Woman in Photomontage and Photography, from Garçonne to Bauhaus Constructivist," *ibid.*; Christine Boyanoski, *Permeable Border: Art of Canada and the United States, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1989).

indigenous cultures was reproduced when artists painted native women as fading into the landscape. Finally, artists' integration of the female form with nature as both a means of civilizing the nature and engendering the female form was an artistic convention that few artists failed to reference in Canada. Even across the English-French Canada line and across differing communities of artists, the landscape and nature permeated artistic renderings of the female form throughout the 1920s.

Despite the popularity of abstract modernist style overseas and across the border the artistic climate in Canada remained conservative. A number of factors contributed to this conservatism. In the United States, the 1913 Armory Show in New York City was instrumental in popularizing abstract approaches to art among art patrons and artists and inspired 250 more modernist exhibits in New York between 1913 -1918.³⁸ It wasn't until the early 1930s that abstract American art began circulating in Canadian exhibits. Unless artists travelled to New York or abroad to see more progressive works they had limited and fragmented exposure to what was being produced outside the country. Arthur Lismer wrote in 1933, "In Canada we see disconnected examples in galleries, and reproductions in magazines and, having lost the thread, we rage against the detached units of our modern

³⁸ Christine Boyanoski, *Permeable Border: Art of Canada and the United States, 1920-1940*(Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 1989).

day."³⁹ Canada also received fewer artist visitors and influences from abroad who preferred to go to the United States where the proliferation of abstract modernism was apparent and bore some connection to modernist trends in Europe.⁴⁰

In Europe, political unrest contributed to European experimental avant-garde movements. Nazism in Germany, Fascism in Italy and Bolshevism in Russia prompted reaction and artistic expression from artists and intellectuals.⁴¹ Although some influences from Europe returned with artists who did brief stints of study abroad, the art scene was reluctant to embrace stark changes in aesthetic representation. Post-impressionism received a good deal of criticism and cubism was outright rejected.⁴² Canadian artists were members of a small community which bred less variety in artistic subject and style.⁴³ Some artists continued to do as they pleased and found themselves pushed out of artistic circles or their work pulled from exhibits and hidden from public viewing. Bertram Brooker and Kathleen Munn, two of Canada's great abstract artists of the 1920s, quit painting in abstract style altogether

³⁹ A. Lismer, "Art at the World's Fair" *Canadian Comment on Current Events* 2 (Oct. 1933) n.p. in Boyanoski, *Permeable Border: Art of Canada and the United States, 1920-1940*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹ Modris Eksteins, *The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: 1st Anchor Books, 1990), 326.

⁴² Evelyn Walters, *The Women of Beaver Hall : Canadian Modernist Painters* (Toronto :Dundurn Group2005), 15.

⁴³ Boyanoski, *Permeable Border: Art of Canada and the United States, 1920-1940*, 16.

after frustrating failed attempts to exhibit and promote abstract work. Public opinion drew the line at moderate modernism. Art critics charged American modernist work as too similar to French models, leaving many with the impression that abstract work simply wasn't Canadian.⁴⁴

The significance of visual culture in this period circulates around the growing importance of the act of seeing. The plethora of images brought on by mass culture was becoming a given in the 1920s as Canadians were growing accustomed to being bombarded and titillated with images and their repetition. This was also a time when the search for icons of self-definition occupied the intellectuals and meaning-makers in western nations. For artists, this was a key cultural moment – as meaning makers and idea shapers, how artists used images would help shape modern Canadian imaginings of nation. This exploration of Images produced in 1920s visual culture will divulge the primacy of the female form as allegorically indispensable to artists of the period.

Chapter Outlines

In this decade painting the Canadian north in modern style was fast becoming a national trend, popularized by the Group of Seven, their contemporaries and their disciples. As discussed in Chapter one, artists re-imagined the north in this decade, turning landscapes from bountiful to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 48; Eksteins, *The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*.

apparently barren and taming the wilderness with clean horizons, smooth, reductionist shapes and for a few modern figure artists, by populating the landscape with the image of woman. Visual representations of woman-in-landscape would run across all mediums in this decade, used extensively by commercial artists and forming the backdrop to Canadian feature films. This study begins with an examination of the uses of the Classical allegory and the emergence of a new modern woman-in-landscape allegory in Canadian visual culture.

Chapter one looks at the uses of the female form as allegory for nation. It argues first that although classical allegories persisted in this period, artists began to draw on the figure in landscape to symbolize nation, introducing a new modern allegory to the visual discourse on nation. This chapter also considers the homogeneity of these images in constructing a racist mythology of an all-white citizenship and national character. Chapter two examines imagery of mothers, locating them within the discourse of nation building, not only as reproducers and caregivers, but also as cultivators and civilizers of the white race. This chapter also investigates the absence of the pregnant body and how mothers' work was codified in symbols. Chapter three addresses images that accompanied the discourse on fashion, gender and consumption. It looks at the fashionable female form, the conflicting uses of the 'modern' female body and constructions of the

modern woman consumer as raced and classed. Chapter four explores the imagery of fear, considering visual constructions of social anxiety and danger through the female body. Looking at images of nudes, urban girls and dancing flappers this examination uncovers how closely linked concerns for the national body were tied to and visually encrypted on the female form. The chapter also considers how the photographs of real, successful and independent women were handled to contain and undermine their feminist power.

CHAPTER 1. ALLEGORY, NATION AND THE FEMALE BODY

This Chapter explores the idea of nation as it was projected by Canadian artists in the 1920s. It examines one of the most persistent visual motifs in western history – the classical allegory – and her continued use throughout the 1920s as a powerful symbol of nationhood and the virtues. As the use of the classical allegory picked up among commercial artists, painters began experimenting with new representations of nation that rivaled the classic allegory, by placing the female form literally *in* the Canadian nation state. The use of the female form by artists reflected the usefulness of artistic representations of women's bodies as symbols of expression. In her work on the use of classical allegory in the western world, Marina Warner reminds us that the body is "chief among metaphors... The female body recurs more frequently than any other: men often appear as themselves, as individuals, but women attest the identity of someone or something else."⁴⁵ We see considerable evidence of this in the 1920s as the female body gets taken up by artists to communicate ideas about nation and the modern. That is not to say, however, that these images reflected the lived experiences of real women. As Warner argues,

Justice is not spoken of as a woman... because women were
thought to be just, any more than they were considered

⁴⁵ Ibid., xix.

capable of dispensing justice. Liberty is not represented as a woman... because women were or are free...Often the recognition of a difference between the symbolic order, inhabited by ideal, allegorical figures, and the actual order, of judges, statesmen, soldiers, philosophers, inventors, depends on the unlikelihood of women practising the concepts they represent... Although the absence of female symbols and a preponderance of male in a society frequently indicates a corresponding depreciation of women as a group and as individuals, the presence of female symbols does not guarantee the opposite.⁴⁶

In the 1920s the female image gained in usage by Canadian artists seeking to portray ideas of nation in new and modern ways. Some artists made attempts to use the male body to convey nationhood, As Mosquin explains in the case of the failed use of the robust male farmer in International Exhibitions abroad.⁴⁷ Artists chose to take up the female image to expressed the modern nation.

⁴⁶ Ibid., xix-xx.

⁴⁷ See Alexandra Mosquin, "Advertising Canada Abroad : Canada on Display at International Exhibitions, 1920-1940 " (York University, 2003).

Gender and the Body

Ideas of gender were already shifting in the 1920s. The image of the battered male contributed to the disruption of gender norms. After the War had claimed 60,000 Canadian soldiers, and returned 170,000 wounded (tens of thousands so physically and mentally maimed that a return to normal life was impossible) real men's bodies became reminders of the brutality of War.⁴⁸ As Joanna Bourke argues for Britain, "The wartime aesthetic of the male body... spread into civilian society after the war. The male body was no more than the sum of its various parts and the dismembered man became Everyman."⁴⁹ Representations of dismembered or battered men were rare in the 1920s. War memorials, writes Jonathan Vance, used intact male bodies to commemorate soldiers and generate national pride, but they evoked a looking back, a reflection on the sacrifices of ordinary soldiers rather than a strong and virile present, and spoke nothing of the future.⁵⁰

Not all artists subscribed to the myth-making imagery of the soldier and masculinity more widely. Some chose to portray the crisis of masculinity that marked the post-Great War experience. If the presence of a male image is,

⁴⁸ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 11. 30,000-50,000 Canadians also died in 1918 in a global influenza epidemic. See Margaret Conrad and Alvin Finkel, *Canada : A National History* (Toronto: Longman, 2003), 370.

⁴⁹ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male : Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, 19. She discusses the work of Jay Winter on responses to the war as a looking backwards in time instead of forward.

as John Berger argues, determined by “the promise of power he embodies” then the dismembered male was not a hopeful image. The female image however, with its history of attesting for things and ideas outside of herself, gained usage in discourse on nation and its future.⁵¹ This idea is demonstrated visually in Stanley Turner's *A War Record*.



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Figure 2: Stanley Turner, *A War Record*, c1920c. Oil on Canvas. Canadian War Museum.

Arguing that “no artist working in Canada produced any statement against the war”⁵³ cultural historian Maria Tippett reads Turner's painting as a positive statement of the Great War. She writes,

⁵¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 45.

⁵² Stanley Turner, *A War Record*, c1920c. Oil on Canvas. Canadian War Museum.

The bright colours evident in the picture and the smiling faces of the veterans and their admirers on Toronto's Davisville Avenue make it clear that this is to be viewed as a happy scene, a gathering of men who think their sacrifice has been worthwhile.⁵⁴

But, Turner's piece offers a layer of social critique that Tippet's reading does not acknowledge – a visual narrative of the immobilization of men and a post Great War turn to the symbolic use of the female form. Turner's painting is a record of the war written on the bodies of men, who are turned to the women on the street, intact and untainted, for meaning, and suggest to the viewer that *she* is the subject and not the soldiers. The modern young woman (a common symbol of the modern Canadian nation in the 1920s) is vital – the whimsical flip of the ribbon on her cloche hat denotes the spring in her step, her optimism, but her eyes, in mid-blink, imply her naiveté, what she does not see or know (that perhaps the soldiers do). She embodies a free Canadian citizenship, the reason soldiers fought, articulated in the image of a youthful, white, middle-class woman. The soldiers in the background, those who cannot stand, are fading into the backdrop. They are not working or moving (as the young woman is) – they are loafing, inactive and unproductive.

⁵³ Maria Tippet, *Art at the Service of War : Canada, Art, and the Great War* (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 74-75.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Turner's *War Record* is testimony to the crisis of masculinity the War had produced and the shifting symbolic meanings of the gendered body.



Figure 3: Henri Hébert, *Faune*, c.1925-26. Watercolour. Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.



Figure 4: John Lyman, *Jeune Homme Indolent*, c.1922. Oil on Board. Musée National des beaux-arts du Québec.

The general visual absence of the dismembered male body likely helped suppress the ugliness of war as Bourke insists for Britain,⁵⁵ but work like Henri Hébert's *Faune* (c. 1925-28) and John Lyman's *Jeune homme indolent* (c.1922) used the intact but vulnerable male nude (a rarity among figure painters) to address the fluctuating culture of masculinity. In *Faune* Hébert's nude embodies a shamed and defenseless masculinity, with slumped shoulders, turned in leg, and clenched hands covering his genitals. Hébert

⁵⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male : Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, 21.

equates man and animal in this watercolour, not only in name, but through the subject's facial features and nakedness. He is vilified with dark, angry eyes and silenced by his faded mouth. Hébert was praised for his desire "to achieve something more than a photographic resemblance, in favour... of a reflection of the psychological, or, as it is commonly phrased, the soul of the sitter."⁵⁶

John Lyman's *Jeune homme indolent* expresses another dimension of undesirable masculinity through the male nude - lethargy and immobility. The sitter is the antithesis of the industrious and motivated male figure. His slumped pose and thin frame communicate his ineffectiveness, laziness and his flaccid penis allude to his impotence or general lack of male strength. His intact body does little to remedy his predicament, for he embodies an internal strife (common to so many wartime trauma sufferers) that his body language nonetheless divulges. Turner, Hébert, and Lyman's work are a few of the notable high art works that portray the disempowered male body produced after the Great War.

Canadian feature films followed the trend of representing the battered male with a host of injured and incapacitated male characters and a ready cast of capable heroines who step up to save the day. In their work on female heroines Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord, Coates and

⁵⁶ William Colgate, *Canadian Art: Its Origin and Development* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1943), 126. Commentary made in reference to his bust work.

Morgan argue that these historical figures took up masculine tasks because of the absence of a male, framing it as circumstance rather than ambition that motivated their actions.⁵⁷ Filmmakers in Canada followed in the same vein, despite the fact that their stories were completely fictitious. In *A Race for Ties* (1929) a detained father and crippled son forces Aunt Sarah and her niece Marion rushing across a snowy wilderness to secure a business deal and save the family from financial ruin. In *Back to God's Country* (1919) Peter Burke is tricked and almost fatally injured by the villain, leaving his wife Dolores to outwit, outshoot, and outrun the bad guys to save herself and her unconscious husband. Leading man Cameron is attacked by a jealous rival when he wins the attention of the beautiful Mandy in *Cameron of the Royal Mounted* (1921), landing him incapacitated in the hospital. MacKay of *Carry on Sergeant* (1928) dies in the trenches of Europe when he cheats on his girl with a French barmaid and his immorality drains him of both his soldiering skills and his will to live. In *The Fatal Flower* (1930) Dolly must lure and capture a dangerous robber when her Police Chief father is killed and the local constable can't solve the crime on his own. Screen writers consistently wrote plots in which they incapacitated or detained male characters first, and then offering up a female figure to dominate the screen in a bold adventure. The formula reveals an understanding held by filmmakers that movie-goers

⁵⁷ Coates and Morgan, *Heroines and History*, Gender of Heroism chapter.

wanted to see female figures in motion on the big screen and that heroism and competence could be embodied by the feminine.

41

Jumpy nerves



TIRED bodies

—Restore Them the Hot Water Way



A FLOOD of papers on your desk—telephones buzzing—a stampede of interruptions . . . no wonder you return home nervous and irritable, too tired to enjoy an evening's entertainment. When you feel like that—take a good hot bath. Leading medical authorities say it is as effective as several hours sleep. It promotes healthy circulation—restores nerves—rids the whole system of poisonous wastes. Can you afford to be without this great health boon? The cost of operating a Crane Automatic Gas Water Heater is only a few cents a day—yet it provides Hot Water day and night. Everything is automatic. A thermostat turns gas on and off. No waste. No coils to clog. No noise or trouble.

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Figure 5: Artist Unknown, "Crane Water Heaters: Jumpy Nerves, Tired Bodies," Chatelaine (July 1930): 41.

Although magazines generally avoided imagery of the injured or dismembered male, advertisements for nerve remedies alluded to the reality of psychological damage experienced by veterans. One advertisement for a book on how to address “nerve exhaustion” explains “how we become shell-shocked in every-day life.”⁵⁸ The artist avoided using of bodies in this ad by using a diagram of the neurological system. Dr. Von Boeckmann however, characterizes the typical sufferer as “he.” Nerve disorders had traditionally been associated almost exclusively with women, but after the war had become “a disease of men in combat.”⁵⁹ An advertisement for a Crane Water Heater is subtle about the association of nerves and illness but features the image of a man soaking in the tub.⁶⁰ The artist avoids the matter of bodily wholeness by painting the happy bather hidden behind the top lip of the tub but the bather is visually pacified by the absence of any limbs. Promising to restore “jumpy nerves” and “tired bodies”, the ad encourages readers to write in for the booklet, “The Hot Water Way to Health.” These images remind us that although the struggle to maintain normative ideas of a robust masculinity persisted, artists were grappling with how to communicate the

⁵⁸ “Nerve Exhaustion” *MacLean’s Magazine* (October 1, 1920): 51.

⁵⁹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man’s Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the 20th Century*, vol. 2: *Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 258.

⁶⁰ Artist Unknown, “Crane Water Heaters: Jumpy Nerves, Tired Bodies,” *Chatelaine* (July 1930): 41.

image and the plight of the battered male, without showing the dismembered male body.

Masculinity was not a concept in flux *because* of war (since constructions of gender are always in flux), but rather took on a *particular form* in the 1920s on which the war had an impact. As Carolyn Kitch found in her examination of the 'destructive women and little men' trope fashionable in the 1910s, the emasculated male in the popular press, which she attributes to "the end of rugged individualism," was already an established motif by war's end.⁶¹ Likewise, dismembered men have always occupied families and communities, but their visual impact as a fraternity of soldiers returning maimed from the front was considerable enough to affect perceptions and constructions of Canadian masculinity more widely post-war. Lennard Davis' argument that the disabled body is "a disruption in the visual" might explain why they appeared so rarely in visual culture.⁶² Sarah M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that in western literature produced in this period,

The gloomy bruised modernist antiheroes churned out by the war... was a no man,... as young men became increasingly alienated from their pre-war selves, increasingly immured in the

⁶¹ Carolyn Kitch, "Destructive Women and Little Men: Masculinity, the New Woman, and Power in 1910s Popular Media," *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research [online]* (Spring 1999): 4.

⁶² Lennard J. Davis, "Visualizing the Disabled Body," in *The Body: A Reader*, ed. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 168-69.

mud and blood of no man's land, increasingly abandoned by civilization of which they had ostensibly been heirs, women seemed to become, as if by some uncanny swing of history's pendulum, even more powerful."⁶³

It seemed that artists of the 1920s were tapping into this new power for they employed the female figure far more than the male figure to enter into a discourse on matters related to the nation. A very small group of robust male figures appeared as allegory for 'industry' and 'advertising,'⁶⁴ yet no male bodies conveyed nation. Abroad in International Exhibitions, Alexandra Mosquin has found that although artists attempted to position the robust male farmer as a symbol of Canada, it did not catch on in the interwar years.⁶⁵ The image of the male farmer specifically, was outdated as a national symbol, even if the reality was that national growth and commerce was highly dependent on the work farmers. Artists used the female image, with its connection to modernity, both visually and otherwise, far more frequently to convey nation. Jane Nicholas's exploration of the 1927 Diamond Jubilee has found that the image of woman was central to the

⁶³ Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the 20th Century*, 2: Sexchanges, 259-60, 62-63.

⁶⁴ "Aemilius Jarvis & Co. Ltd.: A Colossus of Industry," in *MacLean's Magazine* (January 15, 1924: 5); "Walsh Advertising Co. Ltd.: Advertising: Moulder of Thought, Word and Action," in *Chatelaine* (December 1930:1).

⁶⁵ Mosquin, 253-257.

visual iconography created for the national celebration.⁶⁶ As we will see, the female image in the form of classical allegory extended even beyond her role in the Diamond Jubilee and was taken up by commercial artists as a visual motif in the discourse of nation and progress.

Invoking the Classics

Use of the classical female form as allegory for nation was popular with the rise of the modern nation state, and was widely conjured in the western world to embody the ideals of classical western philosophy. Historians have examined her use in France, the United States, Britain, Mexico.⁶⁷ More recently, Jane Nicholas studied this for 20th century Canada in a dissertational chapter on the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of 1927 where 'Miss Canada' was a working guest.⁶⁸ Authors agree that two characteristics remained consistent among allegorical representations – youth and whiteness. The association of youth with hope and the future made it a forward-looking icon and the cult of youth that dominated in the 1920s made the young classical image particularly relevant. Whiteness of classical images also dominated, representing the exclusivity of claims to citizenship and the racist and

⁶⁶ Nicholas, Chapter 2.

⁶⁷ See, Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form.*; Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); *ibid.*; Stacie Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1996).

⁶⁸ Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," Chapter 4.

xenophobic underpinnings of not only the nation-building project, but the legacy of allegoric constructions in places where positions of power were dominated by whites. Thus, the modern allegory for Canadian nation was consistent in its imagery – a youthful white woman embodied the characteristics and ideas that defined modern Canada. In her work on the making of the West End London shopping district, Diane Rappaport identifies the same classical allegory, Lady London as a youthful modernized allegory, “no ordinary British matron, but rather a combination of Nike, and her secularized version, Fame.”⁶⁹ In their use of this modernized rendition of the classical allegory artists in the western world were aligning nationhood with youth, consumption and whiteness through the body of a woman.

The classical allegory had been a popular tool for generating patriotism and the virtues and reflecting nationhood transnationally and in Canada the image persisted through the 1920s. During the Great War artists invoked the classical allegory in the service of wartime nationalist propaganda. With no government unit to produce war posters in the early years of the war, military units and private organizations were commissioned for the job.

In 1914 J.E.H MacDonal, a forty-one-year-old graphic designer working for Grip Ltd. in Toronto, produced a lithograph entitled *Canada and*

⁶⁹ Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure : Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 160.

the Call.⁷⁰ In this propaganda poster the allegory for Canada stands as the central figure. She is the ideological bridge between warfront (the rows of soldiers, flying the Dominion flag as they march off in solidarity to war), and the home front being developed and defended (symbolized by the robust farmer). She is Canada, a Dominion of virtues, loyal defender of Britain, Christianity, and liberty. In a subtle attempt at Canadian distinctiveness, a wave of maple leaves flow from behind her. She is so heavy with patriotic iconography that her body becomes subsumed behind her function as a national billboard. Reflecting this, she is endowed with unnatural proportions. Her legs are so long that she stands statuesque like the monumental allegories of Europe, taller than the farmer, negating any implication of equality with or shared reality with the other bodies portrayed.

This image was widely viewed in 1914 as the cover of the catalogue for the Exhibition of Pictures and Sculpture given by Canadian Artists in Aid of the Patriotic Fund. Aside from MacDonald's lithograph, the exhibit did not reflect a particularly patriotic theme, but was an example of artists acting in

⁷⁰J.E.H. MacDonald, *Canada and the Call*, 1914. commercial colour lithograph. National Gallery of Canada. Served as the cover of the Royal Canadian Academy catalogue for the "Exhibition of Pictures and Sculpture given by Canadian Artists in Aid of the Patriotic Fund", File CPC 0200:1201, *Clara Thomas Archives and Special Collections*, York University (Toronto: T.H. Best Printing Co. Ltd., December, 1914).

the service of nation and of the employment of the classical allegory.⁷¹ As Jane Nicholas demonstrates in her exploration of Canada's Diamond Jubilee celebrations of 1927, the classical allegory appeared as a key patriotic figure of tradition and empire. She argues that use of the classical female body was "an attempt at the cultural retrenchment" of these concepts after the disruption of war.⁷²

⁷¹ Ibid. Catalogue Preface. For more on Canadian artists employed under the Canadian War Memorial Fund during the Great War see: Tippet, *Art at the Service of War : Canada, Art, and the Great War*.

⁷² Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," 65.

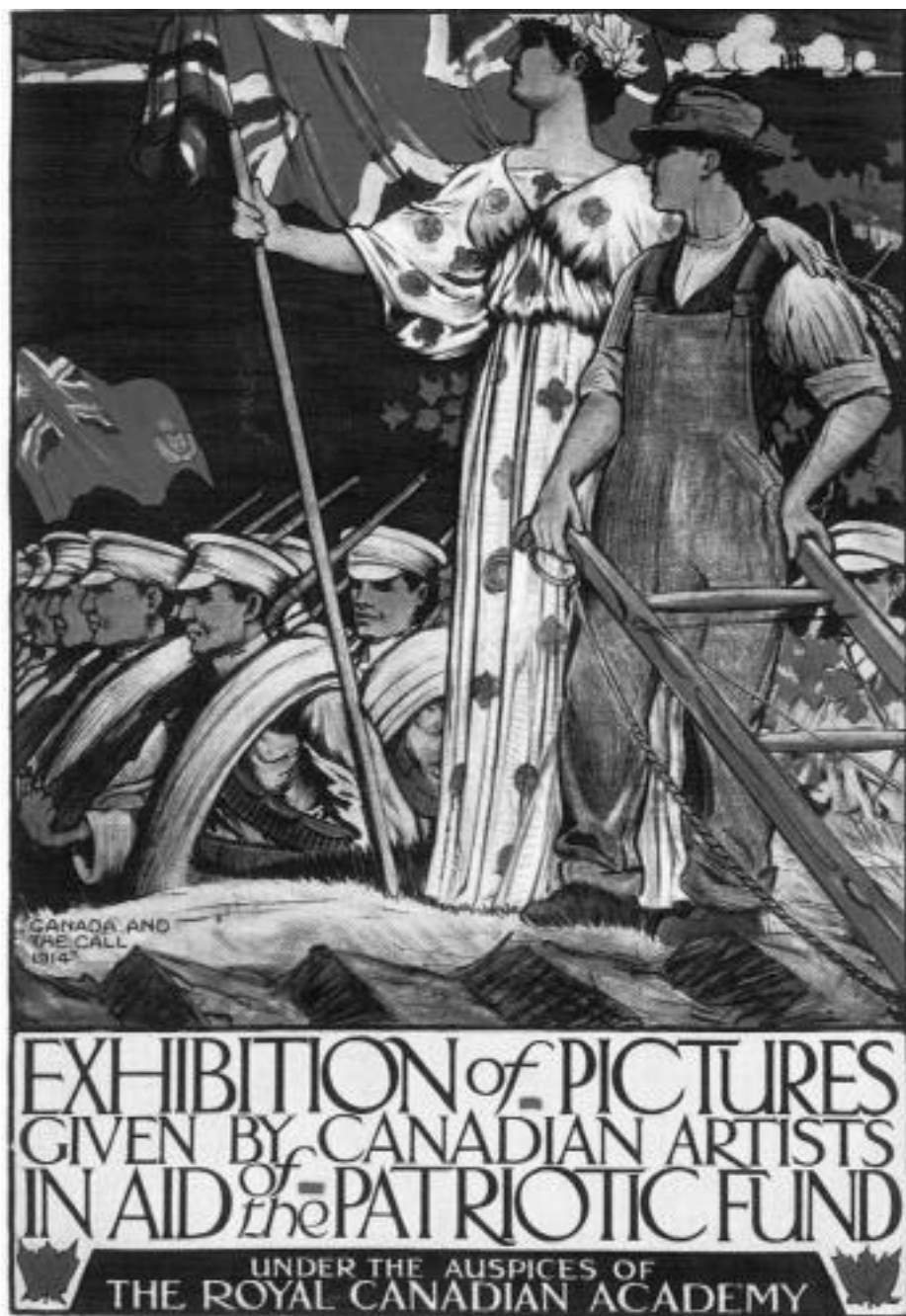


Figure 6: JEH MacDonald, *Canada and the Call*, Commercial Colour Lithograph. National Gallery of Canada.

CANADA MUSTERS HER MANHOOD

SINCE our gallant First Contingent sailed to join the "Old Contemptibles" in Flanders, Canada has answered every call for "more men". Her latest and perhaps most timely response is the new "Selected Army"—men worthy to reinforce the Divisions that upset precedent and astonished military Europe.

A few weeks in Khaki in touch with our seasoned battalions Overseas, and the men of this new army will develop into the same "Fighting Sons o' Guns" of whom George Pattullo wrote admiringly in the Saturday Evening Post:

"The Canadians at the Front shave every day. Let that sink in. Right up there in the trenches—often ankle deep in mud, sleeping in funk holes, each man cooking his own meals, fighting lice and rats and Bosches, with everything combined to break down habits of cleanliness—they rigidly observe the rule for smooth faces and chins. Of all I saw, that hit me hardest, because it meant so much".

The shaving equipment issued to your boy or your friend in our Canadian Army must be on a par with his fighting equipment and clothing! Ask him, and from his answer judge how much he would appreciate a Gillette Safety Razor—the razor that has made good so emphatically that over a million have already been sold for troops from this side of the Atlantic.

See that he has a *real* military razor set—the Gillette Khaki Combination (No. 18), the Khaki Soft Roll (No. 19), or the new Canadian Service Set (No. 20). It's a send-off worth while!

Ask your Dealer to show you the new Gillette Military Sets!

Gillette Safety Razor Co. of Canada, Limited

Office and Factory—GILLETTE BLDG., MONTREAL. 311

Figure 7: Artist Unknown. Gillette Co.: "Canada Musters Her Manhood", MacLean's Magazine (April, 1918): 70.

Commercial artists drew freely on the classical allegory as patriotic imagery aligning consumer brands with the war campaign abroad. A 1918 Gillette Company advertisement did just that. In this ad, selling military razor kits for soldiers overseas, Canada is an oversized female figure, standing stoically at the forefront, while behind her rows of armed soldiers march to war.⁷³ "Canada Musters Her Manhood" dominates the masthead of the ad, and in many ways the body of Canada takes on characteristics that imply she has shed feminine delicacies and beefed up for the role of wartime allegory. She is muscular and serious, her sleeves are rolled up to bare her forearms, and she is ready to work. She is given a strong jaw, a serious brow, and downplayed breasts – although she is unmistakably a woman, her body is clear of the visual markers that denote femininity or sexuality. This reinforces her platonic and symbolic relationship to the soldiers, which is particularly important because she often appears as the only woman.

Propriety in allegory is crucial, for there are instances, as Stacie Widdifield asserts for Mexican art, when allegorical figures are "too sexual to be entirely acceptable for her intended purpose."⁷⁴ Her desexualization is key to her role as allegory for nation, particularly in wartime. A mix and match of elements, she wears the head and costume of the classical allegory with a

⁷³ Artist Unknown. Gillette Co.: "Canada Musters Her Manhood", *MacLean's Magazine* (April, 1918): 70.

⁷⁴ Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, 157.

body and face that resembles more a male soldier than a woman. Although imagery in the Gillette allegory shares a number of elements with *Canada and the Call*, the Gillette allegory was modernized and Canadianized. The British flag was replaced with a map of Canada (which Mosquin argues was quickly becoming an icon of the modern Canadian nation), her modern bob hairdo referenced the Modern Girl connection to consumer culture and the fashionable flapper headband adorned with a single maple leaf replaces the classical crown of greenery. As Mosquin discovers, the Canadian map was becoming an icon for the modern Canadian nation in these years as it gained usage by artists and designers in National Exhibitions abroad, along with the maple leaf, beavers, bilingualism and Mounties was gaining recognition as a distinctive Canadian symbol. The exchange of British symbols for Canadian ones marked the growing sense of autonomy and national consciousness the war had produced, and the fervent nationalist politics of *MacLean's Magazine*. After 1918 the war had ended, but use of the classical allegory had not. Artists continued to draw on the classical female form to express shifting visions and ideals for the nation. Commercial artists continued to use the classical allegory in the 1920s to reinforce ideals for national growth, particularly mothering and technological progress.

Although companies like Gillette, Palmolive and Pears were not Canadian companies and their advertisements, in many cases, circulated in more than one country, their significance to Canadian visual culture remains great. Yes, advertisements were the financial underpinning of the periodical business but that didn't mean that advertisers dictated magazine content and further, they were no more interested in offending readers than editors were. For Canadian editorial teams to allow advertisers into their magazines meant that messages being conveyed were at most, aligned with the social politics of the magazine and at very least, not offensive to the perceived sensibilities of readers. As historians have discovered, popular images of the modern woman appeared internationally and pulled from a common lexicon of the savvy, urban female consumer, informing artists and viewers across political boundaries. That's not to negate regional and national variances, but the advertisements of multinational businesses in Canadian periodicals intermingled with and informed the creation of imagery within Canada.



Figure 8: Artist Unknown, *La Canadienne* (Juin 1923): cover.

After the War's end artists began to portray a restyled classical allegory that embodied more feminine characteristics – shapeliness, softened

feminized features, and because of its production in the milieu of commercial art, a profound investment in national progress through technology and consumerism. She was not the same 'nation' of the war years, and embodied shifting aspirations. One artist chose the classical allegory for a 1923 cover of *La Canadienne*. No longer connected to the war effort, the classical allegory was not the embodiment of a robust masculine war effort but bore instead the visual code of a reproducing nation through the embodiment of fertility. This June 1923 cover of *La Canadienne* communicates nation building and fertility through the body of the allegory.⁷⁵ She is adorned with a number of elements that speak this message. The bare shoulder reveals the 'Nuda Veritas' or 'naked truth' of the female body. Clutching her breast, she conjures ideas of motherly and erotic love.⁷⁶ This image plays the fine line between maternalism and the erotic and almost sacrifices its power as allegory, but is tempered by the classical and religious elements at play – the ancient architecture, the royal blue chiffon associated with the Madonna, and the flowers symbolic of the 'maternal instinct' for nurturing and cultivation. She is the "imagined ideal state"⁷⁷ in reconstruction – a healthy and fertile national body.

⁷⁵ Artist Unknown, *La Canadienne* (Juin 1923): cover.

⁷⁶ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, xxii or chapter 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xix.

CANADA'S PART IN THIS GREAT GIFT TO THE WORLD

In 1874 at Brantford, Ontario, Alexander Graham Bell conceived the idea of the telephone—a contribution to science, still adjudged by many as the greatest invention of all time. Two years later in Boston (on March 10th, 1876—50 years ago this month) the telephone acquired a physical existence when the finished instrument was made.

CANADA—the Birth place of the Telephone Idea

IN THE brief span of a young man's lifetime the telephone has developed from a crude experiment until it has become an essential part of human equipment.

To-day in Canada over 1,000,000 telephones are in use—almost constantly in use. Linking those instruments of communication are miles upon miles of wire running into the hundreds of thousands. Thousands of exchanges, each filled with an intricate maze of wires and equipment are required to clear the way for the millions of messages transmitted daily by telephone. Thus has Canada, the birthplace of the telephone idea, utilized this epoch-making invention. Every advance made by the telephone has been of very practical benefit to Canada. The making of telephones, telephone wires and cables, and telephone exchange equipment is an important Canadian industry. Extensions of telephone service and installing of new exchanges as they are demanded by the needs of business, give employment to thousands of skilled Canadian workers, and in turn contribute very directly to the prosperity of Canada.

LORD KELVIN'S PROPHECY

At the first exhibition of the telephone in 1876, the noted scientist, Lord Kelvin, ventured to prophesy that a day would

Northern Electric
COMPANY LIMITED

This is No. 11 of a series of advertisements issued in the inter-

Figure 9: Artist Unknown. Northern Electric Co.Ltd.: "Canada - the Birth Place of the Telephone Idea" (March 15, 1926): 37.

MacLean's Magazine 35

VISION

*Canadian Hydro Plants Captivate
the Imagination of the World*



FEW people realize the speed with which Canada is leaping forward into the new electrical era.

Among the numerous hydro-electric developments under way in Canada, two, by their magnitude, have captivated the imagination of the world.

One is at Queenstown on the Niagara River, where the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission is completing the installation of a plant totalling over 500,000 h.p. The other, at the head of the Saguenay River, will have an ultimate capacity of 1,280,000 h.p., of which a large amount will be used in a new industry to be established there—the manufacture of aluminum.

The mighty force of Niagara everybody knows, but few realize the force of the Saguenay. This river in northeastern Quebec is the single outlet of five large and many smaller rivers which run into Lake St. John. This mighty flood pours through the tumultuous Grand Discharge, rushing down over 300 feet to sea level—equal to the drop at Niagara—and flowing a thousand feet deep for sixty miles to the St. Lawrence, to be lifted bodily out of its bed by great engineering works that harness its powers.

This work means the establishment in Canada of another centre of hydro-electric energy comparable to that of Niagara!

For thirty-five years it has been the function of the Northern Electric Company to manufacture and make available the means of transmitting and distributing electrical energy in every form. In the Canada of the future we look forward to an opportunity for even greater service to the public.

Northern Electric

COMPANY LIMITED
Equipment for transmitting Sound and Power

Information

Hydro-electric development in Canada represents a total investment estimated at \$767,000,000. At present rate of progress this total will reach \$1,750,000,000 by 1940.

This is number 15 of a series of advertisements issued in the interest of Canada's electrical development.

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Figure 10: Artist Unknown. "Northern Electric Co. Ltd.: Vision", MacLeans Magazine (April 15, 1926): 35.

As cultural nationalism grew after the war, use of the allegory for nation continued to be an easy go-to image for commercial artists wanting to bolster nationalism. Northern Electric Company created a series of more

than twenty advertisements in 1926 "issued in the interest of Canada's electrical development."⁷⁸ Heavy with references to the future, reconstruction, progress, and prosperity these advertisements placed Canada as a world leader in electrical and technological development.⁷⁹

In 1926 at least two Northern Electric advertisements employed the female form as allegory, one Nation, and the other, Progress. In March she appeared as Canada, hovering over a mountainous landscape holding the praised telephone high in the air. Although she is allegory, the image tests the boundaries of the convention by resembling the large number of working women behind Canadian switchboards connecting calls. She is a slim young woman with bare arms, shoulder and leg. She is barefoot and bob haired, and she stares back at the viewer with a look of calm confidence – that she, Nation, has found her new tool - not a sword, a torch, a balance or a flag, but the telephone.⁸⁰

In April, artists commissioned to illustrate for Northern Electric used the classical allegory as Progress. In this ad, Progress looks into her crystal ball revealing an urban landscape. It reads "Canada is leaping forward into the

⁷⁸ All Northern Electric Company Limited advertisements in this series beginning in the spring of 1925 and ending in the winter of 1926 bear this statement. See for example, #3 in the series: *MacLean's* (July 1, 1925: 56).

⁷⁹ Northern Electric Company Limited: *MacLean's* (November 15, 1925): 33; *MacLean's* (July 1, 1925): 64; *MacLean's* (December 15, 1925): 43; *MacLean's* (March 15, 1926): 37.

⁸⁰ Northern Electric Co.Ltd.: "Canada - the Birth Place of the Telephone Idea", 37.

new electric era"⁸¹. Over her shoulder four men, who in other ads in the series are the "engineering minds" behind Northern Electric, take in the vision.⁸² Nation and industrial progress are ideologically linked by these allegories and firmly articulate not only a connection between modernity and nation, but also an understanding of the female body as a symbol of the modern outside of the image of the Modern Girl.

Although the classical allegory persisted throughout the 1920s, some artists using modern techniques explored the creation of a new national form, drawing on the contemporary female figure and aligning it with the emerging popularity of the Canadian landscape.

The Woman-in-Landscape Motif

Concerns over national culture and a distinct national history had grown strong by the 1920s. In her book *Contested Past*, Marlene Shore explores the establishment of the *Canadian Historical Review (CHR)* as evidence of this growth and a burgeoning desire for the professionalization of history among historians and the establishment of their objectivity in creating the national story.⁸³ Although there was not consensus among historians about how history

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Artist Unknown. "Northern Electric Co. Ltd.: Vision", *MacLeans Magazine* (April 15, 1926): 35.

⁸³ Shore, Marlene Gay. *The Contested Past : Reading Canada's History : Selections from the Canadian Historical Review*. (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 6-7.

was to be done or what type of history should be published, historians nonetheless validated intellectual concerns about national autonomy and external influence by writing extensively on these matters. Though some spoke out against excessive nationalism it only added to the bus of the nation debate, making the issue of Canada and its past a matter of considerable contemporary attention.⁸⁴ Sharing intellectual circles, artists were part of and privy to these debates, even if not officially in periodicals like the *CHR*. "The *CHR*'s first managing editor, W.S. Wallace linked landscape and Canadian nationhood in his 1920 essay, "The Growth of National Feeling", writing,

In a thousand ways, in matters of speech, and dress, and diet, and amusements, and even thought, Canadian national feeling is still being moulded from day to day by the stubborn facts of geography.⁸⁵

The landscape had captured the imaginations of artists for decades before Wallace wrote these words. From the endless canvases of dark impressionist and pastoral landscapes to the faux outdoor photo portraits of The William

⁸⁴ Shore, 10-11.

⁸⁵ W.S. Wallace, "The Growth of Canadian National Feeling," *Canadian Historical Review* 1:2 (1920): 140.

Notman Studios, artists understood the landscape to be connected to national identity. The Group of Seven saw themselves as contributors to national culture. After the Great War, as the search for national iconography ensued, artists continued to draw on the landscape as a meaningful subject. In May 1920, the work of the Group of Seven was officially launched with an exhibit at the Art Museum of Toronto.⁸⁶ The foreword to the catalogue articulated the Group's self-proclaimed role in evolving Canadian nationalism. Harris wrote,

The group of seven artists whose pictures are here exhibited have for several years held a like vision concerning art in Canada. They are all imbued with the idea that an Art must grow and flower in the land before the country will be a real home for its people.⁸⁷

The work of the Group was firmly entrenched as culturally meaningful by virtue of the immense support they received from cultural institutions and

⁸⁶ John Herd Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 162. The men who called themselves the Group of Seven included: James E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Fred Varley, Frank Carmichael, Arthur Lismer and Frank Johnston. A.J. Casson joined in 1924, Edwin Holgate in 1930, and Lemoine Fitzgerald in 1932. The binding of the group was delayed by the war, where many were employed as war artists, making their 1920 coming together a product of the war's end.

⁸⁷ Colgate, *Canadian Art: Its Origin and Development*, 82-83.

wealthy patrons.⁸⁸ Periodicals published their work and ideas, galleries favoured their paintings and took the art on tour across and outside Canada, and wealthy art lovers encouraged them by financing a number of art trips and the building of venues.⁸⁹ Despite enormous support, the Group did attract criticism, particularly from art critic Hector Charlesworth, who chastised them for “all painting in the same style and attempting to see things in precisely the same way.”⁹⁰ In retrospect, John Thompson has observed, “The ultimate irony of the Group of Seven’s nationalist crusade was that their hegemony of public taste obscured the work of other talented artists... Their revolution against the establishment had turned into an establishment of its own.”⁹¹

Lynda Jessup argues that the work of the Group was useful in “suppressing social unrest and building community” which coincided with

⁸⁸ Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, 163.

⁸⁹ Mary Vipond, “The Nationalist Network: English Canada’s Intellectuals and Artists in the 1920s,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 11:1 (1980): 42.; Boyanoski, *Permeable Border: Art of Canada and the United States, 1920-1940*, 6.; Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, 159. In 1922 the *Canadian Annual Review* began a special section “to chronicle developments in ‘Canadian Art, Literature and Music’”. By 1928 the section had doubled, reflecting a growing interest in Canadian arts and letters. *Ibid.*, 158.

⁹⁰ Hector Charlesworth, “And Still They Come! Aftermath of a Recent Article on the National Gallery,” *Saturday Night* (December 30, 1922). Quoted in: Douglas Fetherling, *Documents in Canadian Art* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1987), 49-55.

⁹¹ Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, 165.

growing nationalism.⁹² Critics of the time, she argues, were framing the Group as part of the “colony-to-nation narrative” which really only spoke to middle-class Anglophone Ontarians who identified wilderness with essential Canadianism at the expense of Natives and French Canadians.⁹³ Favourable reviews abroad however, encouraged the Group of Seven and their work as representative of Canada and reinforced their choice of style and subject.

As Alexandra Mosquin writes in her study of international exhibitions abroad, the search for Canadian icons and a construction of the national identity coincided with a period of intense advertising and promotion. “A growing relationship between geography and national identity [was] reinforced by display visuals that concentrated on landscape.⁹⁴” Artists projected a staples vision of Canada, that is, that Canada was a nation of vast natural resources and agricultural abundance, that communicated fertility, abundance and opportunity for immigrants – which Ronald Rees also discovered in his examination of representations of the Prairies in ads, paintings and photos in these years.⁹⁵ This type of display had reached its height by 1926, appearing outdated, Victorian and boring, writes Mosquin.⁹⁶

⁹² Lynda Jessup, 196.

⁹³ Jessup, 202, 199

⁹⁴ Mospquin, 191

⁹⁵ Mosquin 20, 23-24; Rees.

⁹⁶ Mosquin, 24

Both she and Rees identify an artistic shift in the 1920s from a high-horizon abundance representation of the landscape to a modernist interpretation that accentuated Canada's immense geography. Clean, scarce, and unpopulated landscapes dominated by the end of the 1920s.

At home, a number of artists were venturing to capture the landscape in different ways that challenged the homogeneity of the wilderness advanced by the Group of Seven and their disciples. Artists like Sarah Robertson in Quebec, Emily Carr in British Columbia and abstract artists like Kathleen Munn in Ontario, and Bertram Brooker and Charles Comfort of Manitoba, whose cubist work was flatly characterized as unCanadian, struggled for recognition. Both circumstance and bias has led the literature on modern art to privilege the Group of Seven, but 'modern art' in Canada included a wider community of artists, some of whom used the body to express 1920s Canadian culture.

In 1920s Montreal, the Beaver Hall Group was an active community of painters, most of whom had studied at the Art Association of Montreal under the artistic guidance of William Brymner who emphasized figure painting. The Beaver Hall Group did not enjoy the same attention afforded the Group of Seven even though they began exhibiting only one year after them in 1921. This may have been due to the fact that the Beaver Hall Group was not as

stylistically uniform as the Group of Seven,⁹⁷ but more than likely, it had more to do with the fact that the Beaver Hall Group was made up mostly of women. Despite the profundity of their work and that of other women across the country by the mid 1930s, art critic Graham Campbell McInnis wrote that for biological, social and environmental reasons women were unable to “wrestle successfully with the greatest creative problems, and emerge – as men occasionally do – triumphantly.”⁹⁸ Despite this climate, female artists produced some of the most thought-provoking figure paintings in the interwar period.

Perhaps owing to their distance from the Group of Seven circle of influence, Prudence Heward and Edwin Holgate of the Beaver Hall Group did not follow the popular wave of vast modern landscape as subject, and chose to integrate the female form into this modern artistic landscape subgenre. Montreal artist Prudence Heward has been celebrated for her depiction of revolutionary Canadian womanhood and for her figures' embodiment of the Canadian spirit.⁹⁹ Heward disrupts the tradition of the male gaze by painting women as agents rather than objects for the male

⁹⁷ Joyce Millar, “The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940,” *Woman's Art Journal* 13 (Spring-Summer 1992): 3.

⁹⁸ Graham Campbell McInnis, “Contemporary Canadian Artists,” *Canadian Forum* (November 1937): 274.

⁹⁹ Joyce Millar, “The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940,” *Woman's Art Journal* 13 (Spring-Summer 1992): 4.

viewer's consumption. It was a defiant artistic convention new among Canadian artists but was pulling from and speaking to an international community of artists in France, Germany and the United States, among others, who were exploring visual expressions of resistance. Heward toed the line brilliantly – her female figures were strong and defiant yet they still had popular appeal.

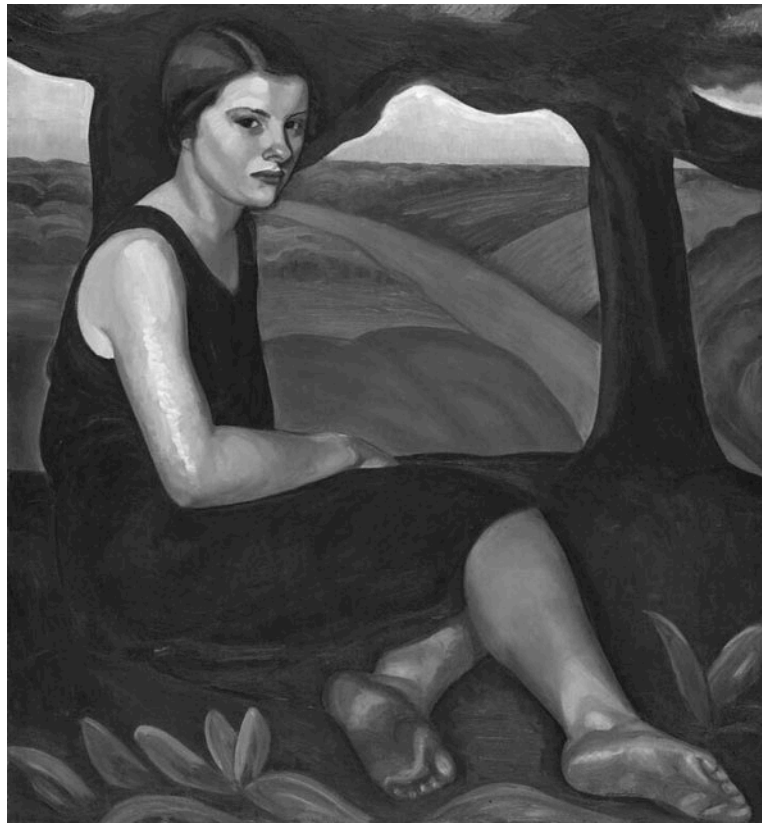


Figure 11: Prudence Heward, *Girl on a Hill*, 1928. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 12: Prudence Heward, *Anna*, 1927. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

In 1929, Heward's *Girl on a Hill* won the National Gallery Wellington Prize. Art Historian Natalie Luckyj argues that the way Heward's subject fills the

canvas gives her “equal status to the landscape that surrounds her.”¹⁰⁰ Youthful and white, Heward's figures in landscape draw on both the visual language of the modern girl in Canada as well as the symbolism of the modern landscape as a growing element of national identity. Heward named her 1928 painting *Girl on a Hill* even though we know her sitter to have been popular Montreal dancer Louise McLean.¹⁰¹ Marina Warner reminds us in her examination of depictions of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that representations of real women have also been endowed with allegorical meaning. Art historians have interpreted Heward's women as strong in their nationalist symbolism.¹⁰² *Girl on a Hill* and *Anna* are only two of Heward's early years of experimentation with the female form in landscape. In Chapter 4 we consider some of Heward's more rebellious images, but some of Heward's most profound work was produced in the 1930s and 1940s when she began to address race through depictions of black female bodies.

Heward was not the only artist at Beaver Hall profoundly interested in the female form. Montreal artist Edwin Holgate produced perhaps the largest series of nude-in-landscape art to come out of the 1920s. *Nude by a Lake* (1923-24) and *Nude in Landscape* (1930) are two of many examples of how

¹⁰⁰ Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward* (Kingston, ON: Queens University, 1986), 57.

¹⁰¹ Walters, *The Women of Beaver Hall : Canadian Modernist Painters*, 47.

¹⁰² Millar, "The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940," 4.

Holgate integrated the female form into the landscape in a modern way. Holgate's understanding of the relation of figure to landscape, and in particular the connection of landscape to national identity was evidenced in his work as a Canadian display artist at the International Exhibition in 1939.¹⁰³ Holgate's integration of bodies leisuring in the landscape in his exhibition murals and ceiling frieze spoke to commercial uses of the body to bolster nation by accentuating the opportunity and wealth of the landscape. In his private studio work, however, Holgate's integration of figure in landscape bolstered nation in a different way.



Figure 13: Edwin Holgate, *Nude by a Lake*, c.1923-24. Woodcut on Japan Paper. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

¹⁰³ Mosquin, *Advertising Canada Abroad*, 252.



Figure 14: Holgate, *Nude in a Landscape*, c.1930. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

Holgate's collection of female nudes in landscape are powerful and symbiotic representations of the female form and the modern wilderness, linking them by portraying them with the same artistic treatment. Both Heward and Holgate overcame what Joyce Millar has called the “woman-as-nature syndrome”¹⁰⁴ which so dominated the genre of woman in landscape before the 1920s. A combination of artists vision of women and impressionist

¹⁰⁴ Millar, “The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940,” p4.

style popular before the 1920s, women were often painted as blending into the landscape in which they were placed with paint strokes and colours often overlapping the silhouettes of bodies.¹⁰⁵ Holgate gives his figures primacy in his work and although his treatment of the female form is almost identical to his treatment of the landscape, the woman-as-nature theme doesn't translate in his work. Holgate's nudes are strong and stoic and non-threatening. In the realm of high art the nudity of the figures allows them to function as symbols and draws on a noble two-thousand-year-old practice of nude figure painting. Their placement in the landscape and their likeness to the land connects these figures ideologically to the growing land-based formation of national identity. Tapping into the construction of the youthful, white woman as a symbol of modernity Holgate buttresses the projection of modern landscape.¹⁰⁶

Many Canadian artists addressed figures in landscape. L.L. Fitzgerald of Winnipeg produced a number of sketches of women frolicking by the lake or along a horizon.¹⁰⁷ Cecil Buller of Montreal produced a series of carvings depicting the biblical "Song of Solomon" starring a strong and voluptuous

¹⁰⁶ For more on the Group of Seven as anti-modern, see Lynda Jessup, *Canadian artists, railways, the state and 'the business of becoming a nation'* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁷ L.L. Fitzgerald, *Four Figures No. 1*, c.1925. Drypoint. National Gallery of Canada; L.L. Fitzgerald, *Four Figures, No. 2*, 1925. Drypoint. National Gallery of Canada.

female nude.¹⁰⁸ Toronto artist Kathleen Munn produced a particularly interesting cubist rendering of a nude in the landscape that serves to reimagine understandings of both the female body and the landscape. Munn's late 1920s work, *Composition*, challenged the dominance and homogeneity of the modernist landscape movement and offered up for consideration a cubist rendering of the nude in landscape. Munn's experimentation with the sharp, geometric lines of cubism fragmented the body and the landscape and challenged claims to knowing the female figure or having mastered it artistically. Munn's cubist work introduced something new within Canadian artistic production. Her work was connected to an international trend toward abstract representations, even though the *Canadian Forum* argued that "abstraction is not a natural form of art expression in Canada", - perhaps this was precisely the point in Kathleen Munn's *Composition*.¹⁰⁹ Premised on "a new way of representing the world" cubism valued multiplicity and subjectivity in viewpoints.¹¹⁰ In retrospect, Munn's work offers a view of modernity and nationhood that represents what we believe the modern experience to have been.

¹⁰⁸ Cecil Buller, *Song of Solomon [Series]*, 1929. Wood carvings. National Gallery of Canada.

¹⁰⁹ Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, 2nd ed. (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1988), 189.

¹¹⁰ Ian Chilvers, *Concise Dictionary of Art and Artists*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 153.



Figure 15: Kathleen Munn, *Composition*, c.1926-1928. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection.

So what was modern about the images of women in landscape that emerged in the 1920s? The figure as subject was not modern, nor the landscape as subject and neither was the craft of woodcarving. The style of painting was undoubtedly modern. It was a lens through which artists projected their thoughts and subjects. Artists like Heward, Holgate, Munn and Buller used this lens to bring together ideologies connected to the land and the youthful white female form respectively. As artists stylized the figure and the landscape in similar ways they demonstrated an understanding in the art

world of the female figure and the landscape as compatible notions on the canvas, even through a modern lens. These artists projected ideas of modern nationhood through their motif and created a subgenre of images of women that rivaled the classical allegory in its ability to express nation and virtue.



Figure 16: Anne Savage, "The Skeena River, B.C." 1927. National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 17: Fred Varley, *Indians Crossing Georgian Bay*, 1922. Oil on Canvas. Location Unknown.

The modern nation, however, did not belong to everyone. Artists also brought together native female bodies and the landscape in modern style but did not communicate the same ideas of modern nationhood. Instead, native figures were framed by markers of colonialism. Native bodies never appeared as white bodies did, bold and celebratory, but instead exemplify the myth that Daniel Francis refers to as “the vanishing Indian.”¹¹¹ Native

¹¹¹ Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 57.

women's presence in the landscape is often an image in transition, recessed into the wilderness, incorporated, almost invisible. Work such as Anne Savage's *The Skeena River, B.C.* (1927), Edwin Holgate's *Totem Poles, no.2* (1926), and Fred Varley's *Indians Crossing Georgian Bay* (c.1920s) all portray native women in the landscape as travelling through, fully clothed, their bodies under layers, and fading into the land. Like nudes in landscape the artistic rendering of the body shared likeness with the land but native subjects were subsumed by it. This trend was reminiscent of the widespread misconception among white Canadians that Natives were disappearing, doomed to either death or assimilation. Films, too, aided in this mythology, offering views of the Canadian West as empty of Native presence and instead happily and legitimately occupied by the white bodies of settlers and cottage-dwellers.

This was a colonial iconography, a colonial statement by white Canadian image-makers about the nation and natives within the construction of the modern nation. Making Natives disappear was a colonial act of the modern world and a result of modernity. Just as Lears asserts for the Girl Scouts who venture into the wilderness to be in nature and practice survival skills, their actions are related to, tethered to the modern world and

these artists' works were a product of the modern.¹¹² Further, it was through these images that whiteness was constituted. As Marilyn Lake argues for White Australian Feminists, whiteness was defined in opposition to both oppressions of the old world and the "primitivism" of Native peoples in the new world.¹¹³

According to Francis the notion of "a modern Indian is a contradiction in terms", since in the minds of white Canadians, natives could not be 'modernized', and were excluded from the emerging modern nation.¹¹⁴ Dissimilar to late nineteenth-century Mexican painting, where the image of the Indian was incorporated in imagery of nation, images of Native women in Canada were marginalized in the emerging national identity that was drawing on the vast Canadian geography. Art historian Stacie Widdifield argues that proliferation of the Indian as a national image in Mexico "reveals that the public has already apparently internalized the figure of the Indian as a sign of what was authentically national."¹¹⁵ But this is not evident in Canada, save for a few Canadian artists such as Emily Carr, whose work reflected a west coast regionalism that wrote Natives into the imagery of the

¹¹² Lears, T.J. Jackson. *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

¹¹³ Marilyn Lake. "C 1 nised and C 1 nising: the white Australian feminist subject." *Women's History Review*, (Vol. 2. No. 3) 1993: 377.

¹¹⁴ Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, 57.

¹¹⁵ Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, 10.

Canadian West.¹¹⁶ She was encouraged to drop her totem poles by Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris in 1929 who argued that they were problematic and outside popular nationalist art. Characteristically, Carr paid no attention.

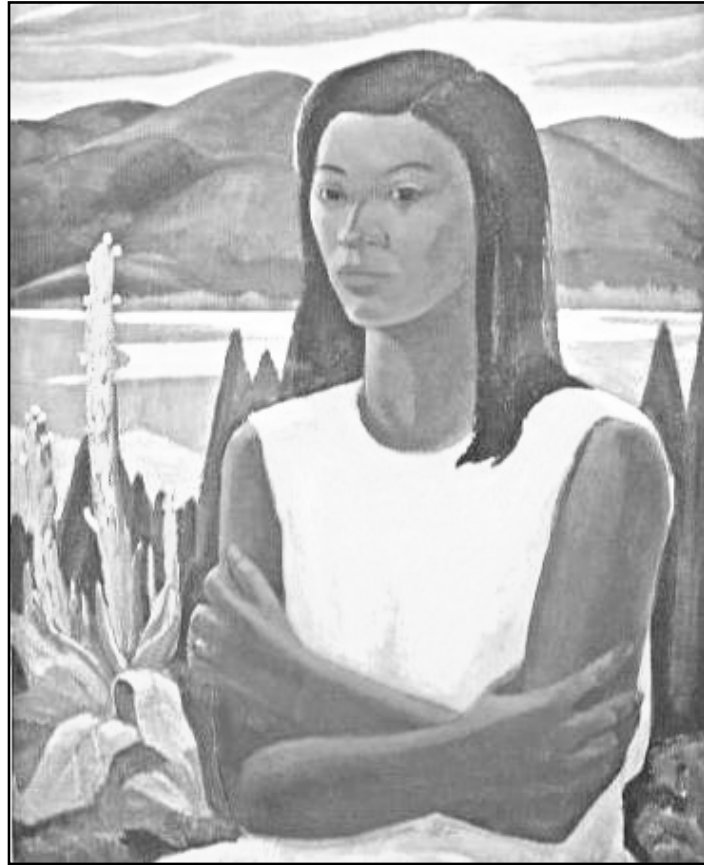


Figure 18: Fred Housser, *Marguerite of Deep River*, 1932. Oil on Canvas. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

In 1932 Fred Housser painted “Marguerite of Deep River,” one of the few modernist portraits of a Native woman in which the figure was

¹¹⁶ Gerta Moray, *Unsettling Encounters: First Nations Imagery in the Art of Emily Carr* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 319.

foregrounded, rather than receding into the background landscape. Housser's piece toyed with the symbolism of empowerment and colonialism in this portrayal. Giving his sitter a name and a place of origin, the figure is imbued with a double layer of meaning – she is a person as well as symbol for a people. Painted with a direct gaze and sitting up, Marguerite appears confident and non-submissive, although her crossed arms allude to being disenfranchised. The crossed arms also make her seem inaccessible which, in a colonial context, could be interpreted as empowerment. Unlike the untouched landscapes that Holgate placed his nudes in, Housser painted the backdrop as disrupted – the tall stem of mullein growing in the background is symbolic as it grows rampantly in well-lit disrupted soil such as logging sites. Like other figure artists of the period, Housser extended the symbolic notions of the land on to the figure and vice versa. For many artists, the image of a youthful white woman stood for a modern white nationhood from which Natives were systematically and symbolically excluded. As “a sign of social meaning,” argues Widdifield, whiteness reflected not only the artists who created images of nation, but ideals of citizenship.¹¹⁷ Housser's rare portrait speaks for a modern Native nationhood, exploited and disenfranchised, through the figure in landscape motif.

¹¹⁷ Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, 140.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1920s the classical allegory for nation continued to be a stabilizing image with considerable breadth – she could be transported to the warfront, at home with farmers, progressing with industrialists and celebrating with commemorators. Her timelessness and malleability was key to her successful use as national iconography. As the iconography of modernity came into focus, artists pulled from and contributed to the growing family of imagery that was gaining cultural significance. In Canada, that was the landscape and the female form. Using modern techniques in painting and carving, artists reimagined the Canadian landscape with a clean line aesthetic and empty vastness that was speaking, more and more, to a definition of national identity. Artists who chose to marry the modern landscape with the female form were contributing to the formation of a new national imagery and a motif that rivaled the classic allegory of Justice and Britannia and their sisters. Now the female form was literally *in* the land of the nation state. As we turn our attention to other motifs and other domains of expression we see the ways in which other allegories of modernity were taken up by artists to express other notions of nation building and national well-being.

CHAPTER 2. QUEEN OF THEM ALL: IMAGES OF MOTHERS

The chief concern of society is with nests and birdlings. Any system that interferes with these should be promptly stepped upon by a heavy and well-shod shoe – rotary pressure to make sure.¹¹⁸

Emily Murphy was certainly not mincing her words when she sat down to write for a 1928 issue of *Chatelaine*. If ever there was a nation-builder, she was it. An impressive career as mother and dedicated public servant, Murphy blazed the trail for many feminists to follow. But she did not jump on just any forward-thinking bandwagon, for some things remained unequivocally essential for Murphy and a number of her feminist contemporaries. Motherhood was an institution with nonnegotiable parameters.

This chapter examines images of mothers produced by artists in the 1920s and the contribution of those images to the discourse of a narrowly defined nation building project expressed through the female body. It examines how artists projected a vision of mothers as reproducers and caregivers and as cultivators and civilizers of an exclusively white Canadian race. This chapter also investigates the limits of the maternal body's visibility -

¹¹⁸ Emily Murphy, "Companionate Marriage: From the Point of View of Mother and Child," *Chatelaine* May 1928: 3.

where, when and why it was missing - and how fertility and expectations of mothers' work were codified in symbols. The story of mother imagery is one of continuity more than change. Although artists adopted modern conventions of representations, codes and symbols for motherhood persisted from decades, perhaps centuries, before.

The context of post-war reconstruction however, made the image of mother particularly meaningful. "Given the loss of 60,000 Canadian lives during the war," Alison Prentice writes, "motherhood acquired an enhanced practical and symbolic importance."¹¹⁹ The "natural" role of mother, as civilizer and cultivator, was central to the nation-building project – not only to overcoming the losses of the Great War, but also safeguarding against the diversifying influences of urbanization and immigration. Low birthrates were connected to military and economic inferiority for the western world, argues Veronica Strong-Boag,¹²⁰ thus the intersection of motherhood and nationalism rested ultimately with what women produced – healthy Canadian citizens and labourers. Joanna Bourke adds that "the dislocation of wartime experiences made men yearn for the comfort and security of conventional domesticity."¹²¹ Both the losses suffered and the return of

¹¹⁹ Alison L. Prentice, *Canadian Women : A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto ; Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996), 219.

¹²⁰ Veronica. Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939*. (Markham, ON.: Penguin Books, 1988), 150.

¹²¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male : Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, 21.

soldiers from abroad contributed to a social and cultural climate that placed motherhood and domesticity chief among women's life purpose and their primary responsibility.

In 1917 journalist Marjory MacMurchy urged that no job was more important to the nation than homemaking and childrearing, and argued for recognition of the "national character" of women's unpaid labour.¹²² MacMurchy insisted that this "class of married women" be given the attention they deserve as caregivers of children and the national interest more broadly. However, her faith in women's "natural" maternal skills was limited. "It is lamentably true", she wrote, "that the average Canadian girl is not, under present conditions, properly trained for home-making and the care of children."¹²³ Women's increasing commitment to work and public life fuelled concerns about the stability of the family and the national future.¹²⁴ Anxieties circled around women's physical health and strength, selfish behaviours, ambitions for independence, her ability to manage and rear her children, and the impact of her insufficient maternal guidance, "impairing the stamina of the race and undermining its future."¹²⁵ Despite the "exaltation of

¹²² Marjory MacMurchy, "Women and the Nation," in *The New Era in Canada; Essays Dealing with the Upbuilding of the Canadian Commonwealth*, ed. John Ormsby Miller (London; New York: J.M. Dent & Sons; E.P. Dutton & Co., 1917), 220.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Prentice, *Canadian Women : A History*, 309.

¹²⁵ Dr. Woods Hutchinson, "The Modern Mother," *MacLean's* July 1, 1920: 68.

maternity” not all experts were convinced that Canadian women were suited for the task.¹²⁶

Feminist writing reflected this growing tension in the debate over women’s work inside and outside the home. With the growth of the welfare state, women were more often framed as mothers to both their children and the nation. Maternal feminists like Mrs. Harold R. Peat asked, “Will the Women Go Back”?, and argued for a new motherhood that did not relegate women to the role of “house slave” or “house-servant” but elevated her to the new role of “Modern Mother” and “man’s partner”, fighting the “woman’s war”¹²⁷;

Women who have sensed the depth of their own intellectual capacity and earning power are not tamely going to return to the eternal grind of housework... The feminine element in industrial life is going to influence the whole labor world... [however] There is another task for us women – the handling of children. Children are the mightiest assets of the nations... The training of children to-day means the guiding of the nations in years to come. Do we women realize our responsibility? Do we

¹²⁶ For more, see: Andrée Lévesque, *La Norme Et Les Déviantes: Des Femmes Au Québec Pendant L’entre-Deux-Guerres* (Montreal: Les Éditions du Remue-Ménage, 1989), 25.; Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*, 150; *ibid.*

¹²⁷ See for example, Hutchinson, “The Modern Mother.” *MacLean’s*, July 1, 1920: 68; Mrs. Harold R. Peat, “Will the Women Go Back,” *MacLean’s Magazine*, October, 1918: 110.

realize the vastness and the difficulty of our task?... Do we know that we are responsible for the new population of our countries?...Sister women, are your munitions ready – are your guns emplaced?¹²⁸

In the monthly section of *L'Action Française* entitled "Nos Forces Nationales", the periodical featured 'la Canadienne' as a national force in 1918. Québécoise feminist Henriette Dessaulles wrote, "c'est la femme qui crée la nation, comme mère, éducatrice et facteur social dans toutes les classes."¹²⁹ For Québec nationalists like Louis Lalande, maternal fertility bore the added element of ensuring religious and cultural survival. In his 1918 article "La Revanche des Berceaux" [*revenge of the cradles*], he argued that the rapidly growing French Canadian population was key to the survival of the Catholic Church, the French language, and the race in light of encroaching numbers of Anglo-Saxons and other immigrants.¹³⁰ Although this was no less true in English Canada where concerns about immigrants (particularly non-white immigrants) were aired in the popular press, discourses on reproduction and cultural survival were ethnically protectionist. French and English Canada may have shared in common desires for ethnic survival but this did not mean that they were partners in their task, for Lévesque

¹²⁸ "Will the Women Go Back," 110, 12-13.

¹²⁹ Fadette, "La Canadienne," *L'Action Française* 2 (Août, 1918): 242.

¹³⁰ Louis Lalande, "La Revanche Des Berceaux," *ibid.* (Janvier, 1918): 100.

reminds us that Québécoise women were warned against allowing cordial relationships with the English to pass over into intimacy.¹³¹ Though we know interethnic marriages existed, there is little visual evidence of it, save for the marriage of Dolores LeBeau to Englishman Peter Burke in *Back to God's Country* where a happy ending is sealed with the arrival of baby.¹³²

Perhaps the biggest threat to the stability of the family unit was women's increased interest in working for wages, which prompted leaders to make arguments that exalted motherhood above any professional pursuit. Ellen M. Knox, principal of Havergale College in Toronto, wrote a book of vocational guidance for the young Canadian woman entitled *Woman of the New Day*.¹³³ She offered advice on a number of career opportunities for New Women. Among her suggestions were nursing, sales, farming and the fine arts. But Knox, like so many other feminists of her time, exalted one profession above the others. Motherhood, argued Knox, was "The Queen of Them All."¹³⁴ Of women in the professions she argued, "the milestone of mid life once passed, their professional value will decrease, year by year; whereas the mother reigns on supreme, her silvering hair a more compelling crown of

¹³¹ Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules : Women in Quebec, 1919-1939*, 29.

¹³² Byrne Hope Sanders, "Back to God's Country ." (Canadian Photoplays Ltd. Calgary, Alberta [Digitally Remastered Version, Milestone Film and Video, NY, New York: 2000]1919).

¹³³ Ellen Mary Knox, *The Girl of the New Day* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1919).

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 19.

glory.”¹³⁵ Despite ideas about a New Day for women and the plethora of options before them, expectations remained steadfast that women would (and should want to) become mothers, even if faith in their ‘natural’ abilities was waning.

With these concerns in mind church and state stepped up their involvement in the lives of mothers and children, offering hoards of advice and guidance. As Cynthia Commachio argues, getting mothers to follow the direction of professionals wasn’t terribly difficult. Advice was often welcomed, for in the era of scientific management, raising children had become an increasingly difficult task.¹³⁶ The turn of the century witnessed growing public interest and intervention in maternity and childrearing. The proliferation of childcare professionals, advice columns in popular periodicals, increasing numbers of hospital births and growth of the child study movement were evidence of the turn.¹³⁷ In September 1930, *Chatelaine* launched a new section of its magazine titled “The Baby Clinic”, a permanent addition to the popular monthly which aligned motherhood with fashion, consumer culture and modernity. Evolving educational goals of the New Woman were incorporated into the ideal of motherhood as educated women were

¹³⁵ Ibid., 217.

¹³⁶ Commachio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940*, 93.

¹³⁷ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*, 165.

thought to be better mothers, and perhaps more importantly, seasoned students and willing consumers of scientific ideology.¹³⁸

Like other modes of controlling birth rates, such as state allowances, (un)availability of contraception and abortion, and sterilization, images of women produced in periodicals, art, and film functioned as symbolic “border guards,” in the words of John Armstrong.¹³⁹ Images identify who belongs to a collectivity and who sits outside it, and as Yuval-Davis asserts, nationalism is not inherently inclusive.¹⁴⁰ Racist exclusions are equally important to the construction of nationalism and nation-building images. The homogeneity of images is not indicative of a demographic reality, but more likely, an anxiety over diversity and a desire to assert order through sameness. The myth of the sameness of national communities is preserved through the use of these symbolic “border guards” that either represent and include peoples, or do not resemble them and marginalize them from the national imaginary.¹⁴¹ Images thus functioned to socially and culturally construct ideas of ‘good’ women and mothers and through repetition, became leitmotif. If one was capable, adherence to the leitmotif promised belonging and exaltation.

¹³⁸ Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," 118.

¹³⁹ Nira Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 16, no. 4 (October, 1993): 629.; John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (North Carolina: Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

¹⁴⁰ Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," 624.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 627.

Images of mothers functioned as metaphors for national growth and stability, to “national and collective ‘honour’”, and images of their children function as emblems of the promise and vitality of the nation's future.¹⁴² Thus, mother-and-child images produced in these years were deeply symbolic and pillars of the visual politics of nation-building.

Mothering, the Body and Nation

In step with the proliferation of more or less standardized childcare advice literature, images of mothers followed a particular trope. The visual code of the good mother was simple and homogenous, and was expressed through particular physical elements of the female body and its composure. A 1923 cover of *La Canadienne* conveys this often-used composition – that of mother and child face-to-face. This mother-to-child orientation was so common that one cannot survey a single magazine of the decade without noticing it.

¹⁴² Ibid., 627, 30.



Figure 19: Artist Unknown. *La Canadienne* (March 1923): cover.

With burgeoning concerns over women's 'natural' ability to care for and properly rear children, this imagery reinforced the notion that the good mother was thoroughly engaged with her child and that it should command her fullest attention. Her body is not divided between tasks, but given over to the task of caring for baby. Even in instances where mothers were portrayed working or in transit their little bundles were carried close to their breast. In Lillian Freiman's 1929 painting, *The Fish Market*, a mother carries her baby high over her breast and the bustling crowd as she navigates the busy market.¹⁴³ The women preparing the fish for sale busily work in the forefront, their

¹⁴³ Lillian Freiman, *The Fish Market*, 1929. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

exposed forearms demarcating their role as labourers, but the mother's arms are fully covered. She is not working at the fish market like the others and is not sharing her role as mother with wage-earning. In Katherine Wallis' mahogany sculpture, *The Struggle for Life*, she portrays a mother holding her baby over her left breast, and with her forearms exposed, she fights off the attack of a large wild dog.¹⁴⁴ Another sculpture, Elizabeth Wyn Wood's *The Gesture*, also employs the face-to-face orientation of mother and child and comments further, through Wood's lean and modern lines, that mother's undivided focus on childrearing is not a traditional or outmoded idea, but remains an ideal for the modern mother as well.¹⁴⁵

A mother turned away from her child was a visual cue used by artists signaling a breach of responsibility. For Emily Murphy's 1928 article on the disastrous trend of companionate marriage, the artist uses the typical mother-and-child trope to accompany the commentary on the familial and national issue of the declining marriage rate. To communicate Murphy's disapproval of these "industrious sinners," the mother's head is drawn turned away from the child, distracted from her maternal role, while the viewer is forced to sympathize with the child who stares back at us, symbolically lacking moral

¹⁴⁴ Katherine Wallis, *The Struggle for Life*, 1929. Mahogany Sculpture. National Gallery of Canada.

¹⁴⁵ Elizabeth Wyn Wood, *Gesture*, 1927. Saravezza Marble. National Gallery of Canada.

direction. "If civilization is to endure" argued Murphy, "we must preserve marriage. For all time it must remain a matter of public concern."¹⁴⁶ The artist communicates Murphy's insistence that the public should react to a private concern by drawing the child looking toward the reader, inviting them into his private circumstance. Breaking the face-to-face orientation of mother and child accompanied a message of anxiety in this article and many others like it.



Figure 20: Artist Unknown. "Mères Sous Des Cieux Divers: Mais Toutes Soumises À L'unique Tyran... Le Bébé.," *La Canadienne* (March 1920): 28.

¹⁴⁶ Emily Murphy, "Companionate Marriage: From the Point of View of Mother and Child." *Chatelaine* (May 1928) : 3.

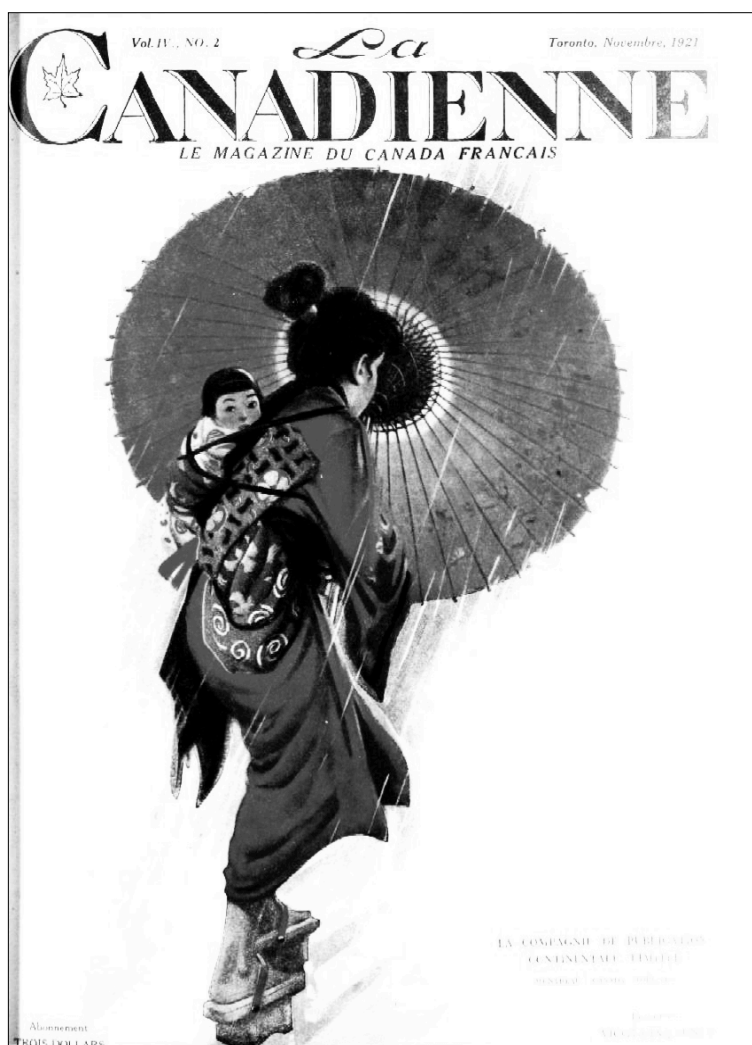


Figure 21: Artist Unknown. *La Canadienne* (November 1921): cover.

The visual orientation of mother and child face-to-face or child-to-breast seldom extended to non-white mothers. In the rare cases where mothers of colour were featured, they were often spectacle. An article in a 1920 issue of *La Canadienne* features “Mères sous des cieux divers;” [*mothers under*

different skies].¹⁴⁷ The author described for readers the ways other mothers around the world care for and carry their children. A native mother from North-West Canada is featured among these non-Canadian mothers, testament to the editor's understanding of native mothers as outside the circle of belonging, and the 'Other' to the assumed reader. Of the Japanese mother, the author writes, "Le mère n'en est pas incommodée et elle va et vient comme si ce précieux fardeau n'existait pas." To carry one's child on ones back 'as if it did not exist' ran directly counter the ideal of visual imagery of the good Canadian mother who demonstrated her commitment to her child through her face-to-face physical orientation with baby. Further, the author's writing on the Native-Canadian mother not only reeks of condescension, but reveals the lens of inferiority and spectacle through which these mothers were viewed;

Le 'paposse' est attaché sur les épaules de sa mère au moyen d'un harnais et d'un châle qui ont remplacé la peau de daim et les lanières de cuir d'original employées par les anciens aborigènes. Progrès de la civilisation!

Neglecting to consider the economic necessity for many of these women to work while caring for their children, the article reinforces the middle-class orientation of the magazine and its racist use of visual material.

¹⁴⁷ "Mères Sous Des Cieux Divers: Mais Toutes Soumises À L'unique Tyran... Le Bébé.," *La Canadienne* (March 1920): 28.

Following John Armstrong's argument that symbolic "border guards" define who belongs and who does not based on culturally understood manners of behaviour and style, these mothers are excluded from and placed in opposition to the good Canadian mother.¹⁴⁸ With women-and-children as "one of the most powerful cultural constructions of national collectivities," presenting these mothers as spectacle reinforced the notion that they were outside the 'imagined community' of good Canadian mothers and did not play a role in constructions of the nation or its future.¹⁴⁹ Homogeneity in the images of mothers pointed to an intense desire to unify, systematize and define, but also signaled the undercurrent of social anxiety with difference.

Navigating the balance between traditional and modern ideals of mothering would have been a delicate task if images are any indication. As Cynthia Comacchio writes, the early twentieth century saw a considerable push toward "scientific motherhood" and a top-down attempt to "modernize" Canadian families.¹⁵⁰ Incorporating science and business principles in one's management of the home was the new 'common sense'; scientific management approaches to caring for baby such as putting it on a routine so that "the household need never be disturbed by the new arrival,"

¹⁴⁸ Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*; and Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," 627.

¹⁴⁹ Yuval-Davis, "Gender and Nation," 626.

¹⁵⁰ Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940*, 4.

was one way women's increased level of education and work experience were channeled.¹⁵¹ Advertisements were not the least bit shy in claiming that their scientific inventions were indeed responsible for "Woman's New Freedom," drawing heavily on the rhetoric of emancipation that circulated in these years.¹⁵² Modern women were also believed to have been freed from the taxing toll of large families. A growing modern trend, lower birthrates were exalted by some experts as the key to racial progress and ethnic superiority.¹⁵³ But this trend did not translate into free time in the lives of real women as advertisements would have us believe. In fact, it opened the floodgates for increased expectations of housewives. The modern mother and her family looked different from the generation previous, but 1920s "mothercraft," as one expert called it, was caught in the dialectic of modernity between the old and the new. Straddling this line meant there were limits to a good mother's modern ways.

¹⁵¹ Stella E. Pines, "The Baby's Routine and Management," *The Chatelaine* (January 1929): 19.

¹⁵² "Perfection Cook Stove: Woman's New Freedom," *MacLean's Magazine* (April 1, 1923): 72.

¹⁵³ Harold Cox, "Birth Control and War," *MacLean's Magazine* (Mar 1, 1921): 25.

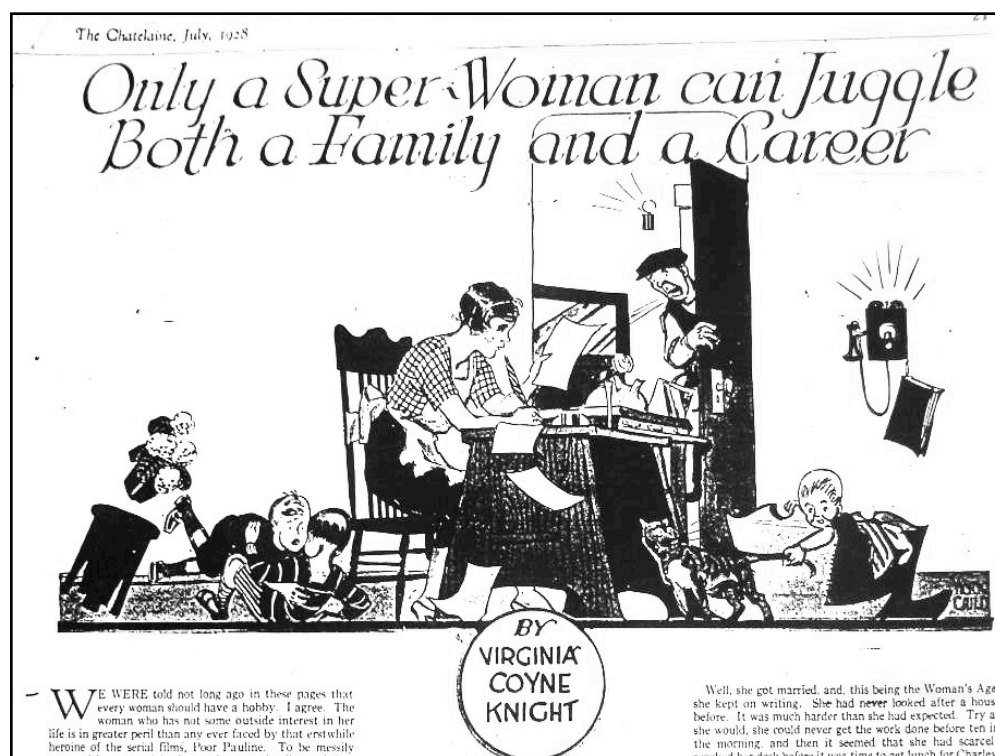


Figure 22: Victor Child (Illustrator) in Virginia Coyne Knight, "Only a Super-Woman Can Juggle Both a Family and a Career," *The Chatelaine* (July, 1928): 21.

Images of bedraggled and frazzled mothers were common in discussions of working mothers. As one 1928 article argued, "Only a super-woman can juggle both a family and a career."¹⁵⁴ Victor Child's humorous sketch depicts a young mother writing at her desk, while the unattended children wreak havoc in the background. The chaos is augmented by a screaming telephone, a stressed deliveryman shouting from the door with the doorbell ringing and a cat being tormented by the baby. This young mother

¹⁵⁴ Victor Child (Illustrator) in Virginia Coyne Knight, "Only a Super-Woman Can Juggle Both a Family and a Career," *The Chatelaine* (July, 1928): 21.

has clearly bitten off more than she can chew. The author writes of the futile attempts of women to carry on working after marriage and children. She is depicted as the personification of a naïve and ambitious modern woman who attempts to do it all. For many working mothers across Canada, this would have seemed a laughable story, as many women did juggle work and family, the distinction being that many did out of necessity, unlike the privileged protagonist in Knight's article. Her failure to juggle both is somewhat humorous precisely because of this privilege – her family does not rely on her income to stay afloat. But, privileged or not, the chaos is unbecoming. The good modern mother was seldom portrayed in multi-tasking, for although it was suitable for the working world, it was not acceptable in mothering. Women who attempted to hang onto popular notions of New Womanhood with respect to careers were highly criticised in the popular press once they began childrearing.



“Comme je suis fatiguée, ma chérie”

AU cours de notre récent Concours de Publicité on avait posé la question suivante: “À quelles fins le Dr Chase's Nerve Food est-il le plus fréquemment employé?”

Et la réponse, dans la grande majorité des cas, a été celle-ci: “J'ai appris en consultant mes amies que le Dr Chase's Nerve Food est surtout employé par les femmes qui font elles-mêmes leurs travaux de maison et qui ont des petits enfants à garder.

“Lorsqu'elles sont fatiguées et épuisées par la monotonie ininterrompue des travaux domestiques et par le soin des petits enfants leurs nerfs finissent par manquer et c'est alors que le Dr Chase's Nerve Food devient l'ami opportun.”

Mme W. German, 214 Park St., Brockville, Ont., écrit: “Après la

naissance de mon garçon je devins très affaiblie et perdais graduellement du poids. J'étais incapable de faire mon travail et souffrais beaucoup du fait que je ne pouvais plus dormir. Je me levais avec des membres encore fatigués et une tête endolorie. Mon cœur était si faible que j'avais parfois des palpitations, puis je tombai dans un profond découragement.

“Suivant les conseils de mes amies je commençai à employer le Dr Chase's Nerve Food et j'en pris en tout douze boîtes. Je voudrais que vous puissiez voir comme je me porte bien et comme je prends intérêt à la vie.”

Dr Chase's Nerve Food, 50 cents la boîte, chez tous les marchands, ou chez Edmanson, Bates & Co., Ltd., Toronto.

Figure 23: “Dr. Chase's Nerve Food: Comme Je Suis Fatiguée, Ma Chérie,” *La Canadienne* (July 1921): 28.

MacLean's Magazine 29



Electricity - Giver of Youth

BUT a few short years ago household drudgery took its heavy toll of woman's youth and beauty. It is not so very long since a woman was considered "old" at thirty, while now she is "young" at fifty.

With electricity in the home has come emancipation - freedom from the fetters of arduous household toil - an outlook wider far than the four walls of a kitchen.

The Canadian General Electric Company counts it an honor to have aided electricity in its mission to woman-kind in lifting heavy burdens from weary backs - in performing tasks that once made tender fingers worn with toil in giving women back their beauty, youth and freedom - in opening up new vistas of pleasure and service.

Canadian General Electric Company Limited makes, not only the equipment needed for the production of electric current, but also the electrical household servants which prepare your meals, do your cleaning, washing and ironing, provide you with hot water or cool summer breezes.



CANADIAN GENERAL ELECTRIC Co. Limited
HEAD OFFICE, TORONTO



Figure 24: Artist Unknown. "General Electric Co. Ltd.: Electricity - Giver of Youth," MacLean's Magazine (June 1, 1926): 29.

However, the opposite was also true. Women who were not modern enough were subject to criticism as well. Those who did not enlist modern science and the remedies it offered could not cope with the demands of

modern mothering. If the strength of the maternal body was a symbol for the strength of the family and the nation, images of overtaxed mothers were cause for concern, and thus a commonly used motif for advertisers in selling the benefits of modern science. The slumped over and tired maternal body was an image of dysfunction, for although motherhood was viewed as a woman's purpose in life, it was still widely understood that a mother had to care for herself if she was to care for her family. A mother too tired to perform her duties as attentive caregiver was a family's, and a nation's, weak link. This 1921 *La Canadienne* advertisement portraying a fatigued mother who has not yet discovered the benefits of Dr. Chase's Nerve Food has succumbed to the limits of her natural body. Not only is she portrayed as somewhat behind the times – long hair and turn-of-the-century dress – but the basin of clothes she is presumably washing by hand and the farmhouse furnishings imply she is not urban, which was often synonymous with the being behind the times, and both she and her child suffer the consequences.

A 1926 General Electric advertisement tells a similar story in imagery – the before and after of a young mother who has discovered the youth-giving power of electricity. Again, the body is the measure of her success. Her weary silhouette is testimony to her bodily experience before electricity. Tired and bedraggled, she cannot focus on her child or read a book. Promises of time and energy for better mothering were common in advertisements as mothers

deflected the barrage of critiques from professionals and neighbours. It seemed that herein laid a paradox: the modern world was both the cause and the solution to women's domestic plight. City living, industrialization and raised expectations of housekeeping and mothering were widespread ramifications of modernity, but with the other hand, the modern world offered solutions (real or fabricated) in modern science.

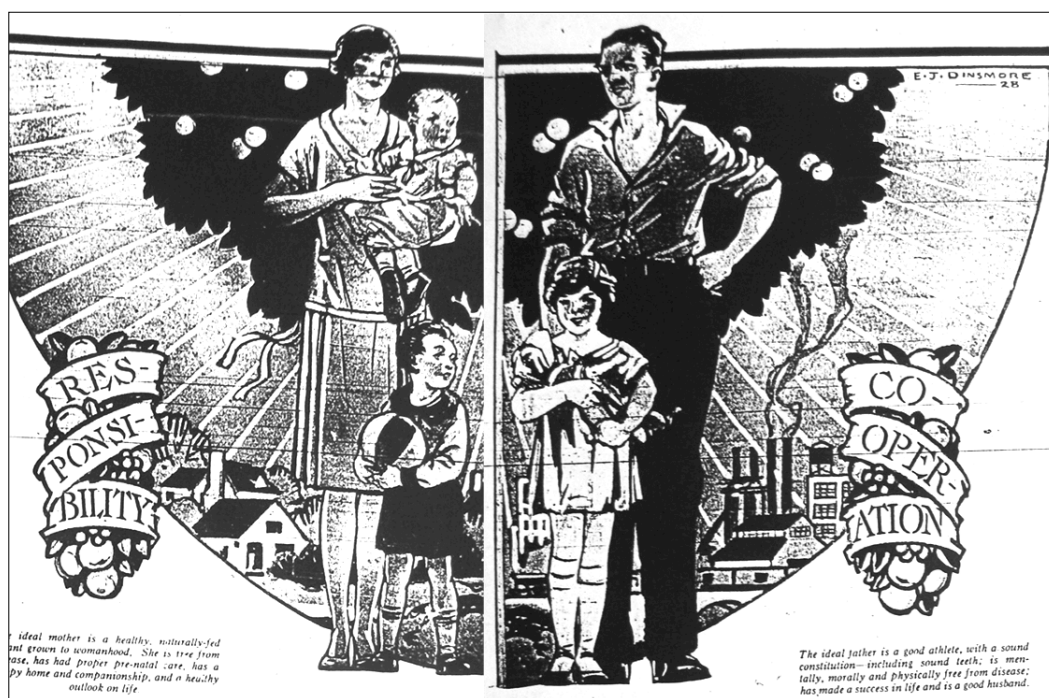


Figure 25: E.J. Dinsmore (Illustrator) in Stella E. Pines, "We Want Perfect Parents," *Chatelaine* (September 1928): 12-13.

Thus, fitting into the mold of ideal motherhood was a delicate aspiration. According to health expert Stella E. Pines, "The ideal mother is a healthy, naturally-fed infant grown to womanhood. She is free from disease,

has had proper pre-natal care, has a happy home and companionship, and a healthy outlook on life.... the ideal father is a good athlete, with a sound constitution – including sound teeth; is mentally, morally and physically free from disease; has made a success in life and is a good husband.”¹⁵⁵ Experts identified many of the characteristics of the ideal parent through the body. Ideals included good genes, a lean frame, youth, energy and whiteness. E.J. Dinsmore’s rendering of this ideal for Pine’s article, “We Want Perfect Parents”, demonstrates visually how the perfect family was imagined. Under the banner of “responsibility” the ideal mother was associated with the home sitting in the background and childrearing, while the ideal father, under the banner of “cooperation,” was aligned with industry. Symbolized here by the fruit-giving tree, they constituted the ideal family. The modern mother, in her shortened tubular dress and bobbed hair, is ultimately “responsible” for the family, while her husband in working man’s attire and strong arm-akimbo stance is charged with the task of breadwinning and “cooperating”. They are portrayed as serious, for neither are drawn smiling. The children between them signify they are doing their reproductive part in the nation-building project – not only are they replacing themselves but growing the population of the nation. Although mother’s dress implies she is modern, access to modern industry is aligned visually with the husband, although she does have

¹⁵⁵ E.J. Dinsmore (Illustrator) in Stella E. Pines, “We Want Perfect Parents,” *Chatelaine* (September 1928): 12-13.

a less direct link to industry in her role as consumer of household goods. Together with their children they are the "perfect" model that professionals sought to carve. Unique in this depiction is mother's presence with her children outside the home, for most often, images of mothers had them nestled within the confines of the domestic sphere when shown performing their motherly duties, or at very least (as we see her) aligned visually with home. Some exceptions to this were visible in magazines and art and were useful in communicating about other national problems.



Figure 26: Artist Unknown In Helen Gregory McGill, "What of the Wage-Earning Wife?," *Chatelaine* (March 1930): 9.

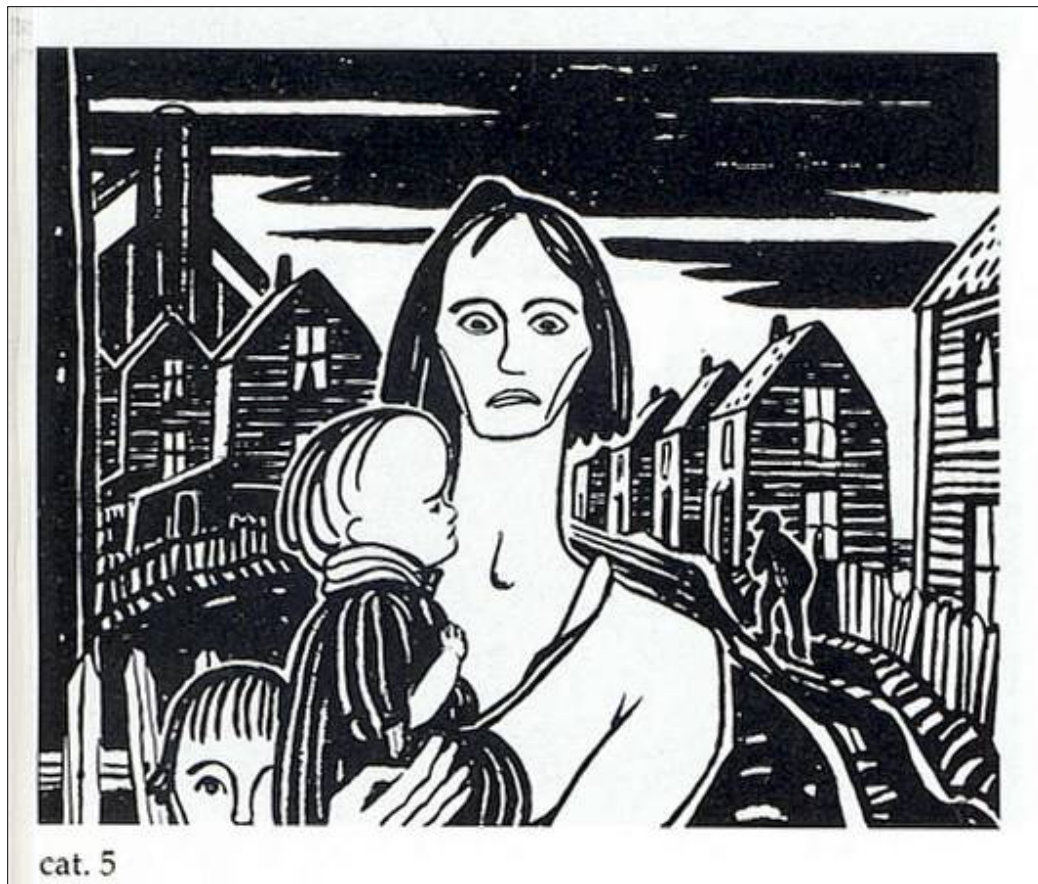


Figure 27: Lawren Harris, *Glace Bay*, c.1925. Ink Drawing. Private Collection.

Where images of mother-and-child were situated in the public sphere, they often functioned as commentary on the larger national discourse on labour and economics. The maternal body, in its capacity for communicating the health of the family unit and the nation at large, was a useful tool for artists to relay anxieties related to the economy. In this 1930 *Chatelaine* article a horde of men and women race in chase of an oversized coin (paid labour) rolling down the street while two mothers and their children stand on the

sidelines. One of these mothers is shackled to a ball and chain labeled "tradition" symbolizing views toward mothers working outside the home. These mothers represent all women with children and the normative pressure society placed on mothers to stay inside the home and out of the work-for-wages economy. Her head slumped and her hand on her cheek, she is at a loss. Her ties to the family unit prevent her from running with the others, which, according to this author, is an international problem requiring careful reconsideration. Of course, working single women were not exempt from the debate. Anxieties about their rights as workers, protection in the workplace, and the growing 'problems' of "oriental" and other 'undesirable' employers and the impact of work on women's moral fibre inspired numerous journalistic exposés.¹⁵⁶ But the bodies of mothers carried different meaning from those of single women. Where single white women sat at the heart of the visual discourse on modernity, white mothers were situated more within the discourse of national well being, often debated through the language of family.

Lawren Harris's 1925 drawing, *Glace Bay*, is another example of how the image of mother-and-child addressed larger economic concern over poverty. Harris' time in Eastern Canada in the early 1920s inspired artwork that

¹⁵⁶ Anne Elizabeth Wilson, "A Pound of Prevention or an Ounce of Cure?," *Chatelaine* (December 1928): 12.; Murray E.M. and Maude Petitt Hill, "Do Women Want 'Protection'," *Chatelaine* (August 1928): 6.

spoke to the destitution suffered by many Canadian families.¹⁵⁷ His dark, heavy and distorted representation of a mother and her children in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia is not a portrait but a social commentary, a story told of not only one family, but of a community and a class of people across the nation. His ghoulish rendering of the mother is at the opposite end of the spectrum from Dinsmore's "perfect parents". She is emaciated. Her eyes, cheek bones, Adam's apple and her boney fingers evidence the limits of the human body's ability to go without food, rest or support. She is the personification of desperation. Her bugging eyes and turned down mouth reveal the sadness and draining intensity of poverty. She is drawn holding and protecting her two children, face-to-face with her little one, which codes her as a good mother, and only deepens the viewer's empathy for her circumstances. But this is not the celebratory imagery of motherhood – this is a mother in trouble. The often-used symbolic connection between mother-and-child and the well-being of the nation functions as critique here. This image does not offer promise, although like other images of mother-and-child it does speak to the future. Harris uses the visual language of motherhood to speak to the theme of nation building, but instead contributes a story of part of a nation deteriorating. This work in particular begs the viewer to ask questions about the pervasiveness of poverty in the east and elsewhere and what could

¹⁵⁷ Peter Larisey, *Light for a Cold Land : Lawren Harris's Work and Life - an Interpretation* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993), 73-74.

become of this family, these children and the nation they inhabit. For all the celebratory imagery of modernity and nation-building in these years, there were some artists who challenged the popular discourse of the unified modern nation that Canada was becoming, suggesting that perhaps capitalism and industry were less building a nation for Canadians than at their expense. Using the mother-and-children motif, Harris' drawing projects a social and political problem that serves a larger discourse on nation and poverty, making this piece the most activist of his work in Glace Bay.

Sex and Gardening: Encoding Reproduction and Childrearing

Mothers,... naturally.

...for the rest of her life she will probably hear this or that complacent male with half her brains chortle out the list of men's achievements with the time-worn comment, "What have you women done that can equal this?" Nothing very spectacular! What we have done has been only to populate the world, and we have done it so quietly that no one thinks very much about it. It is usually attributed to Nature and let go at that.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Knight, "Only a Super-Woman Can Juggle Both a Family and a Career." *The Chatelaine* (July, 1928): 21.

The question 'where do babies come from?' would go long unanswered were we to rely on mass images and art produced in these years for explanation. The mystical stork of children's tales was the only entity in connection with the arrival of baby. The role of mothering was so taken for granted as women's natural calling, and the process so seemingly given, that barely a word was spoken about pregnancy, let alone imagery produced of women with protruding bellies or swollen breasts. Sex was not an uncommon word to see, or idea to allude to, but after courting and marriage, the female body went into hiding. Negating the gestation process, and more importantly, the sex act, the female body

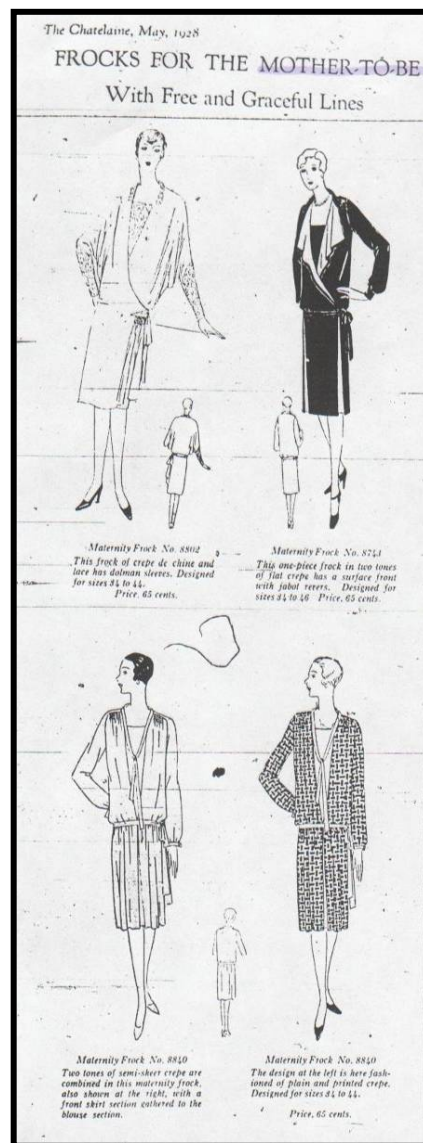


Figure 28: Artist/Author Unknown.
“Frocks for the Mother To Be”
Chatelaine (May 1928): 73

re-emerged baby in arms as the dotting mother. Women's figures appeared the same as when they had left, no wider in the hips or waist and drawn in more conservative dress denoting their new responsibilities and propriety. In

rare cases magazines advertised for maternity clothing, but sketches did not allude to mother's changing body.¹⁵⁹ As Strong-Boag writes, "however much babies were looked forward to, it was difficult to ignore that pregnancy was a direct result of a sexual act."¹⁶⁰ It may have seemed that the perpetuation of the stork imagery functioned as a fairy tale explanation for children, but it was also a useful tool of avoidance and coding for artists and viewers. Female sexuality was perceived as a potential ticking time bomb within the context of nation-building – poised to disrupt the image of the civilized and upstanding country that church and state in Canada were working to create. Even framed within the legitimacy of the family, female sexuality was kept under wraps. Pregnancy was hidden in the 1920s even though public health nurses urged women not to shut themselves indoors.¹⁶¹ In the same way that Anne McClintock suggests that missing imagery of working women in turn-of-the-century British advertisements erased women's unseemly domestic labour, the absence of pregnant women negated and hid women's work as mothers, the essentialism of their power as life-givers and the extensive physical sacrifice made through the maternal body.¹⁶² Not only

¹⁵⁹ "Fashion Pages: Frocks for the Mother-to-Be," *Chatelaine* (May 1928): 73.

¹⁶⁰ Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s.," 152.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), 215.

were pregnant women denied a safe space where their changing bodies were accepted, normalized, or acknowledged, but this avoidance also signalled social anxiety over the messiness of childbirth and the patriarchal nature of the world of art. Even self-proclaimed 'women's magazines' were limited in their commitment to being for and about women, denying perhaps the most profound of women's bodily experiences.

In an attempt to diversify the uses of their disinfectant, Lysol did dare to tactfully acknowledge the maternal body by recommending women use Lysol and water "for feminine hygiene when baby comes," but more often, Lysol ads were one of the few places where one could read for allusions to women controlling fertility, albeit dangerously.¹⁶³ Ads consistently campaigned for the product's "household and personal use... even in the mild solution used for feminine hygiene, its germicidal strength is more than sufficient to provide rapid and thorough anti-sepsis. Its regular use forestalls infection." Use of Lysol in vaginal douching regimes also forestalled pregnancies, disturbing the pH balance of the vaginal cavity to such a degree that impregnation was unlikely. Of course the side effects were alarming. Lysol ads' claims that "It is absolutely safe for the most delicate membranes" were refuted in 1936 by two American female physicians who published a book called *Facts and Frauds in Women's Hygiene* where they

¹⁶³ "Lysol: Are You Keeping Pace with Your Husband?," *MacLean's Magazine* (November 1, 1924): 67.

publicized cases of death and disease caused by douching with products such as Lysol and Zonite and refuted claims made by advertisers that it was healthy or even necessary.¹⁶⁴ As Strong-Boag and Lévesque have shown, women did make attempts to control fertility and abortions were, as Strong-Boag puts it, “a fact of life.”¹⁶⁵ Hiding the pregnant body in the popular press created a vacuum in which some advertisers were only too happy to establish themselves as experts. As Jackson Lears writes, “Preoccupation with bodily purification and control linked advertising executives with the Protestant past as well as the professional present.”¹⁶⁶ As matters of the female body became more regulated by professionals, a means of discussing it publically emerged.

¹⁶⁴ Rachel Lynn and Sarah K. Greenberg Palmer, *Facts and Frauds in Woman's Hygiene* (New York: The Sun Dial Press, 1936), 142-57.

¹⁶⁵ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*, 146.

¹⁶⁶ T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance : A Cultural History of Advertising in America* ([New York]: Basic Books, 1994), 139-40.



Figure 29: "Pears Soap: To have and to hold," *Everywoman's World* (June 1923): 63.

The perceived impropriety of discussions about fertility and the maternal body, however, did create a niche for coded symbols that communicated in the absence of a discourse in words. Despite the prudishness of Canadian culture in these years, a number of artists produced

works that portrayed intimacy between men and women such as Fitzgerald's 1925 *Embrace* and love-making depicted in Cecil Buller's carvings *Song of Solomon* (1929) and Alfred Laliberté's 1926 *Âme et Sentiment*. Where art could take greater liberties in portraying intimacy and alluding to the sex act, magazines had to be more coy. One Pears soap ad provides a great example.¹⁶⁷ At first glance, the ad appears to be a typical pitch for another beauty product, but visually and in its supporting text it engages the discourse of the normative female life path of marriage and childrearing. The ad reads, "To have and to hold a lovely complexion is the delightful experience of a woman who uses Pears' soap." In addition to the obvious references to marriage in "to have in to hold", the ad also touches on pregnancy, "the delightful experience of a woman," and reinforces the language with visual cues for fertility. The woman's left hand gently cups her abdomen and the lilies she holds with her right are strategically pointed there as well, the flowers alluding to ideas of blossoming, growth and the woman's natural capacity as cultivator. The placement of her hands is not coincidental, for hands were one of the essential tools of the productive body. Where images of women with hands folded or unapparent signaled her passivity or immobility, free hands could gesture to the site of focus and implied the body's productivity. We continue to see allusions to fertility and

¹⁶⁷ "Pears Soap: To Have and to Hold," *Everywoman's World* June 1923: 63.

pregnancy coded in these ways throughout the 1920s as surrogate for broaching these topics explicitly.



Figure 30: Edwin Holgate, *Tsimshian Girl with Baby Board*, 1926. Pencil. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

In high art, figure artist Edwin Holgate did allude to bodily preparedness and fertility in his soft and voluptuous figures, with full breasts and wide hips, getting as close as we have seen to the ideal imagery of the fertile body, even though it ran counter to popular consumer-oriented images of lean and tubular female bodies. But a trip to the Gitxan First Nations territory of northwest British Columbia inspired Holgate to produce perhaps the most explicit images of the pregnant body we know of. His portrayal of a native woman in a c.1926 carving, *Totem Poles No. 2*, has her weaving between imposing totem poles with a box rigged with rope hanging across her back.¹⁶⁸ Her pear-shaped body draped in a cape insinuates she might be pregnant but the title of the piece has the viewer focusing more on the intricately carved poles than the figure. In fact, this figure appears to be a preoccupation of Holgate's, for an identical woman (in shape and contour) appears in a different wood engraving with the same name produced around 1927.¹⁶⁹ Some clues exist that suggest Holgate may have indeed intended to portray a mother-to-be in these works. In a lesser-known sketch entitled *Tsimshian Woman with Baby Board* Holgate portrayed a woman that again resembled the figures in *Totem Poles No. 2* (both the 1926 and c.1927 pieces), and makes explicit in the title that the empty box hanging across the

¹⁶⁸ Edwin Holgate, *Totem Poles No. 2*, 1926. Woodcut on Japan Paper. National Gallery of Canada.

¹⁶⁹ Edwin Holgate. *Totem Poles, No.2*, c.1927. Wood Engraving on Japan Paper. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Native woman's shoulders is intended for baby.¹⁷⁰ In this sketch Holgate focused solely on the mother-to-be who peeks shyly over her shoulder, acknowledging the viewer's presence. There is no landscape, there are no totem poles, simply the pregnant Tsimshian woman and her baby board. Although her arms are tucked away under her shawl rendering her passive, her pregnant form contradicts this, accentuating her reproductive capacity. Holgate's image of a pregnant Native woman was unique and ran counter to common perceptions of Natives as a doomed and disappearing race. As Sandra Dyck discovered in Holgate's letters, he felt he was "witnessing the rapid decline of a splendid race of creative and well-organized people,"¹⁷¹ reacting by sketching and carving at least three maternal figure pieces that embodied a narrative of reproduction and survival. Holgate produced no images of pregnant white women. Feasible among explanations might be that images of pregnant Native women were less taboo or somehow less threatening to viewers' ideals of feminine propriety because white viewers did not look at Native women and think of their own mothers, sisters and wives. Non-white women were not held to the same standards of appropriateness, but were harshly judged against it. As we saw earlier, Native

¹⁷⁰ Edwin Holgate., *Tsimshian Girl with Baby Board*, 1926. Pencil. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

¹⁷¹ Sandra Dyck, "A New Country for Canadian Art: Edwin Holgate and Marius Barbeau in Gitksan Territory," in *Edwin Holgate*, ed. Rosalind Pepall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 58.

women, constructed as Others, occupied a discourse on mothering that served more to legitimate white motherhood than to engage on equal terms with it, but Holgate's thoughtful renderings were a sympathetic approach to the maternal body which, although still reflecting the myth of the vanishing native in subtle ways, reflected a beautifully stoic approach to the maternal figure.

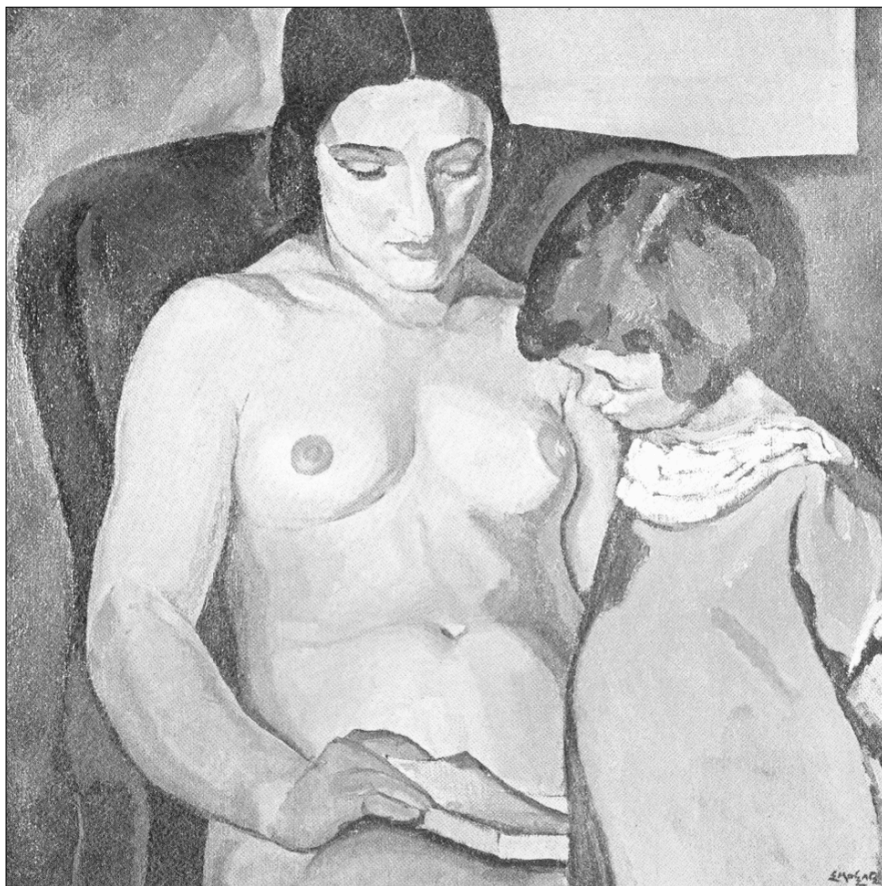


Figure 31: Edwin Holgate, *Mother and Daughter*, 1926. Oil on Canvas. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

Holgate's approach to the white maternal body returned to the world of codified symbols as exemplified in his 1926 *Mother and Daughter*. Another of his many athletic and muscular nudes, this figure shares the canvas with a daughter to whom she is reading. This act of nurturing, teaching, imparting knowledge is not only demonstrated through the image of the reading mother, but also through her naked breast, the child poised just so, as if to suckle on it, to be nurtured and fed by her mother in multiple senses. The mother's nudity is peculiar as most mothers are conservatively dressed when tending to their children, but as Berger points out, "To be naked is to be oneself... to be naked is to be without disguise."¹⁷² Common in Holgate's nudes is the muscular strength of the mother. In particular, her enormous trapezius muscles, bold shoulders and strong forearms lend her body an uncommon air of power and strength. Borrowing from the imagery of the strong and competent, normatively masculine, body, Holgate comments on the strength and competence required in the challenging task of mothering. The mother's slightly rounded belly, heavy breasts and large nipples signal her readiness, and these characteristics of fertility, aligned with exceptional muscularity are a unique and powerful exaltation of motherhood highly unconventional in this era. Holgate does imbue the nude with long hair, however, as a symbol of feminine tradition. Finally, the artist seats this

¹⁷² Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 53.

maternal figure in a red velvety armchair with a high back, making her queen in her domestic maternal role. Holgate's *Mother and Daughter* was revolutionary in its portrayal of a muscular nude maternal figure and simultaneously served as a hail to domestic motherhood, but as Barbara Melosh argues in her examination of intrepid pioneer women figures, their expression of strength is temporary, with "female dependency and maternity as the ultimate goals, to be achieved once the rigors of the frontier yield to a more settled life."¹⁷³ Further, Melosh argued that muscular representations of women as "partners and coworkers in farm labour" helped to construct the comradely ideal that "placed the farm family as icon of an idealized social and moral landscape."¹⁷⁴ Thus, Holgate's image of the muscular, although celebratory, anchored female potential to the family unit and limited it in its temporariness.

Flowers and Soap

Within the context of the importance of agriculture and settlement to the establishment of Canada as a geographic entity and a socialized and productive nation the symbolism of flowers and soap, cultivation and civilization, functioned at two levels; in the context of motherhood it served to demonstrate the perceived role of mother to nurture and mold the youth of

¹⁷³ Melosh, *Engendering Culture*, 47.

¹⁷⁴ Melosh, *Engendering Culture*, 53.

the nation, and in the larger picture, the very fabric of the nation itself. In advertisements, imagery of motherhood was used as a tool by commercial artists to link normative ideas of gender and mothering to commercial goods for sale. This made advertisement images no less noteworthy contributors to stereotypes, but in their difference in purpose from high art, for example, they were more focused, simplistic and blatant in their attempt to communicate ideas visually. Commercial artists were likely quite aware of how long viewers spent looking at their advertisements and the short shelf-life of the magazine. Commercial images had a big job to do in a shorter time than was usually afforded to an exhibited painting. On the other hand, commercial art reached a larger audience and could be reprinted and viewed by the same consumer a number of times. So, commercial artists had to be stealthy in their approach – be clear and simple, make the product attractive, and try not to offend anyone. Referencing widely understood symbols was a way to manipulate the advertising message to serve the selling of a product. Anne McClintock argues, “Advertising’s chief contribution to the culture of modernity was the discovery that by manipulating the semiotic space around the commodity, the unconscious as a public space could also be manipulated.”¹⁷⁵ Berger argues that advertisers had to “turn to its own advantage the traditional education of the average spectator-buyer, what

¹⁷⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, 213.

he learnt in school of history, mythology, poetry.”¹⁷⁶ Flowers and soap were particularly common symbols in the ads of the 1920s and had been for some time, citing normative understandings of women’s role as cultivators and civilizers.

Imagery of women and flowers drew heavily on the popular assumption of women’s inherent closeness to nature. Across films, magazines and high art the conflation of women with nature was rampant. In some artistic renderings women’s bodies and the nature around them were so intertwined that one could hardly be told apart from the other.



Figure 32: Artist Unknown. *Chatelaine* (February 1928): cover.

¹⁷⁶ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 140.

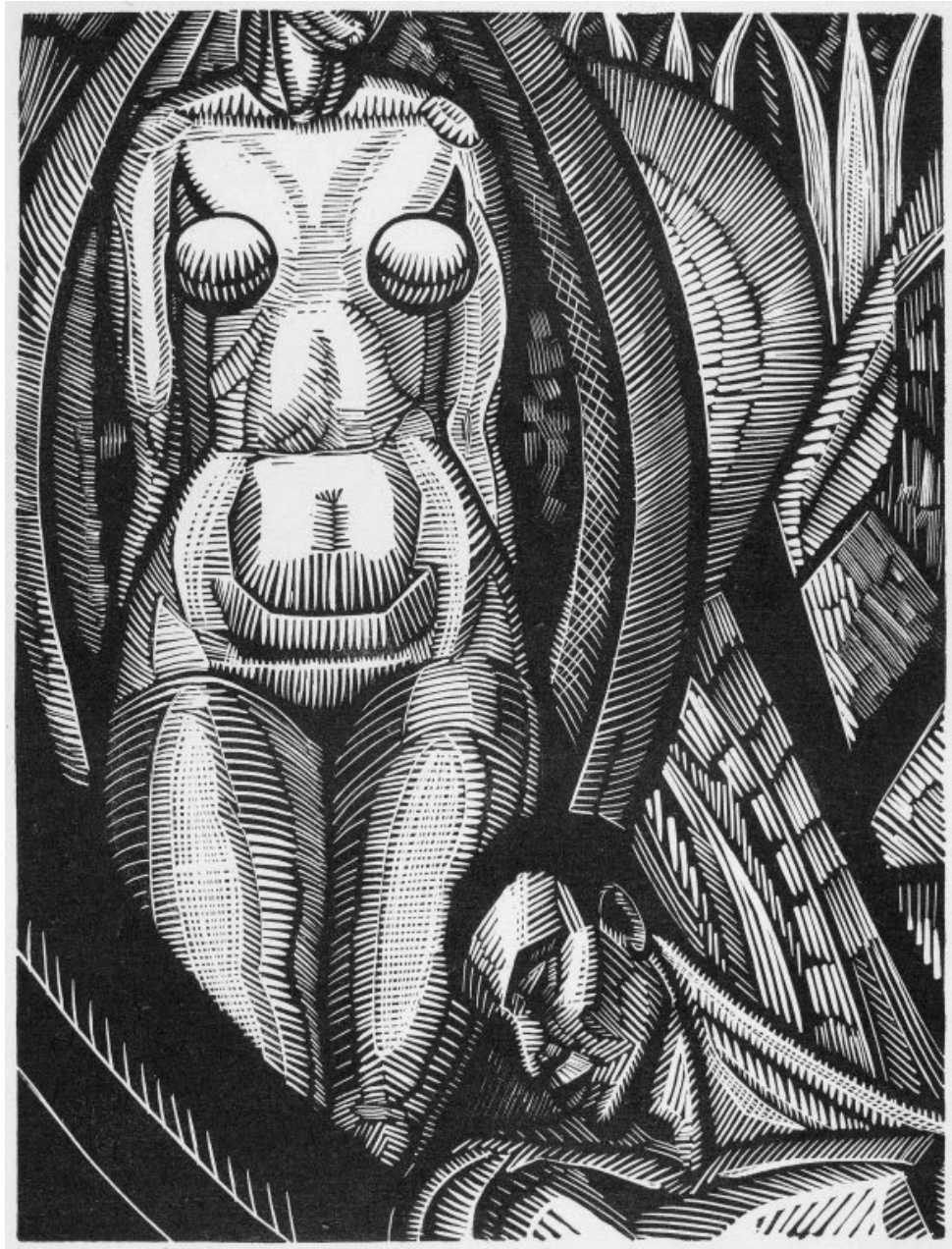


Figure 33: Cecil Buller, *Song of Solomon 1:3*, 1929. Wood Engraving on Japan Paper.
National Gallery of Canada.

In the 1920s images of women in nature persisted but took on modern tones. One 1929 *Chatelaine* cover has the indulgent youthful figure dressed in a fashionable cloche hat, fur wrap, bracelets and dark makeup, and behind her, art deco lines cut through the floral background. In Cecil Buller's 1929 carving, *Song of Solomon*, Buller's modern approach - the clean lines, high contrast, and two-dimensionality of the bodies - streamlines the traditional representations of women intertwined with nature. With elements of the traditional (in ideology) and the modern (in artistic convention), these images continued to perpetuate the connection of women to nature. The imagery of women as nature did not disappear in the 1920s but was transforming into a more modern depiction, as did the allegories of nation in this period. And although the discourse on child rearing was becoming more rooted in science and its professionals, the imagery of women's innate gift for nurturing and cultivating through the imagery of flowers continued to be used by artists because of its power as a visual code.

Thinking of children as flowers gave way to the idea of infants as machines in these years, argues Strong-Boag, but the traditional visual imagery of flowers and gardening continued to be used by artists to symbolize children and child-rearing. In advertisements these images were still serving their purpose of communicating well-known ideas. As historians have argued, the principles of scientific management had infiltrated the work of

mothering. Mothers were encouraged to take the business world as model for how to run the home¹⁷⁷ ...and encouraged to raise children and keep house based on scientific management techniques.¹⁷⁸ In one such article the artist, Stella Grier, portrays a mother's delicate hands holding a clock, onto which the image of a fussing baby is superimposed. Images of scientific management (the clock) and images of traditional approaches to motherhood (flowers) coexisted not only as evidence of a new hybrid approach to mothering but also divulged the unresolved tension between traditional ways of understand motherhood and child rearing and emerging ideals rooting in science.

¹⁷⁷ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*, 164.

¹⁷⁸ Pines, "The Baby's Routine and Management" *Chatelaine* (Jan 1929): 19.

La Canadienne, Juillet, 1922 27

DOMINION LINOLEUM RUGS

**"Oh! Quel Plaisir
de Vivre Dans le Vestibule!"**

Que les marmots aiment à vivre à l'air libre — après un hiver d'intérieur! Quelle image ils présentent durant les longs jours d'été — avec leurs joues baignées par le soleil! — leurs figures heureuses — toujours bouillants de bonne humeur.

Faites de votre véranda une fraîche demeure d'été pour toute la famille. Une carquette de Linoleum la transformera en un charmant vivoir extérieur. Les nouveaux modèles, sortant à peine de la fabrique, sont accueillis avec empressement. Un doux et riche mélange de couleurs a été préparé par nos artistes experts.

Les carquettes de Linoleum paraissent toujours bien saines au un dur travail. Passer légèrement la vadrouille de temps en temps les garde fraîches et propres, et comme elles durent de nombreuses années, elles coûtent très peu à la longue. Décidez-vous d'acheter au moins une carquette de Linoleum cet été, et vous serez convaincu du bien-être qu'elles procurent.

Voix vendeurs de couvre-plancher: nous expliquerons les avantages de Linoleum Dominion et des carquettes de Linoleum Dominion endossées d'une forte toile — garantissant des années de service.





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Flowers were a commonly used motif to suggest cultivation, the nurturing work done by mothers. For scenes like the one created in one

179 "Dominion Linoleum Co.: Oh! Quel Plaisir," *La Canadienne* (July 1922): 2.

Dominion Linoleum advertisement the flowers lend meaning to the product being sold, the linoleum carpet underfoot. In this ad a mother arranges flowers she has likely cut from her brimming garden outside the window. Her work as nurturer and cultivator is attested to by her teeming rose bushes, her indoor bouquets, and her daughter, who she has clearly taught well, for she, too, has learned to follow in her mother's footsteps and cultivate. The floral pattern in the linoleum completes the motif and draws a visual and symbolic connection between the product and mother's cultivating role.

Symbols of mothering in action did not end with flowers, for soap took the visual discourse even further. It was not only that women had a natural ability for nurturing but that by virtue of their presence they communicated the principles of order and civilization. The Principal of Havergale College, Ellen Knox, wrote in her 1919 manifesto for *The Girl of the New Day*;

... So far as the West is concerned, it is not women farmers who are needed, but women of the old domestic virtues. The West needs women badly, not for the cultivation of the land – there will be men enough for that – but as 'home maker', whether they come in the capacity of wives, or housekeepers, or 'Hired Help'." [For] "the presence of women helps to bring cleanliness an order and sobriety in to a community."¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ Knox, *The Girl of the New Day*, 205-09.

Constructed as unruly and unbridled, masculine frontier culture without the 'clean', 'orderly' and 'sobering' presence of women, was seen as problematic. Wifeless men in Canada's west were perceived to be teetering on chaos left unchecked by the civilizing influence of women.¹⁸¹ Commercial artists drew on similar perceptions of soap to play on the discourse of women as civilizing forces and in particular, white women. Palmolive ads in particular played heavily on the inferiority of non-whiteness by situating women of colour in servitude to white women consumers and soap users.¹⁸² Artists pulled on nostalgic imagery of a mythical past, in this case the beautiful and stoic Egyptian queen, and placed her in the servitude of white female protagonists. Likewise, Old Dutch advertisements depicted the stout, strong and faceless European female figure, marching off the cleaning container into the house of a white woman whose housework duties promise to be infinitely easier with the purchase.¹⁸³ As Anne McClintock asserts, examples of "commodity magic and the vanishing of women's work" were plentiful, but they were not without their racial undertones of the division of labour.¹⁸⁴ White

¹⁸¹ For a study of gender in the settling of the west between 1849-1971 see: Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire : Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, Studies in Gender and History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

¹⁸² For examples, see *La Canadienne* (October 1920): 35; (November 1920): 35; (December 1920): 35; etc.

¹⁸³ "Old Dutch: Une Grosse Aide Pour Le Nettoyage De La Maison," *La Canadienne* (October 1921): 34.

¹⁸⁴ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, 222.

women and non-white women, she argues, "are figured not as historic agents but as frames for the commodity, valued as *exhibition* alone."¹⁸⁵ McClintock asks why advertisements paid so much attention to surfaces and reflection and argues that polishing was a way of "replacing the disorderly evidence of working women with the exhibition of domesticity as veneer."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, it was the placement of the white mother in relation to her work - the success and satisfaction derived from her role as civilizer - that was the commodity offered for sale and less the cleaning products themselves.

In relation to child-rearing, artists used soap to imply a transformation of blank slate nature into cultured civility and citizenship. The act of cleaning both the home and one's children was part of the process of purifying, rearing and training in the domestic sphere which stood in as the most basic site of the nation building project. In the context of the growing 'science-of-mothering', fear mongering over the spread of germs, dirt and disease, improper rearing and the inadequacies of young mothers, these ads insisted that the good mother cleans, coddles, polishes and civilizes the home and the family.

Although discourse in 1920s Canadian magazines differed slightly from that of McClintock's turn-of-the-century Britain, they were no less racist and

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 223.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 219.

no less focused on the perceived social and cultural impact of non-white peoples in Canada. Debates aired in magazines over Canada's 'lamentable' immigration policy circled around undesirable eastern European immigrants, labelled in one article as "the scum of Europe" – "part-illiterate, dissipated and often mentally deficient... Are these slackers the kind we want to be the fathers of our future Canadians?... The idea is repulsive beyond words."¹⁸⁷ The article is accompanied by two photographs; one of a posing group of well-dressed and smiling Scottish, Irish and British immigrants, a mother and child present in the tidy little group give the air of family; the other photo portraying a crowd of Russian, Polish and Balkan immigrants chaotically lined up for registration. This group, no less well dressed than the other, is framed as disorderly by the photographer and is juxtaposed in the article with the photograph of the calmly organized and posed order of the portrait of Scottish, Irish and British newcomers. Here, the visual iconography of chaos and in turn, a lack of civility and good breeding, is used to manipulate the viewer into agreement with the conservative xenophobia offered up by the author. "How would you like neighbours of this type?" asks the author, "especially if you lived on the prairie with the nearest settlement fifty miles away?" Settling the empty west with "undesirable" immigrants threatened to compromise the nation-building project as white elitists

¹⁸⁷ L.W. Claxton, "Who Is Stealing Our People," *Everywoman's World* (October 1920): 7.

envisioned it. The author's appeal to the reader also divulges their awareness of a white readership who is, if not should be, concerned with whiteness as a sign of stability, civility, and national well-being. Imagery of the nuclear family was used by the photographer in posing the white immigrants as one would have posed a family. The editors at *Everywoman's World* then contextualized the image as example of calm and civilized family people, communicating to the reader that immigrants from Great Britain were significantly more suitable and desirable for a "civilized" Canada.

Ideas of Canadian mothers as 'breeders of the white race' were also common sentiments of the time.¹⁸⁸ Women were seen as key elements in civilizing the wilderness of western Canada through their influence on and care of men and children. In soap advertisements in particular, this understanding of women's roles was used by artists to sell both soap and perpetuate ideas of mother as civilizer. As Jackson Lears, Stewart Ewen and Vincent Vinikas have written, civilizing the self and one's family through the purchase of products such as soaps and deodorants were seen as one's path to personal and to larger social salvation.¹⁸⁹ One Ivory ad declares the

¹⁸⁸ For example, see: Marie de Lepervanche, "Women, Nation and the State in Australia," in *Woman, Nation, State*, ed. Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias, and Jo Campling (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

¹⁸⁹ T.J. Jackson. Lears, " From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption : Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, ed. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983); Stuart Ewen, *Captains of*

“whiteness” and “purity” of the soap as one of its most virtuous qualities, reaffirming whiteness as rightness.¹⁹⁰ The “sacrament of soap” in McClintock’s words, “a reformation allegory whereby the purification of the domestic body becomes a metaphor for the regeneration of the body politic” found a voice in 1920s magazine ads.¹⁹¹ Women’s work in bathing, nurturing and modeling was framed as her most nationalist and worthy work by commentators and idealized visually. An Ivory soap ad accentuates the role of mother as model for her children, reading “Un Enseignement sans paroles” [*A lesson without words*], wherein the child is learning the virtues of soap – cleanliness and civility – by watching and presumably mimicking her mother. In the E.B. Eddy Co. advertisement, the child in the tub has learned to wash itself under mother’s guidance, symbolically having internalized civility, and now conducting its own self-regulating regime. Although disciplinary bodily regimes may have been misguided in their marking of civilization, the fetishization of soap and cleanliness, particularly in the visual politics of mothering, pointed to a long-time understanding of women’s roles in reproducing standards of civilization and whiteness.

Consciousness : Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Vincent Vinikas, *Soft Soap, Hard Sell : American Hygiene in an Age of Advertisement*, 1st ed. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1992).

¹⁹⁰ "Ivory Soap: Propreté Trouve Dans Un Bassin D'eau Pure Ce Qu'elle Chercait," *La Canadienne* (July 1920): 2.

¹⁹¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, 214.

7 La Canadienne, Novembre 1922



Faut-il en la matière s'en croire avec le genre, l'avis sage de Ivory.

Un Enseignement Sans Paroles

LES BEAUX ENFANTS! Quelle peur cela peut le parler donner pour les conserver ainsi! Pourtant, les mères peuvent fort bien développer en eux cette tendance à la propreté et à la beauté — simplement par des suggestions et par des exemples.

Nous recommandons une manière de procéder qui enseigne la propreté à nos enfants de cette simple manière:

Elle leur fait comprendre combien elle se sent à l'aise lorsqu'elle est propre. Elle leur fait voir un morceau de Ivory Soap en une place facile pour eux à accéder. Elle leur fait voir comment ils peuvent se laver.

Cette maman sait certainement les faire bien nettoyer les grands, et elle découvre que ces morceaux de Ivory Soap font leur nettoyage doux mais complet sans qu'un mot se soit dit aux enfants.

Ivory est le meilleur des savons que vous puissiez imaginer pour vos enfants et pour vous-même. Il n'aime pas déger — c'est ce que tous savons devraient faire. Et, tandis qu'il nettoie, vous faites l'expérience avec Ivory des bienfaits des sept qualités tant désirables d'un savon fin — douceur, blancheur, parfum, mousse abondante, rinçage rapide, et "IL FLOTTE".

Avec chacune de ces sept qualités désirables, Ivory est naturellement le savon favori de la plupart des mères.

PURIFIER & GAMBIE

IVORY SOAP
99 44 % PUR IL FLOTTE

Faites-vous un enseignement Purifier & Gambie à l'école de la santé.

Ivory Soap se trouve en grande quantité partout où se trouvent des savons.

Pour le détail, voir le prospectus qui accompagne chaque boîte de savons. Ce prospectus est aussi disponible gratuitement sur demande.

Geo. Parsons, Distributeur pour le Canada, 100, rue St-Jacques, Montréal.

Copyright, 1922, par The Parfums & Cosmetics Co., Inc., New York, N.Y.

Figure 34: "Ivory Soap: Un Enseignement Sans Paroles," *La Canadienne* (November 1922): 02.

La Canadienne, Novembre, 1920 45



Le Tub idéal pour Bébé

L E TUB de fibre durcie de Eddy est l'arrête qu'il faut pour le bain de Bébé. À part qu'il est léger, facile à manœuvrer et incassable, il a une surface qui ne peut causer de mal... il n'a pas de craquelures, ni joints, ni clous, ni rivets, il ne peut ni se fendiller ni s'ébarbouiller. Il est de beaucoup supérieur au métal parce qu'il ne peut pas être bosselé et qu'il ne rouille pas. Les tubs métalliques absorbent rapidement la chaleur et sont susceptibles de brûler la peau du bébé; même après que l'on a ajouté de l'eau froide. De la même façon encore, si le métal est froid, il communiquera le froid à la peau et fera refroidir l'eau rapidement. La fibre durcie de Eddy n'est conductrice ni de la chaleur ni du froid et est parfaitement adre. Pour la même raison, elle conserve l'eau plus longtemps chaude.

Priez votre fournisseur de vous faire voir l'article

The E. B. EDDY CO., Limited
HULL, Canada,

Fabricants des fameuses allumettes Eddy,

B 39

Figure 35: "E.B. Eddy Co.: Le Tub Idéal Pour Bébé," *La Canadienne* (November 1920): 45.

This is perhaps the very reason that accounts for the absence of mothers in this decade's films. Although all films featured at least one female protagonist, none included mothers. It seems, however, that the absence of these "civilizing" elements was key to the chaos and melodrama that was necessary for a good feature film story line. If the presence of mothers in high and commercial art denoted stability and civility, then their absence in cinema made room for a host of schemers and villains. Without the guidance of mothers to cultivate and nurture young protagonists, they fall victim to temptation and their own naivety, finding themselves in a variety of compromising situations. Social anxieties of the decade were most often personified by youth, who were believed to be susceptible and defenceless against modern vices. The single fathers of 1920s silent films were present and numerous but unable to stand in for the absent mothers as sources of stability and guidance for their children in their time of need.

It seems that the very visual presence of mothers was enough to disrupt the tension and action that pleased viewers. It is easier to account for this absence in the era of silent film when the principal way for filmmakers to communicate ideas was through widely understood visual cues. Good mothers were not dramatic or interesting to a public that paid to be thrilled. Good mothers were calm and steadfast, hardly the stuff that cinema is made of. Visual images of mothers outside the home were a rarity, and especially in

the world of feature films, where public spaces and other exciting elements such as youth, modern fashions and lovers' drama were idolized, mothers had no place. The missing mothers of the silver screen were a testament to their cultural force as symbols of order and stability.

Despite this absence, motherhood remained the ideal happy ending to a heroine's dramatic turmoil. In the conclusion of *Back to God's Country*, after Dolores battles the evil Captain Rydal and saves her injured husband, they quit the busy city and the vast, icy north, and they return to her peaceful cottage in the forest. The film then jumps to several months later, nine to be sure, depicting a happy Dolores and Peter nesting with their new baby. The return to peace and order is paralleled with the arrival of the bundle and Dolores' wild adventure comes to an end as she assumes her new role as mother. She has traded in her modern clothing for the simple, more conservative dress with which she began the film, as an innocent northwoods dweller.

Making up for their absence in films, however, mothers appeared frequently in commissioned portraits on which so many artists subsisted. Portraits of matriarchs produced throughout the 1920s were of women past their youth and often more conservatively and lavishly dressed and posed than non-commissioned portraits were. The bodies of these women (although likely embellished by artists at least a bit) showed the signs of time passing.

Sagging skin, wrinkles and grey hair were painted soft and like badges on the body. These women, often somber in their disposition and facial expression, communicated the seriousness and respectability of the role of matriarch, for a certain level of martyrdom was often required in the ideal image of mother. Too much evidence of time spent on oneself or anything but sobriety made for selfish unrespectable mothers. Once unveiled to the owner the painting would likely hang over the domestic hearth as if to say 'mother will forever be revered.'

Conclusion

Infancy's the tender fountain,
 Power may with beauty flow,
 Mother's first to guide the streamlets,
 From them souls unresting grow--
 Grow on for the good or evil,
 Sunshine streamed or evil hurled;
 For the hand that rocks the cradle
 Is the hand that rules the world.¹⁹²

~ William Ross Wallace

¹⁹² Excerpt from the William Ross Wallace poem first published in 1865 as "What Rules the World." Republished in *Everywoman's World* (October 1927): 10.

Nellie McClung called these words “man's most brilliant witticism.”¹⁹³ Without a doubt, motherhood was the most revered of women's roles. But as Laura Briggs brings to light in her work on the visual iconography of rescue, images have “an explicitly politicized career.”¹⁹⁴ In Canada images of strong and healthy mothers and children were consistently used in discourses on nationhood, visually linking motherhood with the nation-building project. Images of mother-and-child were potent in their multitude and varied very little. Settling down as a wife and mother and focusing one's energy on a clean home, well behaved children and a functional marriage was the hegemonic stance on women's life path and idealized in visual representations of motherhood. Often, women without children could be redeemed by having spent energy caring for others or becoming nurses or nuns, but even these ventures were only seen as replacing the seemingly natural role of nurturing woman. Artists experimented very little with images of motherhood and pulled on imagery that was tried and true. In the sea of visuals produced throughout the 1920s the image of mother was one of the most stabilizing images counterbalancing more disruptive images of single women.

¹⁹³ “We Nominate as Leading Woman in Alberta: Nellie McClung,” *Everywoman's World* October 1927: 10.

¹⁹⁴ Laura Briggs, “Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption,” *Gender and History* 15, no. 2 (2003): 186.

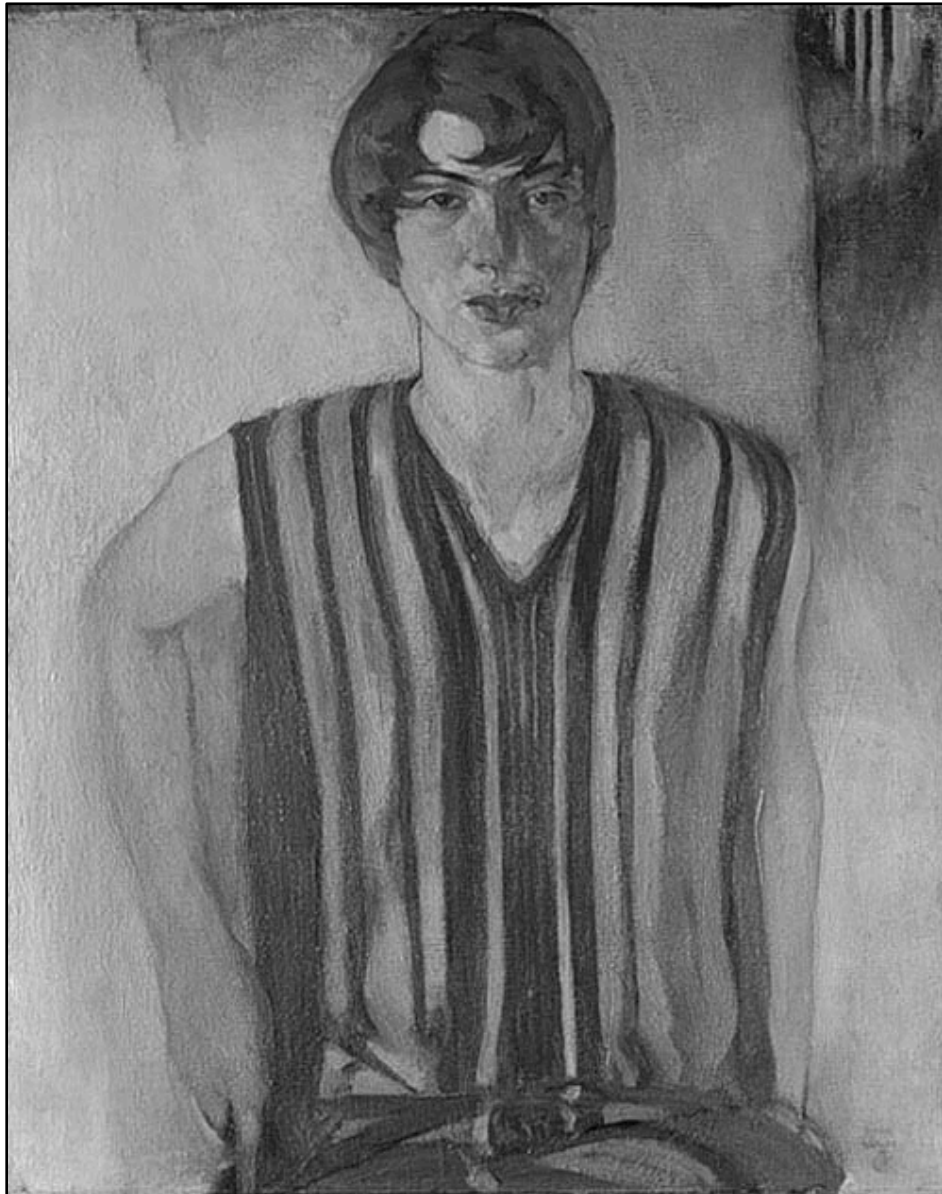
CHAPTER 3. MODERNITY, CONSUMPTION AND THE FEMALE BODY

Figure 36: F.H. Varley, *Vera*, 1929. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

In 1929 Fred Varley's *Vera* hung finished in his BC studio.¹⁹⁵ Staring back from the canvas was Varley's student and lover, Vera Weatherbie, who sat for Varley on a number of occasions. In each rendition the artist captured a different essence of his young sitter. On this canvas he had captured her androgyny and the inherent agency and power of such an image. With one hand in her pocket, and the other gripping the back of her chair, her chest is square and wide and she exudes an assuredness more common to portraits of men. Her pose, although relaxed, implies a certain momentum and agency – as though at any moment she might stand up and leave. Her short hair and dark brow, her bare arms and masculine vest, and the absence of makeup, jewellery or breasts all contribute to *Vera's* challenge to normative ideas of the feminine. The image tells a story of the power of modernity, art and fashion to reshape the female body and transform its visual politic.

Fashion has always been a measure of time passing. According to Elizabeth Wilson it has been a means of questioning reality, attempting to come to grips with human experience in a mechanized 'unnatural' world.¹⁹⁶ In the 1920s this could not have been more the case. Constructions and projections of the female body reflected ongoing discourses on modernity

¹⁹⁵ Despite not adhering to normative ideas of femininity, *Vera* was quickly purchased in 1930 and won the Willingdon Arts Competition the same year, earning the painting a wide audience and considerable admiration.

¹⁹⁶ Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams : Fashion and Modernity*, [Rev. ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 63.

and its impact on the world as it was understood. New ways of refashioning the body were not only about dress but also about navigating a new world in which the female body was the quintessential emblem. As much as the modern female body was a *product* of modernity, it had also become an *agent* of modernity.

This chapter explores the ways in which the fashionable female body was drawn, painted and filmed by artists in their attempts to sell, entertain and inspire in an explosively modern decade. It considers how the young, white female body, as the most modern of modern symbols, was taken up, manipulated and used to project ideas and influence perceptions of goods for sale. Strong and free economies were seen as the backbone of western democracy and essential components in the nation-building process, thus selling and buying were seen as the ultimate democratic act and central to modern development. This democratic right, however, was not open to everyone, for consumption, fashionability and mobility were privileges imagined along lines of class and race. The contradictions embedded in images of women are markers of the complexities inherent in using the body to communicate ideas. This chapter seeks to uncover this and other politics of images and their creation as part of the larger feminist project of deconstructing the fashionable female body.

The Female Consumer

The dichotomy of men as producers and women as consumers continued to persist throughout the 1920s. Within families in particular, women functioned as the primary household purchasers even if they were not the primary breadwinners. As Ben Singer points out, “women fuelled the consumer economy on which capitalism depended.”¹⁹⁷ With this in mind advertisers targeted potential female consumers and fed off the rhetoric of freedom and choice both in written word and in visual representation.

The relationship between ads and nation is a tight one. Publicity is directly related to the national economy and concepts of “the free world” in its constant, though veiled, allusion to consumption as a function of democracy.¹⁹⁸ Consumption as liberation was manifested in the image of the female shopper, who, with money in her purse and demands of high quality and good service, was represented in a position of power and hierarchical authority over manufacturers and salespeople. Consumer culture implied that by purchasing consumers could accomplish a level of control and power over their goods and their lives.¹⁹⁹ As Cynthia Wright argues, “Advertisers were able to translate and rechannel early twentieth-century demands for more

¹⁹⁷ Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity : Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, Film and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 262.

¹⁹⁸ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 131.

¹⁹⁹ Ellen Wiley Todd, *The "New Woman" Revised : Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 147.

freedom and choice for women into a consumerist model of choice."²⁰⁰ In magazines, the emancipated and happy female shopper who demanded good quality and a good price appeared to be in control. Further, images of women being waited on in stores and in shopping malls implied that they had higher status in the public sphere, even if men were waiting them on. As John Berger has argued, consuming therefore seemed like an avenue by which one could reinvent oneself and be happy – be an “active consumer” to balance life as a “passive worker.” Further, he asserts, “Publicity turns consumption into a substitute for democracy...The choice of consumer goods takes the place of significant political choice.”²⁰¹ Artists' work reflected an understanding of this relationship between consumption and nation, which they played out through the bodies of women.

²⁰⁰ Cynthia. Wright, "Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance': Writing Gender into the History of Consumption," in *Gender Conflicts : New Essays in Women's History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto ; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 237.

²⁰¹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 149.

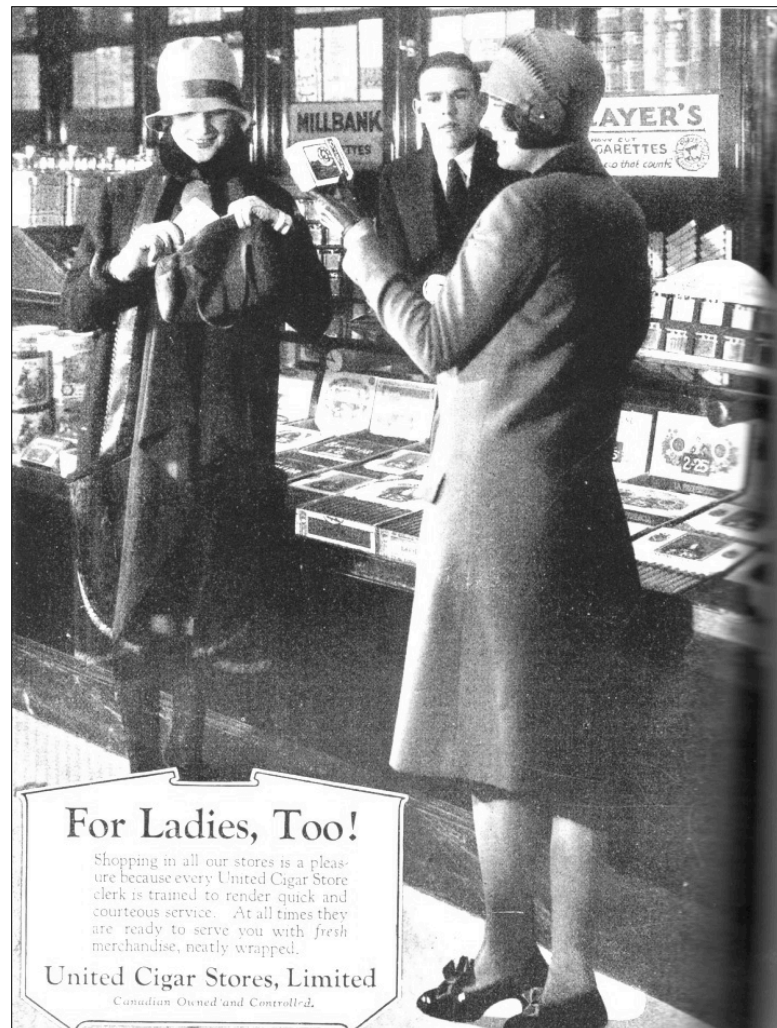


Figure 37: "United Cigar Stores Advertisement," *The Chatelaine* c. 1920s.

In one United Cigar Stores advertisement, two modern women exercise their political choice as they shop for cigarettes. Both women are demonstrating their consumer power in two visible ways – one, by examining the product, the other, by reaching into her purse. The smoke shop promises to offer attentive and courteous service “for Ladies, Too!”, as the young man

behind the counter waits patiently for the women's verdict on the cigarette carton. This smoke shop attempts to reframe the consumption of cigarettes as a traditionally male activity to include women. They are not alone, for in this decade women are occasionally seen holding a cigarette in visual images, however not yet seen advertising them. Veiled by the discourse of welcoming female patronage and by the possibility that these women are buying for their household, this ad skirts the still controversial issue of women smoking in public. To mediate the social taboo associated with women smoking, the advertisers chose a modern female figure in conservative dress to sell tobacco products, accentuating the modernness and liberating act of consuming and steering clear of anxieties over young women smoking.

The Body, Dress and Behaviour

In and of itself, fashion challenged class boundaries. It was a branch of modern art and popular at the same time. Fashion sat in the closing gap between high art and consumption, acting as a hinge, argues Elizabeth Wilson, between the elitist and the popular.²⁰² But fashion also blurred class boundaries in a more material way. The line was still clear between *haut couture* and ready-to-wear, but mass production and mass consumption made off-the-rack fashions considerably cheaper in this decade and consequently, more democratic. As Morton writes, "once clothing was

²⁰² Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams : Fashion and Modernity*, 60.

purchased rather than produced, similar styles could be reproduced at accessible prices by using cheaper material and tailoring."²⁰³ The tubular simplicity of 1920s fashions made their reproduction particularly easy. "Loosely cut, less elaborate styles were more convincingly duplicated at low prices."²⁰⁴ The growing trends of mixing and matching with three piece outfits and wearing artificial jewelry extended the versatility of wardrobes and made it appear that women had more than they really did.²⁰⁵ The popularity of salvaging and remaking old garments also reflected the interests of working-class women in being fashionable despite the economic strains of the early 1920s.²⁰⁶ The disruption of the visual distinction between women of different classes was particularly evident in the streets, where one could often only be judged by their dress and demeanour. The notion of fashion as performance thus had considerable currency in the 1920s as both fashions and public space became more accessible.

Dressing the body in modern fashions was a way of performing modernity. What that meant for the real body was increased mobility for the arms, legs and neck. Less cumbersome clothing meant a faster pace for

²⁰³ Morton, *Ideal Surroundings : Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, 147.

²⁰⁴ Susan Porter. Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 110.

²⁰⁵ Mary Wyndham, "Paris Favors a Feminine Mode," *The Chatelaine* (March 1928): 65.

²⁰⁶ For example see: "Fashion Page," *Everywoman's World* (January 1921): 24.; "Fashion Page," *Everywoman's World* (February 1921): 18.

wearers, lining up the body with popular notions of the virtues of scientific efficiency and industrialism. It was also a script for wearers that came along with imposed expectations of the wearer's behaviour. Spring-boarding off Elizabeth Wilson's idea of "fashion as a kind of performance art,"²⁰⁷ and Jane Nicholas' assertion that "the body became a public indicator of private behaviour,"²⁰⁸ fashion was more than just clothing but an indicator of what the body underneath could and would do. This connection between fashion and the wearer's behaviour was explicit in 1920s fashion literature. Fashion expert Marceline D'Alroy wrote "It has been suggested that the short skirts made many 'little vices' fashionable – drinking in the afternoon, smoking at all times in all places, and making for a general laxity in comportment. And if it is a psychological fact that the fashion is a direct reflection of the way we are thinking and acting and living at the moment – which I personally believe – then the new long skirts most certainly suggest a sudden return to rectitude..."²⁰⁹ But before the "return to rectitude" brought on by economic crisis, the female body in 1920s visual culture spoke of a new freedom and

²⁰⁷ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams : Fashion and Modernity*, 60.

²⁰⁸ Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," 54.

²⁰⁹ Mlle. Marceline D'Alroy, "Are Long Skirts Coming Back?," *The Chatelaine* (November 1929): 31.

new controls, which Tinkler and Warsh argue was “an essential feature of the modern female body.”²¹⁰

Exposure of shoulders, necklines and knees accentuated women’s sexual freedom, much to the consternation of observers. “Nice women have no knees” declared fashion author Mary Wyndham in 1928.²¹¹ Images of the flapper ran alongside articles that discussed concerns over her behaviour, and more generally, the stability of the nation through the integrity of its future mothers. Imagery of the flapper and all it symbolized was also cause for concern in immigrant communities. As Francis Swyripa has shown, imagery of the flapper in the Ukrainian-Canadian popular press was used to express anxieties about the influence of “ignorant and stupid women and girls” who follow fashions on “our intelligent, honourable, thinking girl.”²¹² Thus, the sexually charged image of the fashionable young woman had more than one symbolic meaning. On one hand, it cued an expansion of women’s sexual freedom and control over the body, and on the other, it cued folly and danger.

²¹⁰ Penny Tinkler and Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, “Feminine Modernity in Interwar Britain and North America: Corsets, Cars, and Cigarettes,” *Journal of Women’s History* 20, no. 3 (2008): 129.

²¹¹ Wyndham, “Paris Favors a Feminine Mode.”

²¹² Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 64.

L'Adolescence

Pendant la période de transformation qui est l'âge critique de la jeune fille, elle a besoin pour combattre la chlorose et l'anémie qui la guettent d'un tonique généreux, d'un fortifiant éprouvé comme le

VIN ST-MICHEL

Le plus exquis des toniques, le plus puissant des reconstituants qui lui fournira tous les éléments nécessaires pour faire un sang riche, pur, abondant. Sous son action bienfaisante les fonctions se régulariseront, des joues roses remplaceront la pâleur caractéristique de la chlorose, l'énergie remplacera la langueur, la lassitude, et la force et la santé remplaceront la faiblesse et les douleurs.

Le **Vin St-Michel** est un apéritif agréable, un tonique reconstituant facile à digérer et d'une efficacité prouvée dans des milliers de cas d'anémie, de chlorose, de neurasthénie, de surmenage et de convalescence longue et pénible.

Il se prend à la dose d'un verre à vin avant les repas et chaque fois que le besoin s'en fait sentir.

EN VENTE PARTOUT
BOIVIN, WILSON & CIE, Limitée
Soleils Agents
488, RUE ST-PAUL OUEST
MONTREAL



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One of the most radical changes in female fashions was the cutting off of one's hair. The association of hair with virtue, and of short hair with masculinity, gave the bob cut major visual potency. According to one fashion writer, the bob was invented during the war by women working as

²¹³ "Vin St-Michel Advertisement," *La Revue Moderne* (15 décembre, 1920): 92.

ambulance drivers and in munitions factories overseas.²¹⁴ These women, she wrote, cut their locks out of “dire necessity” and this “wild undertaking call[ed] for fearless disregard of public opinion.” Some of the earliest bobs appeared in issues of *La Revue Moderne* in 1920.²¹⁵ This advertisement for Vin St-Michel employs the image of a bob-haired young woman to sell wine, arguing that in the critical period of a young girl's development this product will improve the blood, cure weakness and pains, and restore healthy colour and energy.²¹⁶ However, the heavy eyes of the young modern imply she has indulged in more than the recommended dose. This advertisement invokes the popular correlation between the modern woman and alcohol consumption, but veils the product behind a discourse of health. As a marker of youthful rebellion, the bob and alcohol shared the symbolism of dissent. As Cheryl Krasnick Warsh has argued, in prohibition Canada drinking was “an anti-establishment activity,”²¹⁷ thus modern bob-haired woman and alcohol advertisements were symbolically complementary in these years.

²¹⁴ Winnie Davenport, “Will Romantic Curls Soon Come Back to Succeed All Present Types of the ‘Bob’,” *MacLean's Magazine* (November 1, 1924): 66.

²¹⁵ “Salon De Coiffure,” *La Revue Moderne* (15 septembre, 1920): 5. ; “Vin St-Michel Advertisement.”; “Page De Lettre,” *La Revue Moderne* (15 février, 1920): 72.

²¹⁶ “Vin St-Michel Advertisement.”

²¹⁷ Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, “Smoke and Mirrors: Gender Representation in North American Tobacco and Alcohol Advertisements before 1950,” *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 31 (1998): 203.

By the mid-twenties the bob had become the standard modern hairdo. One fashion reporter wrote that women who did not bob their hair were known throughout the Prairie West as a "horse and buggy".²¹⁸ In fashion pages, long hair was virtually extinct, save for a few shampoo advertisements, and as the decade wore on the bob grew more and more streamlined and masculine, coming to resemble more a helmet in shape. Particularly in the super chic *Chatelaine Magazine* women donned bob cuts so short and so slick, that the popular cloche hats drawn on the heads of models took up more ink than the hairstyles. Despite its popularity, however, concerns over the masculinity of the bob did not go unvented. In 1924, fashion writer Winnie Davenport voiced her concerns over the 'shingle', a version of the bob which emerged in 1922:

The shingle is dangerous. It has the effect of creating a boyish appearance for young girls, and a distinctly masculine one for older women. To me it has sounded the death-knell of the bob, because women cannot stand the strain of being masculine too long. Even the most efficient of them have moments when they are tired of being self-reliant. With a shingle bob, one is expected to be self-reliant – to put on one's own rubbers and earn one's own living. The shingle bob simply shrieks to the world

²¹⁸ Davenport, "Will Romantic Curls Soon Come Back to Succeed All Present Types of the 'Bob'."

that its possessor is determined to run her own affairs and that she scorns the assistance of mere man.²¹⁹

Of course, the irony of bobbed hair was that it took a considerable amount of time and money to upkeep, but this did not overshadow the visual assault it launched on normative understandings of femininity and gender relations.

For many observers, the new fashions were aligned with a new progressive order for young women. Fashion expert Helen Cornelius observed in 1922 that "50% of mannequins exploit flapper togs" and called flapper fashions "the accepted 'uniform' of this progressive order."²²⁰ Freedom and comfort were the battle cries of this new fashion movement. Nipped in waists and cumbersome tailoring made way for more relaxed relationships between the body and clothes. "Athletic comfort" became a widely popular initiative for everyday wear.²²¹ Fashion writer Sylvia Pryor wrote in 1924,

The modern girl's inclination has long been towards sports. For many winters she has skated, skied, tobogganed. For many summers she has golfed, canoed, and tennised, but her

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Helen Cornelius, "Spring Fashions for Flappers," *Everywoman's World* (April 1922): 13.

²²¹ "Fashion Courts the Sleeveless Blouse for Athletic Comfort," *Chatelaine* (April 1929): 75.

enjoyment usually has been somewhat hampered by clothes...

To-day, fashion follows the decree of the sports-woman..."²²²

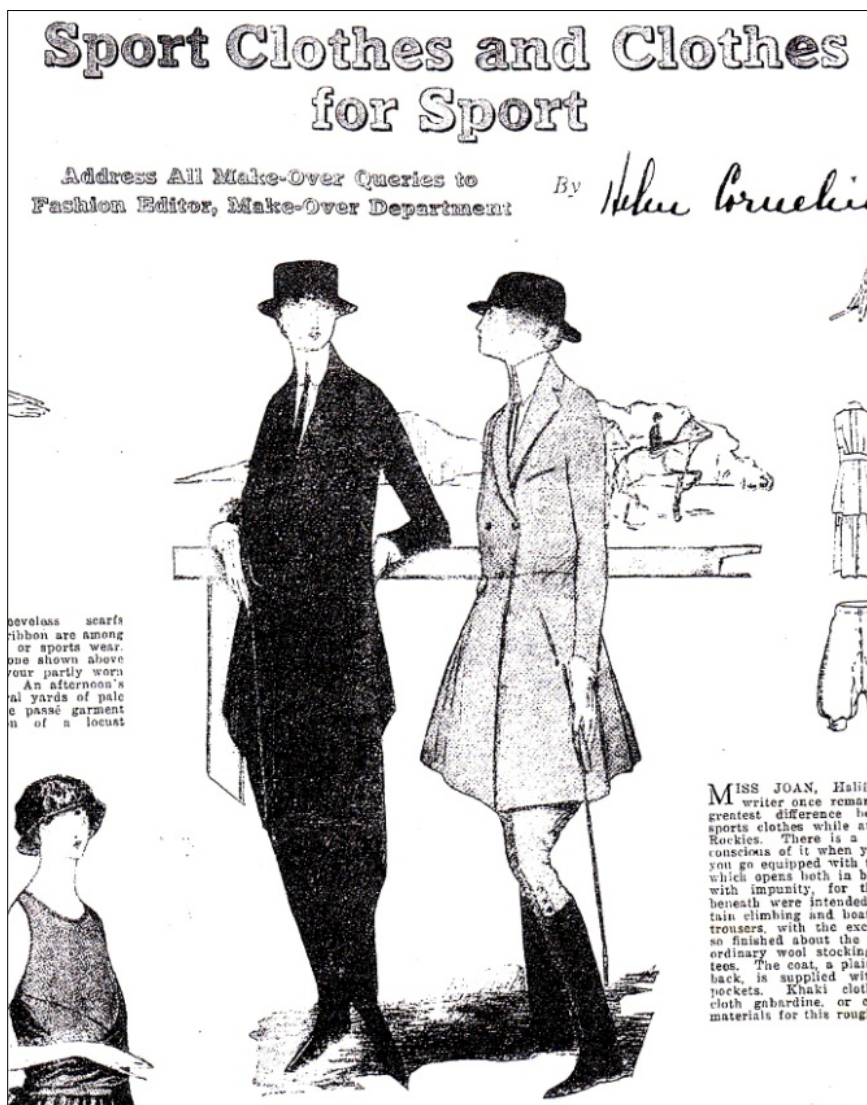


Figure 38: Helen Cornelius, "Sport Clothes and Clothes for Sport," *Everwoman's World* (August 1919): 17.

²²² Sylvia Pryor, "Sports Clothes Are About to Have the Greatest Season in Canada," *MacLean's Magazine* (March 15, 1924): 58.

Sleeveless blouses and sweaters, shortened skirts, widened necklines, knits and tweeds made clothing more comfortable and less confining. Even knickers and trousers made the mainstream fashion pages in the 1920s because they were “practical”, albeit for use in the private spheres of one’s garden or bedroom.²²³ For women’s engagement with the outdoors, however, fashions catered to the increasing requirement for freedom of movement and women’s trousers made a more public appearance. “Will you ride astride?” asked Cornelius in this 1919 article.²²⁴ For the rugged terrain of Temagami and Algonquin Park, she recommended a “rough and ready outfit” consisting of durable materials, practical jackets and, of course, breeches. These drawings of women in riding ensembles, with high collars, neckties, derby hats, and horse whips are among the most androgynous images of the female form outside of high art. Hair, a symbol of female sensuality, is neatly tucked away and bodily curves are deemphasized underneath the riding jackets. The horsewhips, symbolic of power and control, imply self-determination in these two bodies, and the self-confident pose of arm akimbo only accentuates their self-assuredness and authority. Of course, the powerful visual cues we see here are tempered by their temporariness. Cornelius will have these two riders exchanging their

²²³“Practical Dress-Aprons Adapted from French Styles,” *Everywoman's World* (May 1922): 13.; “Combine the Practical and the Chic,” *Chatelaine* (June 1928): 75.

²²⁴ Cornelius, “Sport Clothes and Clothes for Sport.”

androgynous frocks for dresses and cloche hats before she sets them out into the streets.

Ultimately, commercial artists were limited in their range for projecting androgynous female figures. Advertisements and fashion pages were designed to sell products, but not a new gender order and any artist who suggested that a product would unravel gender norms would not have worked for long in advertising. The appeal of dressing in more masculine style clothing was glamourized by fashion magazines, particularly because of the bodily movement it offered. Images of androgyny in magazines also picked up on the access to the male world that these fashions offered to the body – horseback riding astride, sporting with maximum physical freedom, quick and efficient movement in public space. Despite allusions to gender bending, the changing silhouette of the fashionable female form remained within visually identifiable boundaries of femininity, appeasing viewers and clients and not disrupting larger normative gender constructs. The fact that gender could be so easily destabilized through dress made fashion trends highly threatening to normative ideas of femininity and masculinity, but the temporariness of dressing up ensured that whatever gender transgression the fashion might imply, it would not be permanent.



Figure 39: L.L. Fitzgerald, *The Harvester*, c1920s. Oil on canvas. McMichael Canadian Art Collection.



Figure 40: Edwin Holgate, *Young Woman Sewing*, c1922. Charcoal on laid paper. National Gallery of Canada.



Figure 41: Walter J. Phillips, *Mary at Muskoka*, 1926. Colour Woodcut on Japan Paper. National Gallery of Canada.

Androgynous images in high art were far less constrained and artists were freer to toy with the visual subtleties of femininity and masculinity through the body. L.L. Fitzgerald's *The Harvester* (c1920s) depicts an

ambiguous figure lifting hay bales in a field.²²⁵ The feminine facial features and strong, muscular body leave the figure's sex unclear. Likewise, Edwin Holgate's *Young Woman Sewing* (c1922) depicts a figure sitting on the floor sewing a garment, her breast teasingly protruding from her slipped negligee.²²⁶ But the visual cues of femininity are disrupted with the juxtaposition of the figure's muscular tone – the shoulders, forearms and calves depict exceptional physical strength. Walter J. Phillips' *Mary at Muskoka* (1926) is a nude by the lake, who resembles more a young boy than a girl.²²⁷ Undeveloped breasts, a short boyish haircut, a prepubescent frame, all leave one wondering the gender of the lithe figure, but 'Mary's' sex organs fall below the purview of the canvas and the viewer is forced to remain uncertain about the body in the print. In high art, artists could explore blurring gender boundaries more freely. Unlike in commercial art, painters were not required to sell gender as part of a product image, leaving them room to play with its boundaries. Artists' projections of the female body and their experimentations with androgyny unveiled the fragility of gender constitutions.

²²⁵ Fitzgerald, *The Harvester*.

²²⁶ Holgate, *Young Woman Sewing*.

²²⁷ Phillips, *Mary at Muskoka*.

The Modern Body

Fashion took a distinctly modern turn over the course of the 1920s. In the early part of the decade hemlines had already risen to mid calf, waistlines were low and necklines wide, but elements of nature remained a popular part of the fashion aesthetic. Garments were adorned with flowers, frills and flowing drapes that flapped in the wind. Designs lay gently over the body, and were embellished with organic elements resembling waves of water and sprawling flora. Fur, feathers, hints of animal print and animal skin were also popular embellishments (which carried throughout the decade but became incorporated in more streamlined ways). Hair was soft and pinned back, which from the front gave the impression that the hair had been cut short. Some women in magazines were already sporting the bob by the early 1920s, but this relaxed bouffant was a non committal alternative and a foreshadowing of what was to come.

As the decade progressed, the machine aesthetic began to heavily influence fashions and the female form. As Elizabeth Wilson argues, machinery revolutionized material life as well as belief and ideology...“Nature no longer seemed so awesome and mysterious but became an object for human investigation.”²²⁸ This ‘nature’ seemed to include the body as constructions and projections of the female form entered an innovative and

²²⁸ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams : Fashion and Modernity*, 60.

experimental phase. The tall, thin bodies and ultra-linear fashions that were the rage by the late 1920s were in sharp contrast to the graceful lines of only a few years earlier. Fashions shed the extra frills and organic stylizing and assumed a clean and tubular aesthetic, which, in magazine drawings especially, rendered the body physiologically disproportionate. Some fashion pages went so far as to imply that indeed this was the natural body. The “smart waist line,” read one *Chatelaine* page, “is moulded to the figure,” but there is little figure in this image. The lean cylindrical forms lined up in perfect sepia by the artist are the ideal image of the female form in January 1930, for this month, the “Length of line is very Important.”²²⁹ As Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Penny Tinkler have argued for the corseted body of *Vogue* in these years, the female form was presented as “the product of modern manufacturing processes.”²³⁰ Artistic renderings of the body changed considerably in the first few years of the decade, reflecting both a rapidly changing fashion aesthetic and an understanding of the female body as malleable to evolutions in artistic form and style.

²²⁹ “Fashion Page,” *Chatelaine* (January 1930): 67.

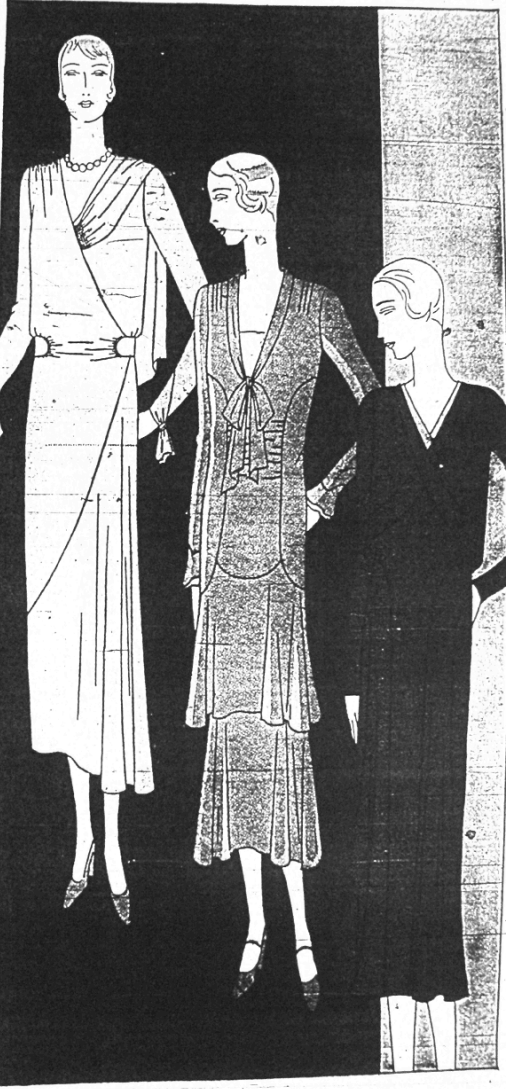
²³⁰ Tinkler and Warsh, “Feminine Modernity in Interwar Britain and North America: Corsets, Cars, and Cigarettes,” 126.

LENGTH OF LINE IS VERY IMPORTANT

THE SMART WAIST.

LINE IS MOULDED

TO THE FIGURE



Frock No. S3387—The frock at the left in the sketch, of flat crepe, has the higher waist-line cleverly achieved by means of an extended belt. A scarf and circular fullness at the side give a graceful movement to this attractive model. Sizes 14 to 40. Price, \$1.

Frock No. S3386—(Centre) In this flat crepe model, gores and gathers modify the very smart princess line. The tiers have fullness at the sides and are flat in the front and at the back, and there is a slightly dipping hem-line. Sizes 14 to 40. Price, \$1.

Frock No. S3385—(Extreme right) Also of flat crepe is this model. The simulated bolero, modifying the severity of the higher waist-line, and the applied circular sections are typical of the new mode, longer of skirt and shorter of bodice. Sizes 14 to 40. Price, \$1.

These are Vogue Patterns. They may be obtained from the shops listed on page 21, or from Vogue Pattern Service, 70 Bond Street, Toronto, Ont.

Figure 42: "Fashion Page," *Chatelaine* (January 1930): 67.

Hand in hand with the ousting of organic elements in fashion came the de-accentuation of the body's reproductive nature. Women's reproductive features – primarily breasts and hips - went into hiding under the pressure of elastic corsets as the body increasingly mimicked the aesthetics of industrial engineering. The relationship between the width of women's hips and fertility has been articulated by James Laver, who argues the crinoline of the mid-19th century “bore a symbolic relation to the age in which it thrived. In one of its aspects it symbolized female fertility, as an expansion of the apparent size of the hips always seems to do.”²³¹ In Canada the narrowed hips of 1920s fashions coincided with a narrowing of the national birth rate.²³² Women's apparent efforts to control family sizes, and by extension their own lives, was written on the bodies of women through fashion.

The ideal 1920s body, its long, lean lines, disproportionate height, and delicate frame reflected more the modern aesthetic that had emerged in art and design than the average female body. Fashion expert Charity Mitchell Johnson admitted in 1923 “there are so few women with the ideal figure” to suit the fashions of New York and Paris and advised “stout” and “angular”

²³¹ James Laver, Amy De La Haye, and Andrew Tucker, *Costume and Fashion : A Concise History*, 4th ed., World of Art (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 184.

²³² Statistics Canada, Vital Statistics, vol. I, Births, (Catalogue 82-204). Series B1-14., "Live births, crude birth rate, age-specific fertility rates, gross reproduction rate and percentage of births in hospital, Canada, 1921 to 1974". For discussions of women controlling their own fertility, See Lévesque, *La Norme Et Les Déviantes: Des Femmes Au Québec Pendant L'entre-Deux-Guerres.*; Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*

women on how to manipulate fashion and their bodies to achieve the art deco silhouette.²³³ Voluptuousness was not an ideal body shape in this era. In 1922, physician R.L. Alasker declared, "It's always wrong to be fat", for "Weight, health and efficiency are closely inter-related."²³⁴ Although dieting and smoking were popular ways to lose weight, being thin wasn't enough. According to Johnson, even thin women needed to be attentive to the angular, bony and brittle characteristics of the slim figure.²³⁵ When *Chatelaine* introduced photos into fashion pages for the first time in 1929 models were photographed in profile, which de-accentuated curves and produced the long straight lines that dominated drawings and the popular imagination of the 1920s body.²³⁶ Historians have likened the popular 1920s silhouette to the skyscraper²³⁷ and the automobile,²³⁸ both cultural icons of modernity and progress. The female body thus, modeled the virtues of the day - a clean modern aesthetic and industrial efficiency.

²³³Charity Mitchell Johnson, "Would You Prefer to Look Like a Lampshade or Like a Table Bell?," *MacLean's Magazine* (February 1, 1923): 60.; "Right Clothes for Thin Figures," *MacLean's Magazine* (February 15, 1923): 58.; "Each Type May Enjoy Her Clothes," *MacLean's* (March 15, 1923): 64.

²³⁴ R.L. Alasker, "It's Always Wrong to Be Fat," *MacLean's* (June 1, 1922): 40.

²³⁵ Charity Mitchell Johnson, "Right Clothes for Thin Figures," *MacLean's* (February 15, 1923): 58.

²³⁶ "Fashion Page," *Chatelaine* (August 1929): 20.

²³⁷ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream : Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 185.

²³⁸ Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," 270.

Although fashions appeared to facilitate increased freedom of movement for women, observers continued to pine over the pitfalls of fashion and its impact on the body and women's lives. Marian Keith wrote in 1920, "We must reform dress" and called for "a serious protest against the prevailing modes of dress and all that pertain thereto...The Malady from which most women suffer to-day is not 'nerves' – it is dress!"²³⁹ Mary Lowry Ross recited excerpts from the 1902 diary of a fashionable woman who tells of the physical horrors and "tortured elegance of pre-war fashions". Her indigestion, fainting spells and inability to sit down due to fashionable corsetry, caused her to say in 1930, the youth "don't appreciate comfort because they've always had it...They think it's amusing to dress themselves up in trains and long gloves and corsets and false hair. Before they realize it they'll be back where we were in Nineteen Hundred and Two: Absolute slaves, from hems to hairpins!"²⁴⁰ The author was insightful in her observations, for along with the changes in fashion that appeared to free the body came new ways of moulding and adorning the female form that contradicted the visual rhetoric of freedom.

Advertisements for corsetry were particularly paradoxical. Although the tendency is to view corsets as a bodily restriction corsetry had evolved

²³⁹ Marian Keith, "We Must Reform Dress," *MacLean's Magazine* (June 15, 1920): 21.

²⁴⁰ Mary Lowrey Ross, "Hemlines and Hairpins," *The Chatelaine* (February 1930): 9.

considerably by the 1920s. Companies like Dominion Corset incorporated technological innovations such as elastic and Lovers Form did away with steel, boning, clasps, lacing and rubber altogether.²⁴¹ In 1920 Helen Cornelius declared her appreciation for the evolution in corsetry; "As yet we are too satisfied with the comfort, moral and physical, that our straight up and down corsets afford to succumb to the nipped-in waist line."²⁴² This 'moral and physical comfort' was front and centre in the minds of advertisers. As Warsh and Tinkler have found for British and American *Vogue*, the rhetoric of modernity and freedom was heavily employed in corset advertisements. In Canada also, advertisers went to great lengths to consolidate modern ideals of freedom and movement and corsetry sales. One Bias Corsets Limited advertisement read, "The days of the stiff and stilted figure are gone forever.

²⁴¹ Jean Du Berger, Jacques Mathieu, and Université Laval. Laboratoire d'ethnologie urbaine., *Les Ouvrières De Dominion Corset À Québec, 1886-1988* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1993), 44.; "Gossard Corsets Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1920) : 34.

²⁴² Helen Cornelius, "The Fashionable Silhouette and Other Helpful Hints," *Everywoman's World* (April 1920): 22.

Gloriously Different

No - Steels
No - Boning
No - Clasps
No - Lacing
Not - Rubber
Washable

Lovers Form Corset
With Brassiere Top

Is today acknowledged the World's most sensible, stylish and satisfactory corset. It overcomes all discomfort from jabbing steels and pinching clasps—banishes all the hurt and fatigue, and takes years off your figure.

Insist on getting the genuine LOVERS FORM. There is a vast difference.

It slenderizes permanently by redistributing excess flesh—reduces overdevelopments from 2 to 8 inches immediately and gives beautiful pleasing proportional lines to bust, waist and hips.

Send at once for Free Booklet, photographs and name of nearest dealer, or send measurements—bust, waist and hips.

WOOLNOUGH CORSETIERS,
536 Yonge St., Toronto

Wonderful for Motoring

Lovers Form is soft as a glove—easy, elegant, graceful, shock-absorbing and restfully comfortable.

Figure 43: "Lovers Form Corset Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1924): 36.

The war has made women realize that their usefulness depends upon their physical activity and freedom of action."²⁴³ A Gossard Corsets advertisement professed, "Here is epitomized the secret of becomingness in dress. Be natural." Yet, the ad continued, "...these Gossards will fairly persuade every type of figure to graceful lines and proportions."²⁴⁴ The juxtaposition of the ideas of 'the natural' and 'persuasion' of the body, although ironic, was nonetheless common in corset publicity. Ads focused on the flexibility that new materials afforded the body, and often featured women exercising, driving, or sitting to demonstrate that the modern women could be both well supported and be free to move.²⁴⁵

This 1924 Lover's Form advertisement features two women's bodies - one demonstrating how freely she can bend over, and the other, the ease with which she is able

to drive while corseted.²⁴⁶ The active female body and

²⁴³ "Bias Corsets Ltd Advertisement," *Everywoman's World* (March 1920): 66.

²⁴⁴ "Gossard Corsets Advertisement."

²⁴⁵ "Lovers Form Corset Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1924): 36.; "Gossard Corsets Advertisement," *Everywoman's World* (September 1919): 23.

the motoring woman were two popular leitmotifs of the time that exuded modernity. The woman motorist in particular is a paradoxical figure, for although her new corset is “restfully comfortable” the body has undergone a double conformity – first, to the constraints of the corset and the fashionable silhouette it serves, and then to the requirements of the most modern of symbols, the vehicle. The alignment of corsets and modernity was negotiated through the female body and its ability to communicate as a ‘forum of signs’.²⁴⁷ Corsets were remade modern through the female body particularly because of the association of the youthful woman with modernity. Despite Cornelius’ 1921 assertion: “there’s no reason why we should submit to some of the atrocities that are often thrust upon us,” corsets remained a staple for moulding the fashionable body throughout the decade.²⁴⁸

As with any industrial product, when the body broke down or was in need of perfecting it was disassembled in order to be repaired. The kaleidoscopic tendency of modernity, to shatter images into fragments of a whole, was a visual pattern popular in advertisements for health and hygiene products. The youthful female body was dissected by advertisers who also

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ ‘Forum of signs’ borrowed from Jean Baudrillard, “The Finest Consumer Object: The Body,” in *The Body : A Reader*, ed. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005), 280.

²⁴⁸ Helen Cornelius, “How Do You Select Your Clothes?,” *Everywoman's World* (January 1921): 17.

appropriated the discourse of rising medical authority to 'fix' what ailed the modern body. As Brumberg has argued, the "body project" was heavily promoted, particularly in magazines where scare copy honed in on bodily imperfections and promised social calamity if they were not remedied. Jane Nicholas writes, "The flapper's image was carved up into tiny pieces that could be individually purchased by consumers."²⁴⁹ This rendered the body of the fashionable woman a product with assembly required, each piece calling for its own maintenance regime. Ads for corn removers featured a single perfect foot,²⁵⁰ ads for depilatory creams featured the milky smoothness of the ideal underarm,²⁵¹ perfect teeth reflected in the mirror promoted toothpaste,²⁵² and a shimmering bob cut sold shampoo.²⁵³ Put together, the perfect modern body was white, hairless, free of foul odours and discolouration, smooth and lean. In the words of Jean Baudrillard, the body itself became the consumer object.²⁵⁴ As a form of capital, beauty and hygiene invited marriage proposals, job promotions, and the good favour of one's acquaintances. Baudrillard argues that beauty, as an indicator of

²⁴⁹Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York, NY: Random House, 1997).; Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," 48.

²⁵⁰ "Freezone Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (April 1919): 70.

²⁵¹ "X-Bazin Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (January 1, 1926): 88.

²⁵² "Pepsodent Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (March 1, 1926): 55.

²⁵³ Baudrillard, "The Finest Consumer Object: The Body," 280.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 277-82.

social status, requires one to invest labour in manipulating the body to appear healthier, happier, and recuperated. The 'look' of the fashionably upkept body is what is for sale. Thus, objectification of the body and its parts was promoted as the formula for success. The trap, however, as some feminists such as Naomi Wolf have argued, is the never-ending cycle of beauty regimes to which the body is exposed, and as fashions exposed more of the female body, these parts too were quickly absorbed into the beauty regime.

Surveillance of the female body was a consistently reaffirmed imperative. Multitudes of ads and fashion and beauty writers encouraged the social practice of "Seeing ourselves as others see us!"²⁵⁵ Berger argues there is a cultural propensity for women to do just that.


A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself... Whilst she is walking across a room... she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking... From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she come to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within

²⁵⁵"See Ourselves as Others See Us," *Everywoman's World* (September 1919): 23.

her as the two constituted yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman.²⁵⁶

39

**"Now I'm free
from the
bondage of
MIRROR
FEAR"**




HAVE you experienced that pit-of-the-stomach feeling after a careful and frank look into your mirror? One cause is indulgence in mealtime beverages containing two drug-stimulants: tannin and caffeine. Cruel as a lash these drugs whip-up the tired nerves. Whipped-up nerves are under constant strain—at night they bump and jar in *shallow* sleep. So dull eyes come—dull skin—those tired lines—conspirators to rob you of your charm.

Tannin and caffeine are harmful. With you these agents may work fast or slow.

How different with Postum! This rich, full-bodied, flavourful drink contains *no trace of any drug-stimulant*—not a sign of anything to cause headaches, sleeplessness and all that host of nervous ills. Serve Postum to the family. Instantly made in the cup at a cost of about half-a-cent. 90 cups to a 50 cent tin. If you prefer, there is Postum Cereal made by boiling or percolating twenty minutes. Ask for Postum at all grocers', restaurants, your club or on the train. Try Postum for 30 days. We'll start you out on your test by giving you your first week's supply free. Write for it. State whether you want Instant Postum or Postum Cereal. Canadian Postum Co., Limited, Metropolitan Building, Toronto 2, Ont.

Postum



You know how many children do not like the taste of milk. You know how they like to have the same drink as the "grown-ups." You know, too, how good it is for them to have a *hot* drink! Make Instant Postum for them, using hot milk (not boiled) instead of boiling water! They'll like the taste immediately! And they will get the added nourishment of milk in a *hot* drink that is economical and so easy to make.




Figure 44: "Postum Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (February 15, 1929): 39.

²⁵⁶ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 46.



“—pour la liberté et la grâce”

La question est de savoir si la mode actuelle pourrait être aussi populaire sans le *Delatone*. La robe sans manche et les tissus subtils en font un accessoire de toilette nécessaire à toutes les femmes, car le *Delatone* contribue à la liberté du mouvement, à la grâce du geste, à une modeste élégance et à la correction du style. C'est pourquoi

“Elles emploient toutes le *Delatone*”

Le *Delatone* est une préparation scientifique, ancienne, et bien connue, qui fait disparaître rapidement et sûrement les poils follets, quels qu'ils soient.

Les spécialistes en beauté recommandent le *Delatone* pour la suppression des poils sur le visage, le cou ou les bras. Après une application, la peau devient claire, ferme et unie.

Les pharmaciens vendent le Delatone; on peut encore s'en procurer une petite jarre d'une once, par la poste, en envoyant un dollar (\$1.00) à

LYMAN BROS. & CO., LIMITED
Dept. L.C. 71 Front Street, Toronto, Ont.

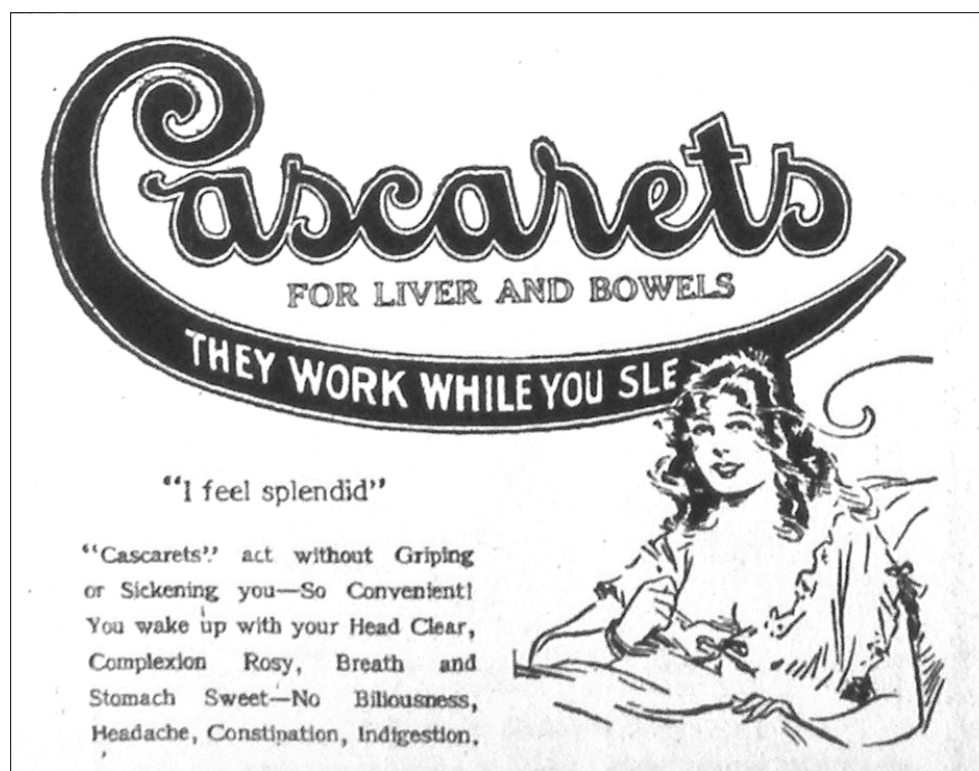


Figure 45: “Del-a-Tone Advertisement,” *La Canadienne* (Mai, 1920) : 37.

In commercial images two elements dominated beauty and fashion pages and advertisements - mirrors and men. Mirrors functioned as symbols of self-surveillance, a reminder of the already firmly entrenched understanding that the female reflection needed to be kept in check. The male presence reaffirmed the presence of surveyor and judge of the female body, and the entity for whom the gender performance is required. For women, in particular, the gaze is marketed as relentless and highly critical and thus avoiding criticism by following beauty regimes is constructed as top priority. Mirrors and men worked in tandem to manipulate the female viewer, reminding her of the inner and outer modes of surveillance focused on the female body. Ultimately, however, it is the female form rendered by artists that betrays the female viewer, conveying the body as the "object of salvation" in the words of Baudrillard.²⁵⁷ Certainly, the "panicky reassertion of culture over nature" that Lears describes in American advertising also persisted in Canadian periodicals.²⁵⁸ Fear mongering was an essential component of the process of creating anxiety and defining "needs" to consumers. In many ways advertisements were encouraging the negation of the natural body but if and when the natural body could be invoked in the service of consumption, it was freely drawn from by artists.

²⁵⁷ Baudrillard, "The Finest Consumer Object: The Body," 277.

²⁵⁸ Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 171.



Cascarets
FOR LIVER AND BOWELS
THEY WORK WHILE YOU SLEEP

"I feel splendid"

"Cascarets" act without Gripping
or Sickening you—So Convenient!
You wake up with your Head Clear,
Complexion Rosy, Breath and
Stomach Sweet—No Billousness,
Headache, Constipation, Indigestion,

Figure 46: "Cascarets Advertisement," *Everywoman's World* (August 1920): 34.

KEEP WELL AT HOME



with the
**BRANSTON
VIOLET RAY
GENERATOR**

Just think what it will mean to you to be entirely free of bodily aches and pains, to have your system so fortified that the attacks of rheumatism, lumbago, sciatica or neuritis, could not distress you or cause you a sleepless night; or again what would you not give for something that would effectually remove and prevent pimples, blackheads, dandruff and falling hair?

The Branston Violet Ray Generator will do all this for you and more.

Doctors know it—Sanitariums know it—the Military Hospitals know it—for they are using the Branston Generator on their patients with excellent results. You can experience the health-giving virtues of the violet ray yourself by having a Branston Generator at home.

Treat Yourself Electrically

Medical science has given its unqualified approval to the Branston Violet Ray as one of the most prompt and effective curative agents the world has yet discovered. There is no pain but yields to its influence; no weakened body that cannot be strengthened and improved by it. A splitting headache, an excruciating case of sciatica, swollen and throbbing inflammatory rheumatism, neuralgia almost severe enough to drive you wild, the burnings of indigestion, or the dull, dread dragging of a lame back, and your Branston Generator is at hand for immediate relief. The cost of a few treatments from the physician pays for a machine, and enables the whole family to benefit by it.

In the Country

You need not let the absence of electricians in your home keep you from enjoying the benefits of this wonderful scientific discovery. You can get a portable Branston Generator which will operate from its own dry cell batteries. A treatment book is given with each instrument, containing full charts and instructions, telling you just how to treat each disease.

Representatives Wanted

We are prepared to appoint a limited number of parties or firms to handle our Generator throughout Canada. Write for our special proposition to representatives.

CHAS. A. BRANSTON COMPANY

MANUFACTURERS

353 Yonge Street
TORONTO

Model 7
for home
use



"Health Rays" Free

Our new illustrated booklet, "Health Rays," just off the press, tells you more about this wonderful discovery. It is free for the asking. If there is no dealer in your town, write us direct. Use the coupon—it is more convenient.

Violet Ray Week April 8th to 15th

During the week commencing April 8th our dealers throughout Canada are holding special display and demonstrations of the Branston Violet Ray High Frequency Generator. Watch for special announcement.

FREE

Chas. A. Branston Co.
353 Yonge St., Toronto, Ont.
Without any obligation on my part, please send me your book "Health Rays" and full particulars of the Branston Violet Ray High Frequency Generator.

Name

Address

Figure 47: "Branston Co. Advertisement," MacLean's Magazine (March 1918): 107.

In the "new ethics of the relation to the body," beauty and eroticism, argues Baudrillard, are two major leitmotifs in the process of the "sacralisation of the human body."²⁵⁹ Beauty, health and hygiene ads employed eroticism as a matter of course. Artists used the body as a portal to convey the pleasure promised by the consumption of goods and investment in the 'body project'. Manipulating the body with corsets, cosmetics, medicines and electronic devices promising beauty and wellness was yet another projection of modernization on the female body. As Elizabeth Wilson has argued, constrictions placed on the body are prone to fetish.²⁶⁰ Fetishization of bodily control and scientific management of the body reflected a modernized eroticism. The intersection of modern marvels and the female body were highly erotic propositions plentiful in ads, particularly those produced by Cascarets laxative and Branston Violet Ray Generator where the erotic appeal of a peeking breast becomes the fetish of choice. The suppression of breasts under elastic corsets throughout the decade only served to accentuate their taboo as an erogenous zone. Artists and photographers designing ads for Cascarets and Branston were keenly tuned in to the cultural capital of breasts as a body part undercover and in exchange for the viewer's attention, offered a sneak peak. Artists advanced the eroticism of

²⁵⁹ Baudrillard, "The Finest Consumer Object: The Body," 279.

²⁶⁰ Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams : Fashion and Modernity*, 97.

ads by drawing women staring back at the viewer, indeed stripping for the viewer. With the Cascarets body drawn in bed and the Branston body photographed holding the phallic 'generator' in her hand, the visual cues to sex are anything but subtle. Pleasure and satisfaction were constructed as achievable through the body, particularly through the sacralization of the female body and attention to its management.



Figure 48: "Fashion Pages," *La Canadienne* (January 1920) : 20.

Fetish in the fashion pages looked slightly different but no less erotic. It was common for bodies in these pages to be drawn subtly interacting in small groups, which took nothing away from the presentation of the garments but projected onto the garments social values affirmed by cues of body language – allure, poise and desirability. Almost never containing men, women's fashion pages were filled with female bodies, thus artists drew women interacting with one another, but not as though they were gossiping over a cocktail. Female bodies in the fashion pages demonstrated more intimate understandings of personal space that engaged the homoerotic imagination. Classic erotic poses with arched backs and arms behind the back sexualize the body as the pose implies maximum vulnerability.²⁶¹

Arms that are made visible are drawn expressively extended as if presenting something (the body). In one 1920 issue of *La Canadienne* the artist has drawn a woman touching the breast of another, the flower in her hand no doubt meant to explain away the eroticism. Two other bodies drawn in the forefront appear to be embracing – they are so mesmerized by one another that they might passionately kiss at any moment. Hidden hands, half caresses and enamoured gazes all lend this page homoerotic energy, and as a fashion page for lingerie it already alludes to evening, the bedroom and

²⁶¹ Allen argues this is the quintessential pose of pornography. Jeanne Thomas Allen, "Fig Leaves in Hollywood: Female Representation and Consumer Culture," in *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body*, ed. Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog (New York: Routledge, 1990), 132.

sex. This page glamorized the private world of underclothes in a public medium, a process of private to public that was common to modernity. It also exemplifies a sexual boundary surrounding lesbian sexuality. Artists of fashion pages engaged the imaginations of viewers with images that suggested lesbian love, but by no means undermined the heterosexual imperative that was firmly upheld throughout magazine pages. Homoerotic images in the fashion pages were examples of artists' mastery of visual manipulation and understanding of the human psyche. They exploited the masculine fantasy of witnessing lesbian desire and the female longing to be desired in order to glamourize fashions.

The manipulative work of artists falls in line with the politics of patriarchal control outlined by feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich and Naomi Wolf who have argued that fashion and beauty regimes are a form of bondage designed to suppress women's mobility and potential.²⁶² This was parodied in the 1929 silent film *Sleep Inn Beauty* where the owner of a vacation resort decides to host a beauty contest in order to busy the bored

²⁶² For more see: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, [1st American ed. (New York,: Knopf, 1953).; Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993).; Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth : How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women* (New York: Perennial, 2002).

young daughters of vacationing families.²⁶³ Young girls come out of the woodwork dressed in fashionable swimsuits, which by the 1920s are more revealing than ever, and they flirt, pose and spin for the owner's son who acts as the beauty contest judge. This beauty parade takes up a considerably long portion of the film and was probably the most complex part of the film to organize since the Port Arthur Amateur Film Society bussed in dozens of local girls for the beauty parade scene who were willing to give up a day to doll up and dress down for five minutes of fame in a local film.²⁶⁴ Having little or no acting experience, these young women were somewhat transparent. Many could not hide their inexperience and uneasiness in being so undressed and on display. Some girls in the beauty parade fidgeted nervously, others were unsure how to move their bodies. Overall, the girls were unfamiliar with the overacting that characterized silent melodramas and thus gave the film a home movie feel that blurred the line between constructed image and real woman. Someone off screen seemed to be directing them and finally organized a can-can line with alternating kicks that gave the 'extras' something to do with their bodies other than look self-conscious. This scene in

²⁶³ Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society. "Sleep Inn Beauty," (1929, Port Arthur, Ontario. The Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society Collection. Produced by Shebandowan Films, 2004). DVD.

²⁶⁴ Kelly Saxberg, "Dorothea Mitchell: A Reel Pioneer," (Thunder Bay, Canada: Shebandewan Film Production Inc., 2006). DVD

the film is telling as the viewer catches a glimpse of real women struggling to perform the projections of themselves that are expected of them.

Movement and Speed

Very often in the 1920s, speed, movement and travel was visually represented using the female body. The fashionable female form of the decade reflected new ideals of efficiency and streamlined design and new fashions implied greater mobility, range and speed. Artists made consistent use of the symbolic power of the modern woman image to sell goods as well as ideas about exploration and movement in a new age of greater mobility.

LAMA FLEECE
BLACK ENAMEL
ELK LEATHER

ALLIGATOR
CROCOGOAT
FABRIKOID



Luggage That Goes Travelling
For the long trip or the week-end
As seen by MARY HUMPHREYS

One smart traveling coat, in lama fleece, with Iceland blue mushroom collar, is shown from R. J. Miller's. For the observation platform, for the deck chair, for the motor, it is an ideal traveling companion... WIA it, a large, durable and handsome purse is recommended in the new leather, croco goat, with shell frame. There are so many important things to be carried in a traveler's purse, and it has to be opened so many times. From Julian Sale.

Another stunning leather is introduced in golf bags—smoked elk. The style here shown boasts the hood demanded for club-protection by serious golfers. From Allcock, Laight and Westwood. The steamer wardrobe trunk is now the admitted favorite of trippers. It can always be conveniently included among "wanted" baggage. In black enamel with heavily brass-reinforced corners. From Hartman.

The ensemble idea in good-looking luggage. Tan alligator grain leather makes up this set of hold-box, overnight bag and dressing case. From Julian Sale. From McBrine comes that most modern piece of traveling equipment, the aeropack. It is not, as its name would seem to imply, especially designed for air journeying, but represents the epitome of week-end comfort in a wardrobe suitcase. This model at extreme left is of Dupont fabrikoid.

Figure 49: Mary Humphreys, "Luggage That Goes Travelling," *The Chatelaine* (May 1929): 12.

The popularity of the modern girl as a historical subject on all continents has demonstrated that she did not exist within strict national boundaries, but that she was a "transatlantic phenomenon."²⁶⁵ The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group argues "What made the Modern Girl distinctive was her continual incorporation of elements drawn from elsewhere. She occupied the liminal space conjoining the indigenous and the imperial, the national and the international...the 'cosmopolitan look'."²⁶⁶ Traditional Japanese styling was visible in lingerie and draping dress sleeves,²⁶⁷ Indian inspiration in turban style hats,²⁶⁸ and Scandinavian and Egyptian influences in embroidery.²⁶⁹ The modern female body became increasingly worldly as artists embellished it with internationally inspired elements. Like flags on a traveller's backpack, fashion motifs from around the world marked the modern body as a citizen of the global market. Even though these fashions and patterns were most often made in Canada in these years (for only the

²⁶⁵ Heilmann, *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930*, Introduction.

²⁶⁶ Tani E. Barlow, Madeleine Tue Dong, Uta G. Poiger, Priti Ramamurthy, Lynn M. Thomas, and Alys Eve Weinbaum, "The Modern Girl around the World: A Research Agenda and Preliminary Findings," *Gender and History* 17, no. 2 (2005): 246.

²⁶⁷Helen Cornelius, "Fashion Tolls the Knell of Flapper Styles," *Everywoman's World* (September 1922): 9.; "Combining the Practical and Chic," *The Chatelaine* (June 1928): 75.

²⁶⁸"Charm and Individuality," *The Chatelaine*(June 1928): 75.; "Fashion Patterns," *Everywoman's World* (April 1923): 13.

²⁶⁹"Fashion Patterns," *Everywoman's World* (September 1923): 20.; Charity Mitchell Johnson, "Each Type May Enjoy Her Clothes," *MacLean's Magazine* (March 15, 1923): 64.

elite had clothing imported from other countries) what they exuded was that the body the garments adorned was a travelled body. To the wealthy voyager, Canadian Pacific 'Round-the-World Cruises' promised the possibility of "expanding into a citizen of the world."²⁷⁰ "Shopping-round-the-world is the most thrilling sport" declares the ad. "One week in Cairo. The next week in the bizzarres of Bombay. Now, buying from a 'Malay Caravan.' Again, from the hole-in-the-wall silk shops of Canton." The speed of the Empress of France cruise ship is what made it possible for wealthy members of the first world to extend their consumer power and exploit economies of the two-thirds world. For those who weren't rich, however, globally inspired clothing gave the air of a travelled or global body without the cruise line price tag.

The privilege of travel, however, was highly elitist and unwaveringly aligned with the privilege of whiteness for only white bodies traveled in visual culture. Likewise, only white bodies were projected as fashionable. For instance, an Egyptian woman wearing ancient Egyptian garb was not fashionable – she was spectacle. She was part of the secret mysticism that made up the allure of Palmolive Soap and a visual representation of what the product promised – servitude to the consumer.²⁷¹ As much as the fashionable female body points to what Suzanne Morton sees as young women's

²⁷⁰ "Canadian Pacific Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 15, 1924): 53.

²⁷¹ "Palmolive Advertisement," *La Canadienne* (November 1921) : 9.

“personal integration into mass consumer culture,” it also points to the increasingly global nature of that culture.²⁷²

Travel in general was especially feminized in these years, which marked a distinct departure from years previous when ideas of women travelling alone prompted anxieties about safety and virtue. By the 1920s, the metamorphoses undergone by the female image made the female body *itself*, the source of modern symbolism from which artists began to draw. Mooching off the cultural association of young women with modernity, McBrine ‘Around-the-world baggage’ sold their luggage with the image of a lean, long, modern woman.²⁷³ Women were only allowed to go so fast „though, argues Liz Millward, which may have explained women's exclusion from aviatrix but their common presence as drivers and train riders in visual material.²⁷⁴ Film historian Ben Singer argues that “Modernity granted women a new freedom of social circulation – or rather, it might be more accurate to say that modernity *required* it. Female mobility was necessary for the sake of modern capitalism.”²⁷⁵ Women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five

²⁷² Morton, *Ideal Surroundings : Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s*, 131.

²⁷³ "Mcbrine Co. Advertisement," *The Chatelaine*(December 1929): 66.

²⁷⁴ Liz Millward, *Women in British Imperial Airspace, 1922-1937* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

²⁷⁵ Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity : Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*, 262.

outnumbered men in the streets in these years²⁷⁶ as well as the canvases of Mary Wrinch who painted the busy Sunnyside Beach in Toronto and Dufferin Terrace in Quebec City filled with women and almost entirely void of men.²⁷⁷ Thus, it was common to see images of women, alone or with other women, exploring the streets, the wilderness or the world.

Dans les villégiatures élevées de l'Ontario.

Parfait climat d'été pour des vacances idéales.

De mille à deux mille pieds au-dessus du niveau de la mer. La fièvre des foins est inconnue dans l'atmosphère embaumée de l'odeur des pins et des résiniers. Il y a des hôtelleries modernes au Parc Algonquin, aux lacs de la Muskoka, à la Baie Georgienne, aux lacs de Bays, Kawartha et Timagami. Ces endroits idéals pour la pêche, les bains, le canotage, le golf et tous les sports en plein air sont à une courte distance de Toronto. **Demandez nos pamphlets.**

GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY SYSTEM

C. E. HORNING, D.P.A.
Union Station,
Toronto, Ont.

E. C. ELLIOTT, D.P.A.
Gare Bonaventure,
Montréal, Qué.

Figure 50: "Grand Trunk Railway Ad", *La Revue Moderne* (July 15, 1920): 3.

²⁷⁶ Alison L. et. al Prentice, *Canadian Women : A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1988), 215.

²⁷⁷ Mary E. Wrinch, *Sunnyside Toronto*, 1923. Oil on Canvas.; *Dufferin Terrace*, 1920. Oil on Canvas.

CANADA'S SUMMER GIRL

GOES TO
 MUSKOKA
 LA BAIE DE CHALEUR
 PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
 ST. JOHN RIVER VALLEY
 NOVA SCOTIA - BY
 THE SEA.

via

The National Way

OR
 NIPIGON
 QUETICO
 MINAKI

OUT OF DOOR
 LOWER ST. LAWRENCE AND
 MARITIME PROVINCES.
 QUEBEC AND
 NORTHERN ONTARIO.
 PRAIRIES, ROCKIES &
 PACIFIC COAST.

FREE COPIES OF ABOVE PUBLICATIONS ON
 APPLICATION, TO GENERAL PASSENGER DEPARTMENT
 VANCOUVER WINNIPEG TORONTO
 MONTREAL QUEBEC MONCTON

Canadian National Railways

Figure 51: "Canadian National Railways Advertisement," *Everywoman's World* (June 1920): 34.



Pourquoi la froide saison vous retiendrait-elle en ville
aux fins de semaines? Avez-vous déjà songé à visiter

LES LAURENTIDES

en hiver et à revoir sous le frimas et le givre ces pittoresques
endroits ou l'été dernier vous vécûtes de si délicieuses journées?

Apportez vos skis, vos raquettes ou vos patins, car toute
la région invite aux sports d'hiver et offre aux amateurs l'oc-
casion de s'en donner à coeur joie.

Renseignements aux bureaux des billets du
PACIFIQUE CANADIEN.

Figure 52: "Pacifique Canadien Advertisement," *La Revue Moderne* (15 Janvier, 1920)
: 74.

The woman-in-landscape motif that emerged in high art to rival the classical allegory were predated by the work of commercial artists early in the decade, who had already explored modernity, the landscape and

nation through the female body. Edwin Holgate's nudes in landscape are akin to the railway advertisements produced for magazines in the early 1920s. The woman-in-landscape motif appeared across mediums because it was a site of intersecting visual ideas useful to artists.

Artists drew heavily on nationalist sentiments and images of women in landscape to sell tickets. From their inception, railways were a nationalist enterprise dating back to John A. Macdonald's National Policy announced in the federal election of 1878, where he argued that the completion of the Pacific railway was a cornerstone of settlement and national development. But by the 1920s the railways were desperate to stay afloat. Burdened by a decrease in profits after the war, the emergence of the automobile as competition, and bankruptcy of the project for Eastward expansion, the government took over railways in a series of mergers between 1917 and 1923 resulting in the Canadian National Railway. With three major rail lines established in 1920 the country was opening up to Canadians like never before. The wilderness, now more developed by resorts and for recreation, offered endless opportunity for vacationers to escape urban centres and experience the peaceful wilds without roughing it in the bush. As Catriona Sandilands argues, "In a powerful if contradictory combination, then, the CPR's luxury hotels and bourgeois tourist rituals promised a settled civility for a new nation and an iconic representation of the nation as an awesome and

timeless place of wild beauty."²⁷⁸ She argues that Banff "was the core of a 'new' nation, and visiting it – however luxurious – was an act of colonial (re)discovery...nationalist recreational practices in a relatively new kind of national space."²⁷⁹ Advertisers encouraged Canadians to reinvest their time and money in their own country, boasting the vastness and beauty of the landscape, its healing properties, and in one Canadian National Railways ad, insisting that this type of travel was "The National Way."²⁸⁰

To demonstrate that the landscape was not unruly and unapproachable, ads portrayed a wilderness tamed by signs of civilization such as cottages, campsites, portage routes, and the most civilizing force of all, woman. Ads also confirmed the trend (albeit mostly among wealthier Canadians) that single women increasingly had disposable income over which they had sole control, and that women did, as Angela Wollacott has shown, travel alone. She argues that "perhaps the most powerful image of modernity was the Australian woman herself, traveling to London." With travel

²⁷⁸ Catriona Sandilands, "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation, and Nature in the Rocky Mountain National Parks," in *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment*, ed. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, Catriona Sandilands (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 144.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

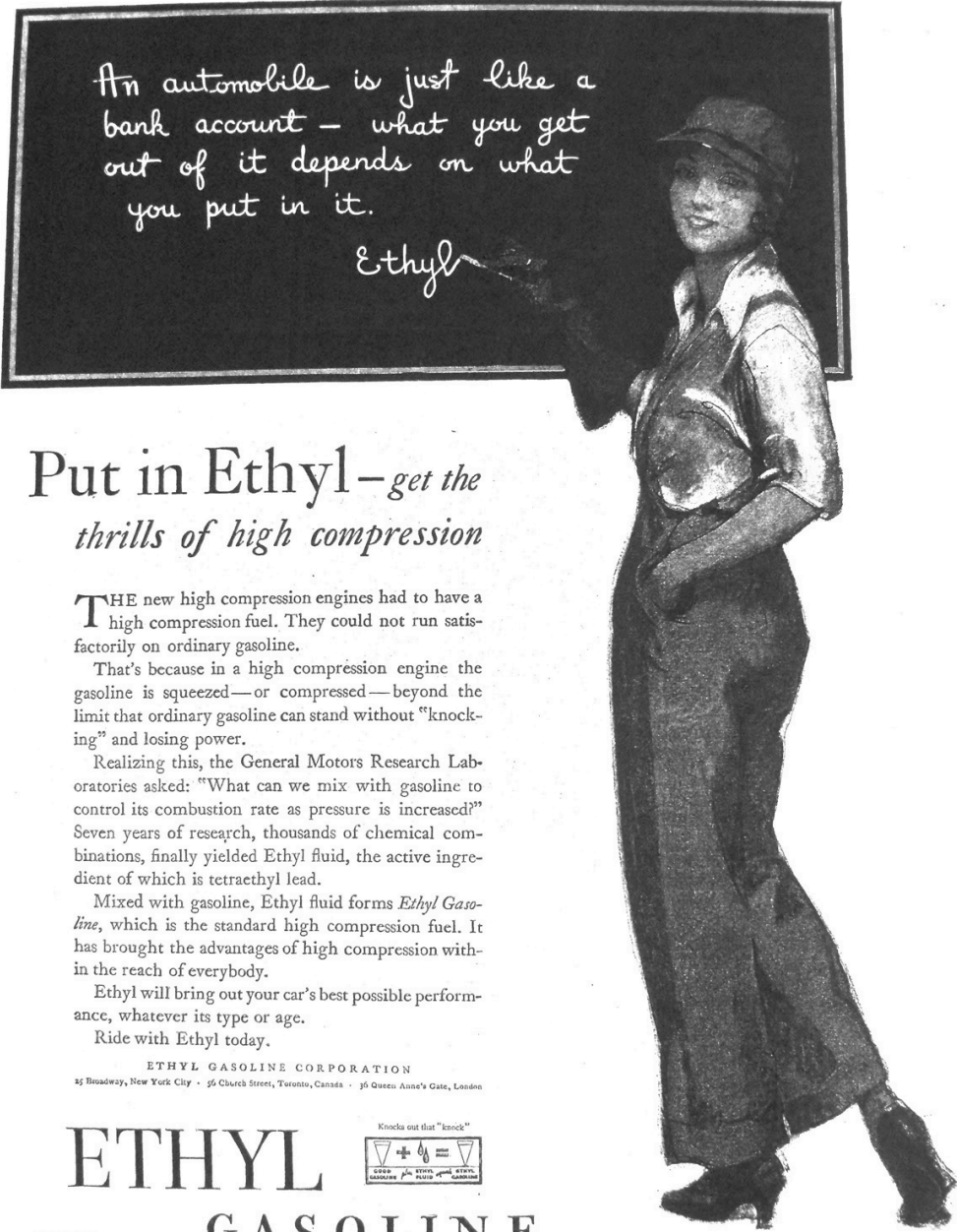
²⁸⁰ "Canadian National Railways Advertisement." Also see: "Grand Trunk Railway Advertisement," *La Revue Moderne* (15 Juillet 1920): 3.; "Pacifique Canadien Advertisement," *La Revue Moderne* (15 Juillet 1920): 34.; "Canadian National Railways Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (July 1, 1926): 59.; "Coleman Camp Stove Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (August 15, 1924): 54.; "Allcock, Laight & Westwood Co. Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (June 1, 1922): 44.

normally gendered as male, the stylish, independent, “women of the world” signalled everything that the “New Day” promised – the travelling woman was liberated.²⁸¹ A few sly signifiers assuage any anxiety images of a woman alone in the landscape might provoke - A genderless stick figure in a far off canoe, for example, reminds the viewer she is not completely alone.

Images of women travelling along the railway weren't functioning as much to celebrate women's improved status as much as they were functioning to symbolize the colonial process. For Wollacott's travelling Australian women, the privileges of whiteness travelled with them, but in Canada, women travelling to the wilderness and women living on the frontiers were also symbols, evidence of the modern colonial project outward from the metropole as opposed to toward it.²⁸² They represented a “civilizing”, cultivating, domesticating force emanating out from modern urbanity. Artists' use of the female form in landscape was a way to construct the north and the west as civilized, safe enough for immigration, settlement and of course, travel.

²⁸¹ Angela Wollacott, *To Try Her Fortunes in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23, 40.

²⁸² Sandilands, "Where the Mountain Men Meet the Lesbian Rangers: Gender, Nation, and Nature in the Rocky Mountain National Parks," 145.



An automobile is just like a bank account — what you get out of it depends on what you put in it.

Ethyl

Put in Ethyl — get the thrills of high compression

THE new high compression engines had to have a high compression fuel. They could not run satisfactorily on ordinary gasoline.

That's because in a high compression engine the gasoline is squeezed—or compressed—beyond the limit that ordinary gasoline can stand without "knocking" and losing power.

Realizing this, the General Motors Research Laboratories asked: "What can we mix with gasoline to control its combustion rate as pressure is increased?" Seven years of research, thousands of chemical combinations, finally yielded Ethyl fluid, the active ingredient of which is tetraethyl lead.

Mixed with gasoline, Ethyl fluid forms *Ethyl Gasoline*, which is the standard high compression fuel. It has brought the advantages of high compression within the reach of everybody.

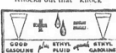
Ethyl will bring out your car's best possible performance, whatever its type or age.

Ride with Ethyl today.

ETHYL GASOLINE CORPORATION
 15 Broadway, New York City · 56 Church Street, Toronto, Canada · 36 Queen Anne's Gate, London

ETHYL

Knocka out that "knock!"



GASOLINE

© E. G. C. 1929

Figure 53: "Ethyl Gasoline Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 15, 1929): 83.

TIRES that are winter proof--that stand the jagged ice ruts in the road and give the least skid on snowy pavements, are the winter sportsman's favorite tires. "Gutta Percha" on a tire looks good to the knowing purchaser who is keen for big value in mileage and little trouble in the way of leaks and blowouts.

"GUTTA PERCHA" TIRES

One practical proof of the superiority of "Gutta Percha" Cord Tires is that motorists who have run the scale of different tires, seeking maximum service, have given the "Gutta Percha" Tire their repeat order.

"Gutta Percha" Cord Tires will be the vogue for 1922. Be in the fashion--make it "G.P." Cords on all four wheels.

Gutta Percha & Rubber Limited, Head Offices and Factory, Toronto
Branches in all leading Canadian cities

Figure 54: "Gutta Percha Tires Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (February 1, 1922): 3.

Artists' use of the female form to sell cars, car products and motoring as a freeing pastime could hardly go unnoticed. Magazine pages were teeming with images of women driving, alone and in groups, most often in the absence of men. The characteristic formula did not deviate; women drivers were drawn as white, thin, fashionably dressed and always young. Some ads constructed women as professionals, with one Ethyl Gasoline ad featuring a woman wearing overalls, work gloves and a cap giving lessons at the blackboard. Other companies, like Ford, promised "Prompt, courteous, economical service for the woman motorist... who wants to be sure of the mechanical performance of the car at all times, yet does not want to be bothered with mechanical details."²⁸³ Some magazines made an attempt to educate woman drivers. In 1923 *Everywoman's World* launched a monthly series of articles titled "Alice in Motorland" that taught women about cars.²⁸⁴ *Chatelaine* followed suit, launching "a new department for women motorists" a few years later.²⁸⁵

The question of whether advertisers were actually selling cars to women, however, remains a curious query. How many women could have

²⁸³ "Ford Motor Company Advertisement," *The Chatelaine* (August 1929): 37.

²⁸⁴ For example see: Frederick C. Russell, "That Maze of Gears - the Transmission," *Everywoman's World* (September 1923): 9.; "When the Engine Is Overheated," *Everywoman's World* (October 1923): 13.

²⁸⁵ For example see: Florence M. Jury, "Winter Driving," *The Chatelaine* (January 1930): 32.

afforded to buy their own cars? Considering the culturally charged image of the young, modern woman, it would seem that the woman driver is less the subject or the target and more the marketing lens through which cars, related products and ideals of freedom were sold. As much as cars appeared to make women more mobile, the young female form made cars more modern, accessible, and above all, freeing. No doubt, many women did have influence over household budgets and longed for the autonomy that car advertisements projected, but car ads were not selling liberation to women, even if women were featured as consumers - Ads were selling liberation to anyone with enough money to buy a car. The image of the young modern woman spoke across gender lines communicating ideals of freedom, autonomy, citizenship, a place in the New Day, fun, celebration, and youth. Artists funnelled those symbolic meanings by drawing women into their advertisements. They sought to align the meanings inherent in the youthful female body with cars, not the other way around.



Figure 55: Artist Unknown, *La Canadienne* (Juillet 1920): cover.

A 1920 *La Canadienne* cover demonstrates the point visually. The fashionista at the forefront is seemingly preparing for a car ride; she is putting

on her driving gloves and gives the viewer a glance on her way out. The driver in the car appears to be moving over. It looks like our fashionista is going to take the wheel. She is a modern girl. She sports a bob hairdo and a glamorous over-the-top driving costume that screams of speed in checkerboard print and with a flowing scarf around her cap that will flap behind her as she motors. The artist has designed her form with all the signifiers of modernity and has even put her in pants to emphasize that *she* has a need for speed. She is not wearing a big hat or big hair, carrying neither a parasol nor any bags. She is aerodynamic, efficient and glamorous. Her image lends its signifiers to the car in the background. Carrying three of these young women out on adventure is what makes this a fun car and a tool of liberation. Just like the Gutta Percha ad above, the idea being sold is the exciting good times exemplified in the airborne female skier. Artists exploited the cultural meanings inherent in the youthful female image to express ideas of speed, liberation, cultivation and civility in the landscape and, in turn, contributed to a mythology of the modern landscape and nation.

Visual confluence worked both ways. Just as the meanings inherent in the youthful female body gave meaning to automobiles, the esthetic of cars also influenced the portrayal of the female form. As Roland Marchand aptly argues, extreme heights, elongated limbs, off-balance stances that implied motion and tubular bodies not only suggested that the female body was

pliable and subject to artistic interpretation but that the female body was subordinate to male counterparts, dependent on them for stability and subject to refashioning in ways that men's bodies were not.²⁸⁶ This serves to accentuate the point that women's bodies were decorative, subjected to molding and remolding as needed, regardless of the material reality of the female form.

The Perils of Consumption

Although consumption had its ties to nation building through economic strengthening, it was also perceived to have its pitfalls, particularly for women. Editorials urged parents not to give their girls too much spending freedom, for their frivolity could lead to humiliation.²⁸⁷ Authors often constructed young women as unable to make good decisions when it came to spending money, the draw of consumer trifles being more alluring than they could bear to refuse. "Have you shopping insanity?" asked one article that condemned the lack of etiquette shown by rude and demanding consumers who made unreasonable demands on stores and clerks.²⁸⁸ It seemed that there was a limit to the view that women exercised agency

²⁸⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream : Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940*, 184-85.

²⁸⁷ Marjorie Middleton, "Lead-Strings That Bind," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 15, 1925): 74.; Dorothy G. Bell, "Do Business Girls Save Money?," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 15, 1923): 70.

²⁸⁸ Bell, "Do Business Girls Save Money?."

through consumption, for authors also castigated “exchange artists” – women who made purchases with the intention of returning the item.²⁸⁹ Some authors drew on popular perceptions of women’s weak nerves and lack of self-control as explanation for inabilities to cope in consumer spaces. Shoplifting was a common crime among women shoppers. As Elaine Abelson writes for the United States, “the lady shoplifter was a non-threatening figure, often seen as irresponsible, more childlike than adult, unable to resist momentary temptation and ready to succumb to the ‘lust of possession’.”²⁹⁰ Although in her *MacLean’s* exposé on shoplifting, Gertrude Pringle divulges that fifty percent of shoplifters are in fact men and boys, the artist, R.M. Brinkerhoff nonetheless chose the image of a matronly shopper to illustrate the article. As a well-dressed woman, the figure does not represent the large number of shoplifters that Pringle argues steal for lack of money. This caricature represents the middle-class white shopper who, for reasons of weakness, insanity, or lust, has resorted to stealing consumer items that she could quite likely afford to buy.

²⁸⁹“Have You Shopping Insanity?,” *MacLean’s Magazine*(May 1, 1923): 30.; Clara Savage, “When you ‘Go Shopping’” *MacLean’s Magazine* (February 1, 1921): 52.

²⁹⁰ Elaine S. Abelson, “Shoplifting Ladies,” in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Jennifer Scanlon (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 311.



Figure 56: Gertrude E. S. Pringle, "A Woman Detective's Story," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 1, 1922): 16.

A story written by Nellie McClung adds the city as a dimension of lure and vice. In her piece entitled "The Neutral Fuse" McClung tells the story of an Alberta farm wife who is depressed and sent to the city by her women's group as their conference representative, hoping it might pick her up.²⁹¹ While there she experiences a breakdown while in a store and is arrested for shoplifting. The presiding judge suggests she return to the farm and spend time with a doctor to remedy her illness. The city as a site of vice was a common theme in the 1920s that had been gaining momentum as industrialization and urbanization changed the physical and social landscape. Writers like Ethel Chapman urged women to see the transparency

²⁹¹ Nellie L. McClung, "The Neutral Fuse," *MacLean's Magazine* (Dec 1, 1924): 28.

of the city and advertised goods, to quit the city and go west, but for many who sought to live modern lives, the modern world was the city.²⁹²

Canadian films visually relayed a slew of cautionary tales about the perils of frivolousness, consumerism and the pitfalls of city life. They were somewhat paradoxical because although films inadvertently advocated for fashion and consumption by projecting fast and fun-loving fashionable girls on screen, Canadian films also symbolically projected modernity as a double-edged sword. It was no secret in these years that there was growing concern over the influence of American films on Canadian culture, for they vastly outnumbered films produced in Canada. This spurred some filmmakers at home to make movies which, in the words of Director-Producer Ernie Shipman, were "as real and free and wholesome as is Canadian life at its best."²⁹³ Promotion of the landscape as nationally defining was a nationalistic practice in Canadian filmmaking since 1897 when films were being produced for the purposed of advertising, tourism, attracting financial investment and encouraging immigration.²⁹⁴ Thus, promotion of the landscape as virtuous had been well established when filmmakers turned their interest to producing fictional silent feature films in the late 1910s.

²⁹² Ethel M Chapman, "While Greater Issues Go By," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 1918): 100.

²⁹³ Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1978), 95.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-33.

Leading female protagonists in these films were projected as avid nature lovers and intimately integrated with the landscape and all its creatures. Primary characters such as 'Dolores LeBeau' in *Back to God's Country* (1919)²⁹⁵, 'Mandy Haley' in *Cameron of the Royal Mounted* (1921)²⁹⁶, 'Werta Brandon' in *The Devil Bear* (1928)²⁹⁷, and 'Ruth' in *Cinderella of the Farms* (1930)²⁹⁸ portrayed Canadian women as products of rural wholesomeness. These characters are innocents, removed from the social ills of cities. In fact, when 'Dolores LeBeau' moves to the city to be with her new husband she falls into a deep depression, "Yearning for the wild things she loved, praying for a day when the forests will claim her again." When in their natural element, these women are dressed more conservatively than fashion pages were recommending in these years. Skirts were worn long and shirts modest, hair flowed in curls, and their rolled up sleeves and aprons attested to the time they spent working. These women represented the virtuous pioneers and cultivators of the Canadian west and personified the remote innocence of the wilderness.

²⁹⁵ Canadian Photoplays Ltd., *Back to God's Country*, (1919; Calgary, Alberta. Digitally Remastered Version, Milestone Film and Video, NY, New York: 2000). DVD

²⁹⁶ Winnipeg Productions Ltd. *Cameron of the Royal Mounted*, (1921; Winnipeg, Manitoba). National Archives of Canada, British Film Institute Fonds: ISN 207121921. VHS.

²⁹⁷ Thunder Bay Films Ltd. *The Devil Bear*, (1928; Fort William, Ontario). National Archives of Canada, John E. Allen Fonds: ISN 2134671928. VHS

²⁹⁸ Ontario Motion Pictures Bureau, *Cinderella of the Farms*, (1930; Ontario). National Archives of Canada, Graphic Consultants Ltd. Fonds: ISN 25679. VHS

Symbolic elements of the modern like the city, fashionable party dresses, dances, and beauty pageants, usually signalled that the plot was going to take a turn for the worse. Often, frivolous young moderns who demonstrated poor judgement needed saving, thus launching the plot. Women who did not work, who chased thrills, or indulged in conspicuous consumption often found themselves in trouble. 'Betty Baker' in *His Destiny* (1928)²⁹⁹ was a wild gal and proficient horse rider, but her love of thrills made her "More trouble to her father than a penitentiary full of prisoners." When she flippantly accepts the marriage proposals of more than one man while at the Calgary Stampede celebrations, she is abducted by an angry suitor and must be saved by a clean-cut cowboy. Despite living in the northland wilderness, 'Werta' in *The Devil Bear* (1928) has grown accustomed to a leisurely lifestyle, fancy party clothes, and a Native woman-servant. When frolicking in the forest she is abducted by an escaped guerrilla and has to be saved by her love interest. In *The Man from Glengarry* (1922) trouble ensues when the characters leave the Ottawa valley lumber camp and arrive in the city. A dance hall scene foreshadows a plot twist! Although this film has only survived in pieces we can still make out the terrible turn the story takes when smoking flapper Maime starts her scheming.

²⁹⁹ British Canadian Pictures Ltd. *His Destiny*, (1928; Calgary, Alberta). National Archives of Canada, Thunderbird Films Fonds: ISN 135760. VHS

But perhaps the most demonstrative of these examples can be found in the 1928 *Carry on, Sergeant*.³⁰⁰ Factory worker Mac leaves his girlfriend for the warfront in France, where he encounters a mousy bar maid. When they first meet, she is modestly dressed, in simply tailored loose fitting clothing, her hair is tied back, and she does not attract Mac's attention. Mac goes away to the trenches and when they meet again the barmaid has undergone a makeover. Her clothes are chic, her hair sleek, her face is painted, and her body language is flirtatious. The barmaid seduces a tired and demoralized Mac and she leads him by the hand up a back staircase. Mac was able to stay faithful to his girlfriend until he encounters the fashionably made-over bar girl. As Peter Morris has written, the film generated a great deal of controversy, particularly because of the way it portrayed the weak moral values of men in the Canadian Expeditionary Forces.³⁰¹ After his affair with the barmaid, Mac is a tortured man, loses his will to fight and is killed on the front.

Unlike in magazines, where consumption and a focus on keeping up the modern body were touted as a means of salvation, in films, the fashionable and modern female body was most often a symbol of danger, temptation, and immorality. The warning in these films was subtle, but present: consumption is not a virtue. The Canadian character as it was

³⁰⁰ Canadian International Films Limited. *Carry on Sergeant*, directed by Bruce Bairnsfather (1928; Ontario). National Archives of Canada, Gordon Sparling Fonds: ISN 426801928. VHS

³⁰¹ *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*, 79.

portrayed in films produced in Canada was connected to the land, and valued hard work, integrity, and modesty. This antithesis to the images of women in magazines remind one that the glamour associated with consumption and self-actualization through the 'body project' was not a universal projection across visual culture.

Non-Whiteness and the Unmodern

As much as there were fashionable garments in the 1920s there were also fashionable bodies. The way that artists drew, painted, sculpted and photographed female bodies in the 1920s collectively reflected a racial and classed hierarchy of power and agency. Where white women were projected as active participants in the modern world, non-white women were projected as unmodern. This trend was widely visible in 1920s visual culture and extended across all visual mediums. Native women disappeared into the landscapes of artists' canvases, Black women picked ginger and cotton in faraway places, Persian women danced for visitors and served them food and drink, portly European women served as domestic servants to wealthy families – it seems there was little exception to the rule that the consumer world was designed with non-white peoples holding up the platform on which white Canadians lived. There was no question for artists as they sketched up a consumer scene that the body on the buying side of the counter was a white body.

White
—as the Cotton in Dixie/

YOU will revel in the charm of rooms finished in Luxeberry Enamel . . . as white and soft toned as newly plucked cotton.

Picture your home refinished in pure white . . . colonial-like in its simple dignity . . . immaculate, sun-flooded and inviting.

Luxeberry possesses rare purity of tone. It has not the slightest trace of blue, gray or yellow. It never cracks, peels or chips. It may be used inside or out, so porcelain-like is it in durability.

Pure white and mellow toned . . . not harsh or cold . . . you'll love every inch of your Luxeberry woodwork.

BERRY BROTHERS
Varnishes Enamels Stains
Waukegan, Ill.

Get the picture and see how it's done!

Luxeberry
ENAMEL SPREADS CONTENTMENT

The advertisement features a central text box with descriptive text, a small portrait of a man, and a bottle of Luxeberry Enamel. The background is a grayscale illustration of a woman carrying a large basket on her head, with a man and another woman in the background. The word 'White' is written in a large, stylized font at the top, and 'Luxeberry' is written in a large, cursive font at the bottom.

Figure 57: "Luxeberry Enamel Advertisement," *MacLean's Magazine* (May 1, 1924): 80.

"Canada Dry" buys a large part of the best ginger grown in Jamaica

HAD you been in Kingston, Jamaica, B.W. I., two years ago, your eye would have been caught by great green posters. This is what you would have read: "Ginger-growing competition, arranged by the Jamaica Agriculture Society, for prizes offered by Canada Dry Ginger Ale Limited."

Definite efforts like these produce this fine old ginger ale

The meaning of a ginger competition in an island 80 miles south of Cuba, far off in the Caribbean Sea, is simply this: to produce a better, finer ginger ale for you. It is typical of the exacting methods which "Canada Dry" employs. The finest quality of Jamaica



AN IMPORTANT EVENT, KINGSTON, JAMAICA, B.W.I.



The ginger-growing competition, instituted by "Canada Dry," resulted in more careful, more scientific methods of ginger-growing.

ginger and other absolutely pure ingredients are used. It is blended and balanced in exact proportions. Those proportions are carefully watched and tested to see that they never vary. The purity of "Canada Dry" is a matter of hourly examination in the laboratory. By means of a secret method of carbonation, "Canada Dry" is always uniform in charging.

"Canada Dry" has a delightful flavor

The pure, mild ginger in "Canada Dry" gives it a delightful allure and subtlety of flavor and it is

actually good for you. In fact, many leading medical authorities recommend it. It is served in leading hospitals too.

Serve "Canada Dry" with dinner tonight and offer a glass when good friends come to call.

A drink of distinction to serve

Drink it at luncheon or in the afternoon when you entertain. Order when you dine out. Keep it on hand always. Buy it in the Hostess Package. You'll never know how good ginger ale can be until you drink "Canada Dry."



"CANADA DRY"

The Champagne of Ginger Ales

Canada Dry Ginger Ale Limited, Toronto, Edmonton and Montreal
Formerly J. J. McLaughlin Limited, and Caledonia Springs Corporation Limited

Figure 58: "Canada Dry Advertisement," MacLean's Magazine (January 15, 1929): 35.

The unapologetic spectacle of non-white bodies propping up (and being exploited by) the privilege of North American consumer society was

constructed as the natural order of things. In some ways advertisements told the truth by projecting women of the two-thirds world labouring while white women and men leisured, but ultimately, argues Berger, "Publicity helps to mask and compensate for all that is undemocratic within society. And it also masks what is happening in the rest of the world... It produces a fake world. It interprets the world in its own terms, with its own philosophical system." 302 The Luxeberry Enamel advertisement shown here overflows with language and iconography of white colonialism – "White as the cotton in Dixie... Luxeberry Enamel spreads contentment." Certainly, the woman picking cotton is not touched by this spreading contentment. In fact, it's unclear why she is even in the advertisement since the product being sold is paint and not cotton, unless the advertisement is indeed drawing on the racial dynamic of the colonial period – offering consumers a nostalgic past where non-white peoples were firmly under thumb; a place and time to which they could be transported: "Picture your home refinished in pure white...colonial-like in its simple dignity," the ad reads.

Canada Dry conjures similar ideals in an advertisement re-enacting the launch of a ginger growing competition in the spirit of cultivating "the finest quality of Jamaica." In this ad too, as white plantation owners are leisurely gathered around the announcement a Jamaican woman is drawn

³⁰² Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 149.

walking by, a load on her head. Again, the distinction between privileged and non, modern and not, is expressed through the presence of non-white women working. Selling these non-white women as primitive fed the construction of white womanhood as the only modern womanhood, as the only group of women who had access to the consumer world as purchasers and its modernizing influence.

Palmolive produced a series of advertisements where the relationship between white and non-white women blatantly reflected this larger global economic and social politics. In this 1921 ad, fashionable, middle class white women attract the attention of men of means, presumably because they use this soap, a longstanding symbol of colonialism and white refinement.³⁰³ The Egyptian woman is situated below the white women, exploited for her labour and exoticism, and dressed in festive clothes as though she were putting on a show. But despite her beauty, modernity is not hers. She is in the past. Her image is used to produce nostalgia and to imply a connection between the beauty secrets of a mystical ancient world and the task of attracting a man. Her objectified body, the absence of any sign of modernity on or around her, and the place she occupies on the page all reflect the unevenness with which modernity and the consumer economy were experienced. In images of non-white women and their presentation as labourers and servants, female

³⁰³ See for example : McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*.

whiteness was being constituted. The two white women are accompanied by strong images of modernity – the urban theatre and the automobile – and lay claim to a more ‘civilized’ existence, both through their interaction with modernity and their cleanliness.

L'impression que vous avez faite hier soir—

Soutendra-t-elle l'effet du soleil aujourd'hui?

Teints — Du Soir et de Midi

La plupart des femmes peuvent paraître bien le soir, mais seules les peaux parfaites et naturelles peuvent supporter l'éclat du jour.

Une peau rayonnante, saine et brillante est la marque de la jeunesse, — et chaque femme peut obtenir une telle peau. Nombreux sont les embellissants, mais le principal est d'avoir une peau extrêmement propre.

Les bons teints demandent du savon

La propreté qui embellit n'exige pas seulement une surface propre mais encore des pores soigneusement nettoyés. Une telle propreté demande l'usage du savon.

Malpropreté, huile, transpiration, bouchent les pores. Cette accumulation doit être enlevée au moins une fois par jour. Le meilleur moment est le soir. La peau peut alors respirer pendant toutes les heures du sommeil.

S'ils sont privés d'un tel nettoyage, les glandes et les pores s'obstruent et s'irritent. Leurs fonctions sont retardées. La peau devient rugueuse. Des points noirs et des pustules apparaissent.

Doit se faire à l'aide de mousse

Ce nettoyage doit se faire par le savon auquel il n'y a point de substitut. Il faut faire pénétrer la mousse dans les pores par un massage modéré. Après le rinçage, la poussière et l'huile disparaissent.

C'est une mousse balsamique qu'il faut

On a cherché à produire une mousse balsamique et crémeuse, une mousse qui adoucit en même temps qu'elle nettoie et laisse la peau douce.

Pour y parvenir, la science moderne est revenue à des méthodes vieilles de 3,000 ans. Elle fait usage d'un mélange d'huiles de palme et d'olive, non pas appliqué à la façon de Cléopâtre, mais modernisé. Dans le savon l'absolue ces deux huiles merveilleuses sont parfaitement combinées. Pour la propreté du visage, le monde n'a jamais rien découvert de supérieur et ne découvrira probablement jamais rien.

Le Palmolive nettoie la peau en l'adoucissant. Il la laisse fraîche et colorée. Son emploi quotidien est la base de la beauté. Son application consciencieuse pénètre la peau des meilleures huiles que l'on ait jamais connues.

Si la peau est très sèche, appliquez de la cold cream avant et après le lavage. Le savon fera une mousse balsamique. Faites-la pénétrer dans les pores. Rincez avec de l'eau tiède, puis, appliquez de l'eau froide pour tonifier. Vous avez alors fait de votre mieux, mieux encore qu'une bonne nourritrice, de l'air frais et de l'exercice, pour embellir votre peau.

Pourquoi ce bas prix?

Nous importons les huiles de palme d'Afrique, les huiles d'olive d'Espagne. Elles sont les plus chères et les meilleures qui puissent entrer dans la composition d'un savon pour le visage. Cependant le palmolive se vend à bas marché. Le fait est d'une importance de la production. Des millions couvrent le Palmolive. Il se vend partout depuis de nombreuses années dans le monde à la portée de toutes les bourses.

THE PALMOLIVE COMPANY
 Of Canada, Limited, Toronto, Ontario.
 Fabricants de toute espèce de granules de toilette.

Suprême pendant 3,000 ans

Les savons Palmolive sont supérieurs à tous les autres. Ils ont été utilisés par les femmes de tous les pays et de tous les siècles. Ils ont été recommandés par les médecins et les hygiénistes. Ils ont été utilisés par les reines et les impératrices. Ils ont été utilisés par les hommes et les femmes de tous les pays. Ils ont été utilisés par les hommes et les femmes de tous les siècles. Ils ont été utilisés par les hommes et les femmes de tous les siècles.

Figure 59: "Palmolive Advertisement." *La Canadienne* (November 1921): 9.

As a commodity item, soap continued to carry with it ideas of whiteness and cleanliness as markers of civilization well into the twentieth century. In Canada's number one box-office hit of the era, a soap scene divulges the racist and subordinating sentiments towards Natives. In *Back to God's Country* the ship captained by the villain Rydall docks along Canada's icy north eastern shore where a group of Inuit women are welcomed aboard to join a brewing party. It's not entirely evident why these women have come here since they don't seem enthusiastic or comfortable. Enthralled by a gramophone on the ship one Inuit woman makes clear her lack of familiarity with the music player. Her distraction, however, is taken advantage of by a drunken crewmember who sexually assaults the woman, struggling to keep from being raped. The other Inuit women aboard are being danced around the room like rag dolls by the crew, but when the women do not respond the way the men expect, the men change their approach to the Inuit women. One crewman reaches into a crate of soap and offers it to his dance partner. She does not know what to do with it and bites into it like a snack, amusing the crewmembers who break out in laughter at her expense. Dressed in traditional Inuit clothing these women are conveyed in the film as backward and primitive. They are constructed as ignorant, out of step with modern

standards of dress and hygiene and outside of a cheap thrill or a laugh, ultimately undesirable to the crew.

Constructions of non-white women as outsiders to the modern world created an imagining of Canada as a white nation and as the fashionable bodies within it as white bodies. Non-white women were projected as characters of the past and doomed to fade out, marginalized from the privileges of the consumer market and the role of purchaser. Artists seldom drew white and non-white bodies occupying the same space, which reinforced the distance between them and the social division that existed along lines of race. Whether as servants, heavy labourers, uncivilized or unclean, artists were able to tap into the cultural iconography of power and difference in their projections of non-white women, thereby also constituting the fashionability and modernity of whiteness.

Conclusion



Figure 60: Fred Varley, *Vera*, 1931. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

By 1931 Fred Varley's representation of his lover Vera had transformed.³⁰⁴ Her fashionably longer flipped-out hair was a symbol of the end of the bob era. Her shaped brow, rouged lips, pink collared shirt and

³⁰⁴ Fred Varley, *Vera*, 1931. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada.

long sleeves seemed to be mirror opposites of how Vera had been painted only two years before. Her arms and hands were no longer visible. It was the end of an era.

The new aesthetic ideals of androgyny, efficiency, speed and mobility had succumbed, by the early 1930s, to the super-feminine stylings common to times of crisis. Fashion writer Mary Wyndham wrote that "Paris Favors a Feminine Mode: The Boyish Figure Fades from the Picture."³⁰⁵ After the Depression set in, a new mood captured the nation. Bodily images that challenged feminine gender norms quickly retreated. The bodily reform that 1920s fashions implied was quickly thwarted for visual gender dynamics more reminiscent of the status quo. "Obviously," wrote Helen Cornelius in 1922, "the aim of the modes is to swing the pendulum back to pre-flapper days, when one was able at a glance to tell a lady from a hoyden and a matron from a maid."³⁰⁶ Cornelius was no doubt basking in her foresight when short skirts and even shorter hair fell out of fashion and the body was slowly reconfigured to suit the new mood.

Artists would change with the times. Modernity was still in fashion but the young flapper was out of the picture and no longer a useful symbol of the modern. Androgyny was placed on the backburner of aesthetic and

³⁰⁵ Mary Wyndham, "Paris Favors a Feminine Mode" *The Chatelaine* (March 1928): 22.

³⁰⁶ Helen Cornelius, "Fashion Tolls the Kneel of Flapper Styles" *Everywoman's World* (September 1922): 9.

gendered fashion experimentation for it was no longer seen as tasteful, although the odd daring fashionista (German actress Marlene Dietrich in a sharp tuxedo comes to mind) did have a go at it. The female form came to embody notions of frugality, simplicity and for some artists, expressions of suffering and pain in the 1930s. The constant reappropriation and reconstruction of the female body was a testament to its malleability as forum of symbols which in the 1920s exuded the celebratory tone of modernity. The fast, efficient, free and mobile female form as designed by artists was the fashionable emblem of an age.

CHAPTER 4. SEXUALITY, ANXIETY AND DANGER

This chapter explores the ways in which artists constructed and mediated the visual vocabulary of anxiety through the female body in 1920s visual culture. The further images became unmoored from the visual vocabulary of good nation, the more potent they became as symbols of degradation and immorality. Artists used the female body in particular ways to signal disorder and draw on the anxieties of the viewing public. It seemed that the two elements of modern representation and modern activity could run safely parallel in visual culture, (a good mother could look modern but should not be engaged in modern activities, for instance), but when they intersected, as they did in the image of the flapper, they became signposts for danger and potential national chaos. Anxieties incited by images of nudes and flappers were premised on two key beliefs – that visual changes to women's appearance marked changes to normative ideals of gender and that changes to these ideals were poised to undermine the nation. In this chapter, an examination of nudity in high art and films, the flapper across mediums and artists treatment of strong and successful women images will uncover the flexibility and limitations of the modern female image and their contribution to the discourse on nation.

Art Historian Jerrold Morris writes, "The morality of the inhabitants of this continent crystallized during the Victorian age, when the greatest expansion

of its social structure took place. That morality was based on the maintenance of an appearance of respectability.”³⁰⁷ This was more important in the colonies than anywhere else where they had something to prove in reaction to popular perceptions that the colonies were unruly and uncivilized. And although the female form on one hand embodied the hope, stability and future of the nation and the nation-building project (particularly through images of mother-and-child), at the same time it held the power to undo it. Sexuality was the pivot point for this duality – when the body extolled an unfettered sexuality it threatened to unravel the very basic unit of nation-building rooted in the family; when the body implied chastity and loyalty, or where the body’s sexuality was negated altogether, it suppressed these anxieties. Fausto-Sterling writes,

From the start of the scientific revolution, scientists viewed the earth or nature as female, a territory to be explored, exploited, and controlled. Newly discovered lands were personified as female, and it seems unsurprising that women of these nations became the locus of scientific inquiry. Identifying foreign lands as female helped to naturalize their rape and exploitation, but the appearance on the scene of ‘wild women’ raised troubling questions about the status of European women. Hence, it also

³⁰⁷ Jerrold A. Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting* (Toronto: Press, 1972), 25.

became important to differentiate the 'savage' land/woman from the civilized female of Europe.³⁰⁸

Thus the appearance of defiant or independent women in Canadian visual culture did, as Fausto-Sterling argues for Europe, 'raise troubling questions' about the status of Canada women and the nation more widely. The key element that stood to disrupt the social order was sexuality. This was particularly true in light of modernization, which as Linda Nochlin asserts, effectively challenged the artistic tradition of "Masculine mastery and feminine display."³⁰⁹ The 1920s saw an increase in visual expressions of female sexuality, prowess and defiant challenging of the viewer-subject relationship across mediums, which were pulling from international trends in female representation but were new to the Canadian art scene and in many cases, alarming to viewers. Although often conservatively represented, artistic treatment of successful and independent women implied that they too were perceived as a threat, but for very different reasons. How artists chose to photograph, sketch and film overachieving women revealed a complex visual politics of gender, independence and agency. In this chapter we explore the visual place and artistic uses of the female body and the

³⁰⁸ Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe, 1850-1817," in *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, ed. Ruth Richardson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 206.

³⁰⁹ Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty : The Visceral Eye*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures ; 2003-2004 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.

elements of sexuality, agency and public space to illuminate the intellectual and psychological landscape of femininity and anxiety in 1920s Canada.

From Nude to Rude

Although nudes were staples of artistic tradition, 1920s exhibitions rarely featured them because of the “moral outrage” they sometimes provoked.³¹⁰ In traditional commissioned forms of art such as decorative panels and ceiling frescoes nudes found their ordained place in public spaces. “Such paintings were even more acceptable if they were part of decorative ensemble sanctioned by long tradition... no fault was found with nudes sporting on a ceiling, or in panels which were an integral part of the luxurious décor of a theatre or the lounges of steamships.”³¹¹ Particularly in mythical scenarios, where the female form lent its allegorical strength, nudes spoke in the traditional visual vocabulary of symbols for the seasons or the virtues and were therefore not seen as potential threats. Modern nudes, however, having exchanged classical elements and symbols for modern ones, also took on the politics and potency of modern anxieties over the female body and feminine sexuality.

Despite the fact that nude portraits were part of the academic figure study genre, the ways in which artists were projecting the female nude in the

³¹⁰ Rosalind and Brian Foss Pepall, *Edwin Holgate* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 46.

³¹¹ Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting*, 7.

1920s divulged new layers of complexity in female sexuality that triggered responses from the viewing public. Viewers' attempts to censor the work of figure artists with complaints serve as a gauge for the limits of public tolerance. The fact that most complaints pertained to nudes and their perceived eroticism points to the trigger – images of women's naked bodies made many people uncomfortable. Viewer tolerance to nudes was therefore part of the politics of their production. If artists sought legitimization from the academy and Canadians more widely, there were boundaries to consider. These boundaries often marked the grey area where nude and nudity, art and transgression, met, and where the anxieties of Canadian society became legible.

Censorship of nudes was one way that these anxieties were manifested. Bertram Brooker's "Figures in a Landscape"³¹², mounted at the Ontario Society of Artists exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto in 1931, was removed by gallery officials when the painting's "morality was questioned" for fear of its impact on visiting school children.³¹³ It was quickly packaged, shipped, and hung in Montreal the same year with no backlash, which points to the variable of regional culture to the politics of art production and display. The climate for nudes was clearly more accepting in

³¹² For image of Bertram Brooker, *Figures in a Landscape* (1931) Private Collection, Oil on Canvas, see Pepall, p48.

³¹³ Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting*, 15.; "Artists Quarrel over Nudes in a Landscape," *Toronto Star* March 7, 1931, 2.

Montreal where contemporary figure painting was one of the city's artistic strengths and where art was more radical or avant garde in this period.³¹⁴

A few weeks later, in an act of what artist Bertram Booker called a "bootlegging of the nude", a Toronto department store exhibited nude art in one of their store galleries. One of John Russell's nudes³¹⁵ "was hung with two or three other canvases in a tiny room off one of the main galleries, behind a closed door which no one would think of opening unless attention was called to it." Newspapers spread the word and "the puritanical Toronto public flocked to see it."³¹⁶ Reflecting on these events later in 1932, Brooker focused on his frustration with the Puritanism of Toronto with a press who did not publish a word of criticism for this "bootlegging", and he scoffed at a public that "delights in the discussion of those things which it considers illicit."³¹⁷ This event marked a distinct overlap of high art and consumption as the informal exhibition brought the nude to the arena of conspicuous consumption where politics of the body were understood and manipulated differently. Not only did this instance alter the demographic of viewers (now including middle

³¹⁴ Brian Foss, "Living Landscape," in *Edwin Holgate*, ed. Rosalind Pepall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 48.; also see Ungar, "The Last Ulysseans: Culture and Modernism in Montreal, 1930-1939."

³¹⁵ John Russell's 1927 *A Modern Fantasy* caused uproar when it exhibited at the CNE that year. It drew incredible numbers of viewers and received scathing critique in the press. For more see: Nicholas, "Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s Canadian Visual Culture," Chapter 4.

³¹⁶ Fetherling, *Documents in Canadian Art*, 68.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

class and perhaps even working class shoppers) but it created a new context and space in which art was viewed – in the same building where consumers bought lingerie and makeup. Mounted in department stores, these exhibits linked art and consumption in ways traditional art galleries did not, blurring the line between high art and commerce.

Figure painter LeMoine FitzGerald was said to have hung one of his favorite nudes over his mantle “until a neighbor complained that her children could see it through the window. In this unfriendly environment,” writes Morris, “it is not surprising that he did not exhibit his figure paintings and, later in life, produced a large number of studies and drawings which he showed to no one.”³¹⁸ When he published his book in 1972 Morris wrote that he still knew of several of FitzGerald’s nudes that were not being shown “because of their owners’ Victorian sense of propriety.”³¹⁹

Although nudes produced by Edwin Holgate were often celebrated, they were also sometimes the target of critique. Two of his nudes that were hung in Toronto incited so much complaint that the two canvases were squeezed out of the exhibit by curators for “lack of room.”³²⁰ His *Nude in the*

³¹⁸ Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting*, 11.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Fetherling, *Documents in Canadian Art*, 68.

Open was one of those controversial canvases.³²¹ Before the show opened Holgate's figures were said to be notable, setting "a new fashion in nudes – away from French decadence to the Laurentians for a background. Splendidly painted nudes, without cosmetics."³²² When *Nude in the Open* traveled to Montreal with a Group of Seven exhibit in 1930 it received acclaim in *La Revue Moderne* as well.³²³ It was purchased by the Art Gallery of Toronto that same year, which was evidence that the art world approved of the canvas' artistic value, but a series of "irate" letters from Methodist leaders and other like-minded viewers landed the painting in the gallery's cellar.³²⁴ This body is far more erotically positioned than Holgate's other lounging nudes in landscape. Her open position, with one hand behind her head, her erect nipple and her flushed cheeks are signifiers of sexual arousal, and Holgate presents her to the viewer as if submissively on display. There is no challenge to the viewer or the viewer-sitter relationship as her eyes are drawn closed and she faces away from the viewer. As we shall see later, this was one of the key characteristics that made other of Holgate's works and the work of Prudence Heward so jarring. Some art critics have argued that

³²¹ *Nude in a Landscape* was the other. It, too, was purchase in 1930 by the National Gallery.

³²² Augustus Bridel, "All Space Is Occupied for Art Gallery's Opening," *Toronto Star* 1930, 25.

³²³ Foss, "Living Landscape," 48.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

Holgate's use of landscape as backdrop, so familiar to the viewing public as nationally symbolic, was a strategy to "soothe the prurient elders".³²⁵ One might add that his refusal to challenge the viewer placated conservatives as well.

Beaver Hall artist Prudence Heward was far less docile in her representation of the female nude and by the end of the decade and into the 1930s she was aggressively challenging representational norms of the nude figure. Her painting *Girl under a Tree*, which exhibited with the Group of Seven in 1931 "was given a polite but reserved reception,"³²⁶ and attracted particular criticism for the subject's "high-strung sexuality".³²⁷ In a tradition of dealing with the nude delicately, Heward's work was challenging normative artistic notions of the nude, the landscape and the relationship of the nude to that landscape. At a time when the wilderness and the figures in it were the antithesis of urban perniciousness, Heward was introducing the possibility of the multiplicity of understandings of the female form and the landscape. Morris writes that the most notable characteristic of the painting is "the feeling of psychological malaise" which one might argue was central to the modern experience.³²⁸ Pepall and Ross argue that Heward's painting "grates

³²⁵ Pepall, *Edwin Holgate*, 49.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

³²⁷ Millar, "The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940," 5.

³²⁸ Morris, *The Nude in Canadian Painting*, 12.

upon art history rather than paying homage to it. Her nude displays an uncontained eroticism and an unnervingly clear awareness of the viewer's presence: an awareness that does nothing to encourage modesty of physical presentation."³²⁹ It's clear across Heward's work that she wasn't interested in encouraging modesty through her female forms – her representations were liberated, self-assured and unapologetic. No doubt influenced by the years throughout the 20s she spent studying in Paris, Heward offered a different representational lens for the female body that drew on abstract perspectives popular in Europe. Heward was moving against the highly popular nostalgic nationalism that characterized the decade. Maria Tippett argues that women artists from English and French-speaking Quebec “lacked a nationalist ethos” but Joyce Millar disagrees, arguing that Heward was directly visually engaged in the discourse on nation and the landscape and that her powerful female nudes and portraits portrayed a strong sense of women's place in it.³³⁰ Heward may not have fallen in line with popular modernist renditions of the nude in landscape, but she was engaging in the visual discourse of nude and nation from a different, arguably more realistic and more modern, perspective.³³¹

³²⁹ Pepall, *Edwin Holgate*, 51.

³³⁰ Millar, "The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940," 5.

³³¹ Maria Tippett, *By a Lady : Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto ; New York: Viking, 1992), 68.



Figure 61: Prudence Heward, *Girl Under a Tree*, 1931. Oil on Canvas, Art Gallery of Hamilton.

In *Girl under a Tree* it is precisely these differences that articulate her unique artistic perspective on the modern female form and its relationship to nation. Her modern abstraction of the wilderness structures the hills and mountains that likens them to urban buildup, much of which took place along waterways which she implies with the deep blues of the horizon. The cactus inspired flora, native to warmer climates, is further evidence of a colonized landscape. For theorist John Berger, “nudity is a form of dress.”³³² Heward’s ‘girl’ is dressed for the modern nation. She is not plush or dainty, but

³³² Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 54.

chiseled. Muscular female forms were common to the work of Holgate and Heward but seldom viewed in the work of other artists. This bodily construction was one of the conventions that made the two artists especially modern. Nochlin calls the imagery of the “beached, blubbery white woman” of Renoir’s works “anti-feminist icons, an insult to the feminine mind and body.” Weighed down by their fat and by gravity, they succumb, she argues, and as such are “anti-idealist.”³³³ Here, the strong arms and legs of Heward’s nude are only outdone by her powerful chest, her pectoral muscles so developed that her breasts lack the fleshy bulbousness that characterized most female nudes. In fashionable dress, suppression of the breasts under elastic corsets was all the rage, much to the chagrin of fashion experts who lamented that women were looking more and more like men. Indeed, if one were to cover her feminine face, her body might be mistaken for that of a man.

The 1920s were rife with discourse on the dangers of androgyny, of women ‘forgetting they are women’ and ‘trying to be men’, of women’s expansion into male dominated public space - the boundaries of femininity were being reconstituted and Heward’s production of this nude should not be isolated from that historical context as some art historians do. It’s in this context that the nude’s gender and sexuality is so potent. Her open pose and self-assured character disrupts the traditional relationship of viewer to subject.

³³³ Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty : The Visceral Eye*, 48-51.

She is aware of her viewer and she plays to this awareness. Berger argues that in nudes, women are there to feed an appetite, not to have any of their own.³³⁴ However, Heward's *Girl under a Tree* is a knowing and sensual figure expressing sexual prowess. She is less the 'knowable' female form, suggesting that in fact *she* is the knower – she knows herself and her own desires. She does not give the impression that she is accessible or passive like so many other nudes. This is perhaps the uneasiness that sets in for many viewers. Her "insolence" as Millar puts it, bound together with her knowledge of self (her sexual self) and her place in relation to others is what likely turned off many viewers, for it went against the grain of normative femininity, even if it did capture, in some small way, the mood of the times. Further, argues Millar, most of Heward's portraits reveal "her vision of women as strong, confident, and often heroic figures who draw their strength from the land, a far cry from the derisive 'woman-as-nature' syndrome."³³⁵ Heward's "Girl" turns the relationship between the landscape and the nude on its head. Unlike so many other nudes in landscape, with a 'knowable' female form and a vast uncolonized wilderness, Heward's painting evokes a less nostalgic and more modern interpretation – that colonization has transformed the wilderness and

³³⁴ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 55.

³³⁵ Millar, "The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920-1940," 5.

that the female form is an agent in that space and not so easily known or claimed.³³⁶



Figure 62: Edwin Holgate, *Two Bathers* (c. 1923-24) Wood Engraving. National Gallery of Canada.

³³⁶ Other portrait work by Prudence Heward would be well worth examining, also toying with the boundaries of femininity and the relationship of the figure to the landscape. Although in almost all her other works the figures are clothed, they are no less potent in their strength and presence, and won a number of distinguished awards throughout the 20s and 30s. Some considerations for such an examination might be: *Anna* (c.1927) Oil on Canvas, NGC; *Girl on a Hill* (1928) Oil on Canvas NGC; *Rollande* (1929) Oil on Canvas, National Gallery of Canada; *Dark Girl* (1935) Hart House, University of Toronto, Oil on Canvas; *The Farmer's Daughter* (1945) Oil on Canvas. Winnipeg Art Gallery; *Une Jeune Indienne* (1936) Oil on Canvas. Musee des beaux-arts, Montreal.; *Young Girl with Rose* (n.d.) Oil on Canvas. Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa.



Figure 63: Edwin Holgate, *The Bathers*, c. 1930. Wood Engraving. National Gallery of Canada.

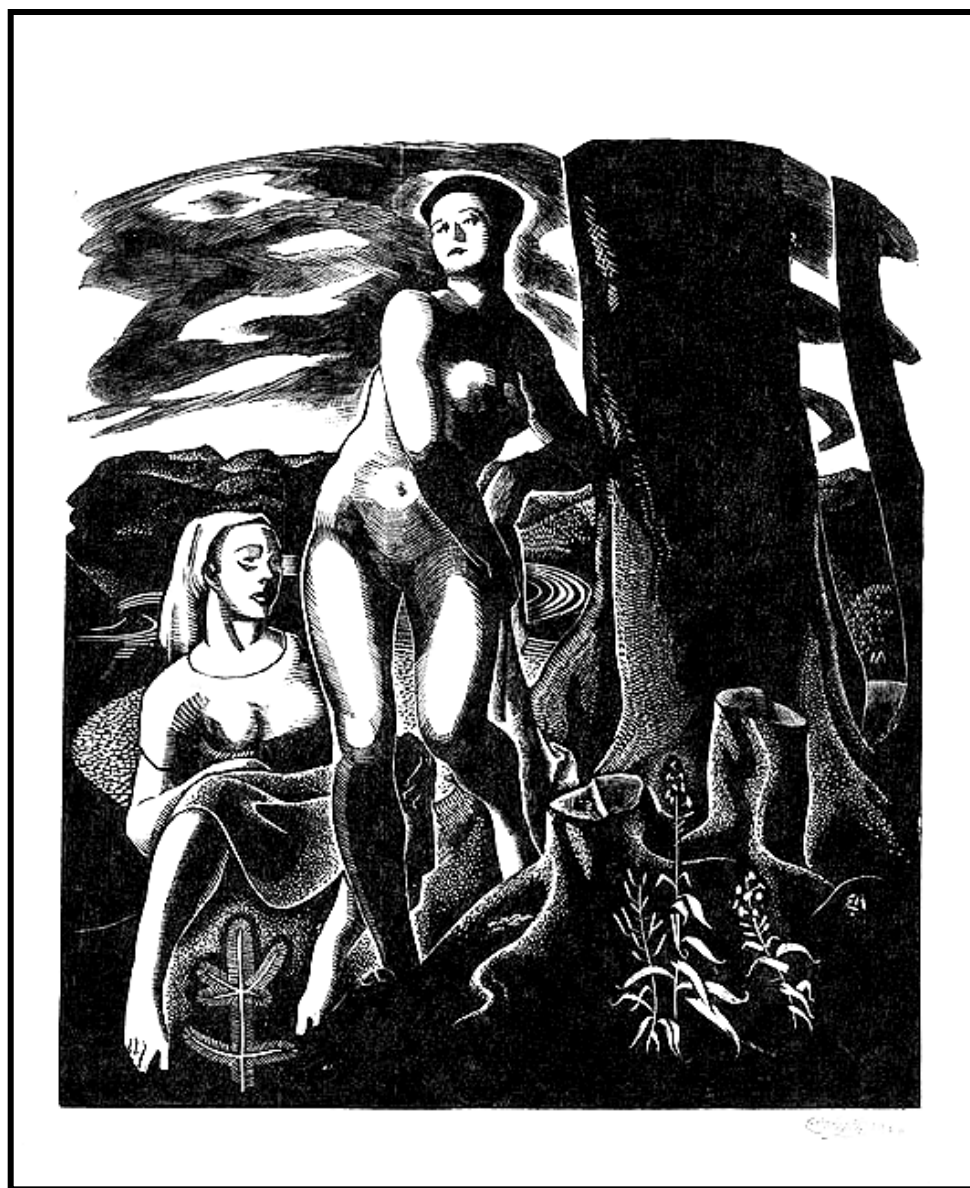


Figure 64: Edwin Holgate, *Two Figures*, date unknown. Wood Engraving. MacKenzie Art Gallery (Regina).

Edwin Holgate's work in carving prints also challenged artistic traditions of female representation in Canada with themes like eroticism and

homoeroticism, bodily liberation and bodily knowledge. *Two Bathers* (c. 1923-24), *The Bathers* (c. 1930) and *Two Figures* (n.d.) are only three of a subgenre of Holgate's erotic nudes. In *Two Bathers* the two female nudes seem to be frozen in a moment leading up to a kiss – the seated nude's head tilted up just so. Her companion's body, more muscular than her own (especially her highly developed arms, quadriceps and buttocks), take on a masculine form and only her dangling breasts give her away as a woman. Bending down to dry her hands on a towel, the subjects erotic position could easily be explained away by viewers. Although eroticism characterizes *The Bathers* as well, the two nudes share less connection – one lounging with her legs spread, the other with outstretched arms and legs freely exposing her body to an empty virgin landscape. She mirrors what Nochlin reads as the “fantasy of bodily liberation” in the nude bathers painted by Renoir in the 1880s.³³⁷

Perhaps the most explicit and suggestive of the three, *Two Figures* depicts a nude posing for a dressed woman, her buttocks so purposefully on

³³⁷ With the experience of the daily routine of corsets and lacing Nochlin considers the perspective of the female viewer, how she “must have felt before this vision of freely expanding flesh... of simply breathing deeply, of not having their breasts pushed up under their chins and their ribs and lungs encased in whalebone.” And although 1920s fashions were considerably less restrictive than they had been in the 1880s women's bodies continued to be restrained under flattening elastic corsets, the tubular ideal and hygiene regimes popularized in the 20s. The idea of basking in the sunlight corresponded with the increasing popularity of tanning which, among middle and upper-class Canadians, was a sign of privilege and a mark of leisure. Lightly bronzed skin became a beauty ideal instead of a sign of having labored in the fields as it was for non-urban workers. Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty : The Visceral Eye*, 9.

display for her lover that she must lean on a stick for balance. The dressed woman seems intensely focused, her left arm hidden from view leaves room for the erotic imagination; Is she penetrating her lover? The aptly placed sapling in the foreground, shaded to illuminate its phallic contours, reaches just to the hem of the woman's dress. Taken together, these prints (and we could add others to the roster) depicted various stages of intimacy between women in landscape. They allude to a number of themes that would likely have been alarming to viewers – unabashed nude scenarios that were a departure from nude study poses, homoerotic tensions between female subjects and veiled allusions to sexual activity.

Holgate's work also showed his interest in exploring gender through bodily shape and presentation. His numerous muscular female forms pulled from the popular 1920s fashion trend of androgynizing the female body, but Holgate didn't project androgyny in the same way magazines and films did through the lithe, flat-chested and short-haired flapper. His brand of gender ambiguity took the opposite form, in muscular and fleshy nudes. Many of Holgate's figures were in motion and claimed space to the same degree as dancing flappers but he tempered his figures' transgressiveness in two key ways; His subjects' activities were being performed in a private place, away from the urban masses and in the wilderness that carried with it symbolism of its pure and therapeutic nature and secondly, his figures, although carved in

modern technique, referenced more the fleshy shape of 19th century nudes and classical allegories and not the mechanistic and tubular bodies of the 1920s fashion pages. Steering clear of the visual politics of the flapper body, Holgate avoided connection to the discourse of the controversial modern girl and associated instead with the emerging modern allegories of nationhood. Holgate may have been unsure about how his figures would be received for out of the three carvings shown here, he exhibited only the least insinuating of the three, *The Bathers*.³³⁸

Holgate constructs the landscape for these bathers as a place of transgression – a secret part of the national wilderness. Tagged by nationalist painters as iconography for the vast natural beauty that defined the Canadian character, Holgate explored the potential of the landscape as an un surveilled place of hiding where women could explore their bodily and sexual freedom. Unlike many of Holgate's powerful modern allegories for nation, the figures in these prints are moving, exploring, living *in* the landscape. What's more, they are there without men, and with the traditional male viewer also at threat of being displaced by the subject staring back, Holgate's bathing beauties thwart the homogenized expectations and

³³⁸ Holgate's prints were not the only images of lovers produced in high art, although they too were rare. Artists such as Cecil Buller, L.L. FitzGerald and Alfred Laliberté tactfully named representations of heterosexual intimacy avoiding potential readings of eroticism - basing work after biblical verse (as in the case of Buller) or 'respectable' aspects of intimacy as in the case of Laliberté's *Heart and Soul* (c.1926) or FitzGerald's *Embrace* (1926).

standard artistic uses of the female form in landscape. Like Heward, Holgate was inspired by his studies in France that paralleled his beginnings as a woodcarver and his prints reflected the avant-garde styles and bodily liberalism that marked French art in these years. Heward, Holgate and a number of their contemporaries who studied in France were part of the colonial project in this sense – importing stylings and themes and retrofitting them to the Canadian art scene, challenging its boundaries, and in particular, its uses of the nude and the landscape.³³⁹

Where artists had to contend with the traditions of artistic representation film-makers had far less heritage to confine or judge it beyond theatre roots. The gauge for tolerance was not set to an elite academy and instead set to the tolerances of a mass and multi-classed viewing public. Although most feature films produced in 1920s Canada have been destroyed, of the twenty-five known films produced at least ten remain from which we can piece together a vision of moving images in their earliest years. Production companies sprang up throughout the country in the silent film era but few succeeded in seeing a film through to production. The climate for

³³⁹ It should be noted that there also existed a number of indoor nudes produced in these years that also challenged ideals of feminine propriety. Among them are: R.S. Hewton, *Slumber*, 1935. Oil on Canvas. McMichael Canadian Art Collection; R.S. Hewton, *Sleeping Woman*, c1929. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada; Edwin Holgate, *Interior*, 1933. Oil on Canvas. Art Gallery of Ontario; Edwin Holgate, *Nude*, 1930. Oil on Canvas. Private Collection; Edwin Holgate, *Nude*, c1922. Oil on Canvas. McMichael Canadian Art Collection; John Lyman, *Oriental*, c1924. Oil on Canvas. National Gallery of Canada; J. Frederic McCulloch, *Seated Nude*, 1930. Oil on Canvas, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

feature films was enthusiastic, but the medium was saturated with the hundreds of films from across the border and in Quebec, stifled by the anti-cinema mentality of Catholic leaders such as Lionel Groulx who preached that movies were a tool for popular corruption.³⁴⁰ In addition, unlike artists, filmmakers were not able to convince the Canadian government that movies could aid nationalism, even though the landscape remained a defining feature of Canadian films throughout the decade.³⁴¹ Thus, filmmaking in Canada was an expensive and risky business.

What films had going for them was not only their popularity as a medium, but the repeatable nature of the medium. Movie reels were made up of thousands of frames - mass produced images of women that now had movement and could be shown over and over. Not only did protagonists have an image, but a swagger and energy, taking up space like never before. Where still images offered a moment in time, films offered days in the lives of protagonists, multiple scenarios in which characters played out their imaginary lives and where filmmakers could show a moment of impropriety in the life of an otherwise respectable character. Films allowed time to explore multiple and sometimes conflicting aspects of the same body. This complicated the female body in new ways and tested the limits of the use of

³⁴⁰ George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 45.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

the female form as metaphor. Moving pictures had a much greater effect of reality than paintings which likely motivated critiques of films' social and moral influence.

The landscape played a large role in Canadian films, serving as the backdrop to cinema melodrama in almost all features – northern backwoods, expansive prairies, and icy eastern shores. Filmmakers took full advantage of the natural movie sets the country had to offer. As a result, women in the landscape were a common vision in these films, mirroring the popularity of the woman in landscape motif. Just as in high art, the context in which protagonists were placed codified their bodily image and character. In a controversial scene that has been labeled Canada's first "skin-flick", woods-dweller and nature-lover 'Dolores' strips down to nothing and dives in at a local waterfall to bathe where the viewer catches a glimpse of her naked back and a side profile of her breast.³⁴² Actress Nell Shipman played the scene light and sweet, at times bordering on flirtatious. Peter Morris writes "it had been intended that Nell play the scene in a discreet pink leotard. But the leotard wrinkled visibly when wet, so Nell determined to play the scene nude."³⁴³ These reports likely only aided ticket sales, for although sex was a topic to be dealt with discreetly, it was no less true in the 1920s that sex sells.

³⁴² National Film Board of Canada. *Dreamland: A History of Early Canadian Movies, 1895-1939* (1974; Thornhill, Ontario). VHS.

³⁴³ Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*, 106.

Shipman was not only the film's heroine but also wrote the screenplay for the film, based on a James Curwood story featured in *Good Housekeeping Magazine* entitled, *Wapi the Walrus*³⁴⁴. Taking some creative license with the story, she downplayed the role of the dog hero and beefed up the role of the heroine. With her then-husband as producer, Nell Shipman had a great deal of latitude in the writing and making of *Back to God's Country* (1919) including the portrayal of Dolores' character. One reason the nude scene may have escaped censorship was because of the chaste, virtuous and lovable character Dolores was portrayed as. She dressed and behaved modestly, loved and lived in balance with the animals of the woods, and took care of her dear father. Her connection to nature was profound, even mythical, and with that, Shipman had set the stage for an innocent reading of the nude bathing scene.

This film continued to draw on the conventional dynamic of the male viewer and female object, with a scopophilic villain, named Rydal, lurking in the bushes. It is here that he sees Dolores for the first time and becomes intent on 'having' her. "I want to see more of the girl!" he declares to his sidekick. Before Dolores undresses to dive into the water she is spooked by a sense that someone is in the brush watching her. She dramatically looks right, then behind her, and using the landscape as protection she quickly dives into the

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 104.

pool (of which we see only a splash) and she hides behind a waterfall. Rydal approaches the pool in search of the nude bather but is scared away by one of Dolores' devoted woodland friends, a brown bear. The bear's protection of Dolores plays not only on her connection to nature as a woman, but also on the protection of the body and sexual virtue as the natural order of things. When she is certain that she is alone again she delights movie viewers with a titillating series of playful dance-like swoops, splashes, and shallow wades into the rushing waters.

Nell Shipman portrays a happy and innocent nude bather, but is well aware of her multiple audience-voyeurs, inviting them into the fantasy with her coy smiles and flirtatious motions. She also demonstrated awareness of the limits of public tolerance for nudity. The camera never gives frontal or rear view of her nude body. A few suggestive hints leave the rest to the imagination. This is telling of a key difference in how moving images were viewed differently than high art, where the female body could be fully nude and yet never naked. As Berger argues, viewing art came with a whole set of pretenses regarding its value and intent. Films, however, were far more entangled in modernism and modernization (indeed, were a product of it), which carried with it the mass-produced, here-today-gone-tomorrow qualities of the modern world which left many suspicious. Chaste-at-heart Dolores toys with the boundaries of the moving nude in landscape but does

not transgress by attempting to display what canvases had displayed for centuries. Her familiarity with the wilderness and the animals' embrace of her presence arguably are what allow for this silver screen first. In fact, of the surviving 1920s Canadian features, this is the only film that put the nude in landscape in motion.



Figure 65: Still scene capture from: Canadian Photoplays Ltd. Calgary, "bathing at waterfall scene," *Back to God's Country* (1919; Alberta: Digitally Remastered Version, Milestone Film and Video, NY, New York: 2000).


THE MOVING PICTURE WORLD 421

**DON'T BOOK
"BACK
TO GOD'S
COUNTRY"**

Unless

You want to prove that
the Nude is NOT Rude


Is the Nude
Rude?



September Morn

As cooling and refreshing
as an Arctic Breeze

**The Return-Date
Picture of 1920**



December
Morn

A First National
Attraction

Figure 66: "Back to God's Country promotional poster", *The Moving Picture World* (December 1920): 421.

Despite the nude scene (or perhaps because of it) the film was released in September 1919 to great acclaim. *Back to God's Country* was seen across North America, in Britain, Japan, Europe, and Australia and grossed over a half million dollars in year one.³⁴⁵ When the film was re-released in 1920 the advertisement banked on the nude scene to draw in movie viewers. "Don't book 'Back to God's Country' unless you want to prove that the nude is not rude."³⁴⁶ This advertisement featured two drawings representing scenes from the film – both from the seconds-long nude scene. In one drawing a girl is shown gingerly dancing on a rock in the nude, coyly looking back over her shoulder at the viewer. With the subject's right breast profiled and her buttocks outlined, the drawing shows more than the film itself does. "Is the Nude Rude?," the caption reads. And in this version, 'Dolores' has cut off her long hair in favour of the 'bob', looking more like a flapper than the long-haired and virtuous Dolores we meet in the film. The politics of film production and marketing were complicated in Canada. The United States dominated the movie-making industry and had taken control of Canadian theatres. Small studios, even tinier budgets, and film-by-film private investing could not sustain a Canadian filmmaking industry, let alone compete with an emerging Hollywood. This shameless self-promotion was

³⁴⁵ Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*, 106-7.

³⁴⁶ "Back to God's Country promotional poster," *The Moving Picture World* (December 1920): 421.

likely seen as a necessary tactic to get attention. Producer Ernest Shipman attempted to garner support for Canadian filmmaking, arguing that the national spirit evident in literature should be transposed onto the screen, but nothing came of his appeal to nationalism.³⁴⁷

Certainly, the line between 'nudity' and the 'nude' marked public tolerances for artistic expression and impropriety. Shipman understood this well, using the word 'nude' in the film's publicity, aligning his bathers with those on canvas – as art and not lewd entertainment. The nude was an artistic rendering of the female form, but nudity was a marker of vice. The nude was docile, but often nudity was not, challenging the viewer's assumed position of authority over the nude body. Although these categories were distinct, the line between them wasn't always clear and judgment of which was which was in the eyes of the beholder. Where the public sensed a transgression of the nude into nudity and attempted to censor the work of artists we see evidence of public tolerances, the boundaries of which artists had to respect or toy with in subtle ways, otherwise risking ostracism. Because of its long-standing history as artistic subject, the nude was a site for artists to explore the multiple meanings of the nude and naked female form. Because of the female body's association with nature and the landscape, it was also a place where questions and anxieties of nation could be explored. Eroticism

³⁴⁷ Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema*, 34.

undermined normative perceptions of femininity and female sexuality, which, in turn, undermined ideals of the family unit and its members and ultimately, threatening the nation-building project.

The City and the Dancing Girl

Nudity was not the only way the female form communicated anxieties. Images of dressed women in the city were also a site of concern in magazine editorials and films. Where the wilderness was thought to be a source of virtue, the city represented the ultimate site of corruption. The city was seen as the ultimate site of vice. Cities were thought to threaten the virtue of women, who, according to critics, could not defend themselves against the vices and temptations that permeated modern urban spaces. The flapper, dressed in the latest fashions, her hair cut into a 'bob' and her legs exposed, was the ultimate symbol of the negative influences of the city written on the female form. As Strong-Boag argues, the flapper "was an essentially confrontational figure, poised to contest the conventions of workplace and bedroom."³⁴⁸ The image of the modern girl, like the nude, walked the fine line of representation, because although she was the quintessential symbol of modernity, she could also symbolize the dangers and hazards of the modern city and the perceived weaknesses of young women.

³⁴⁸ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939.*, 7.

Promiscuity was chief among concerns for the welfare of the modern girl. Its direct link to prostitution, criminality and feeble-mindedness marked the intersection between the sexual behavior of the modern girl and the state of the nation more widely.³⁴⁹ The chief concern with these young women was not as much with their own behaviours and attitudes as with how those characteristics translated into motherhood and how their 'modern' values would be transmitted to their children. With motherhood as women's primary fate, their actions in youth threatened the stability and integrity of the institutions of marriage and parenthood. The spread of venereal disease, illuminated as a public health issue during the First World War, heightened awareness of women's bodies as the subject of concern and control and in the 1920s social workers were becoming particularly concerned with working class girls who "were callously embracing a new consumerism and lax morality in the form of sex-for-sale."³⁵⁰ Although some editorials did defend flappers as having an undeserved poor reputation, most often they lamented the dangers and deceptions of life in the fast lane using the image of flappers to signal folly, fear and peril. The flapper became a widely referenced and highly recognizable trope that often signaled trouble. Whether as evil predator or naïve victim, argues Sangster, women were

³⁴⁹ Joan Sangster, *Regulating Girls and Women : Sexuality, Family, and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960*, The Canadian Social History Series (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 4.

³⁵⁰ Sangster, *Regulating Girls and Women*, 89.

perceived as a 'problem' within the legal system, and this was no less true in magazine editorials.³⁵¹

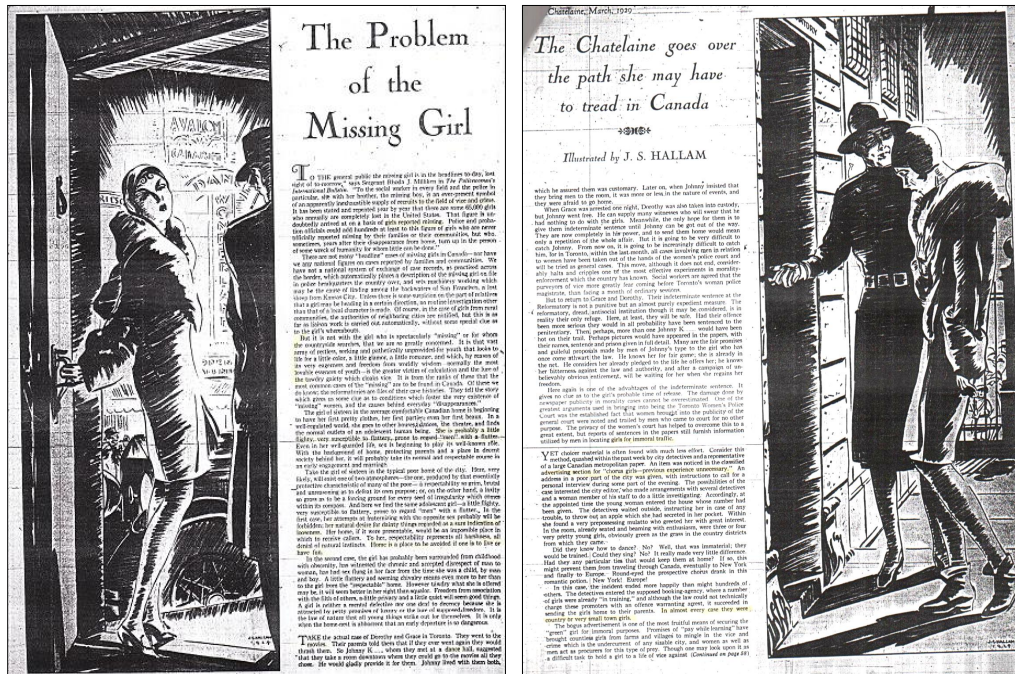


Figure 67: "The problem of the missing girl", *Chatelaine* (March 1929): 8-9, 59.

In one editorial article the flapper image is used to characterize the 'missing girl' of urban spaces and the vices that await her in the city:

But it is not with the girl who is spectacularly 'missing'...that we are so greatly concerned. It is the vast army of restless, seeking and pathetically unprovided-for youth that looks to life for a little color, a little glamour, a little romance, and which, by

351 Ibid., 98.

reason of its very eagerness and freedom from worldly wisdom – normally the most lovable essence of youth – is the greater victim of calculation and the lure of the tawdry gaiety that cloaks vice... She is probably a little flighty, very susceptible to flattery, prone to regard ‘men’ with a flutter...her natural desire for dainty things regarded as a sure indication of looseness.³⁵²

According to the author, these girls are recruited at dance halls, movies, and through advertisements for chorus girls, through which they are lured into prostitution. “In almost every case they were country or very small town girls.” She adds, these girls are often doped, maltreated, and conned into vice. “There is no greater danger to a nation,” she writes, “than the modern tendency to find excuses for badness.” Artist J. S. Hallam drew this ‘problem girl’ as a young flapper, her face made up and dressed in the latest trends, standing at the threshold between a domestic space and the sparkling city. A sign for the ‘Dance Wonderland’ lit up the outdoor background and with her dancing shoes on one can assume that this is where she is headed. Following behind her, a man in a dark trench coat adds to her characterization – she is inviting this man along with her and for the viewer this only adds to her impropriety. She is not drawn in a still pose - she is on the move as so many flappers were drawn - and in a short skirt we can only

³⁵² “The problem of the missing girl”, *Chatelaine* (March 1929): 8-9, 59.

assume she has no intention of sitting still in a chair, but exercising her freedom of movement.

This movement is precisely what concerned critics, for shorter flapper fashions and the bodily freedoms they implied incited considerable anxiety. 1929 fashion expert Marceline D'Alroy wrote, "It has been suggested that the short skirts made many 'little vices' fashionable – drinking in the afternoon, smoking at all times in all places, and making for a general laxity in comportment....It is a psychological fact" she asserted, "that the fashion is a direct reflection of the way we are thinking and acting and living at the moment," which artists such as Hallam understood all too well.³⁵³ In the page on face our reckless young flapper has landed herself incarcerated. Her body is not drawn tall and flippantly confident as in the first illustration, but slumped over and shamed by her supposed transgression. Hallam makes the most subtle change to the flapper's image when he draws her being incarcerated. She is no longer wearing dancing shoes but a pair of short boots. Her body has been stilled by her incarceration and she no longer opens her own door as she is led by the arresting officer. Hallam used visual cues drawn on the body to articulate ideas about what the body could or could not do – its mobility, its freedom, and attitudes held in the body.

³⁵³ Middle. Marceline D'Alroy, "Are Long Skirts Coming Back?" *The Chatelaine* (November 1929): 31.

The dancing girl as an image often used by artists to communicate folly and transgression and allude to unfettered sexuality. Not surprisingly, references to their growing sense of sexual self ran parallel to critiques about young women's dwindling moral conviction.³⁵⁴ Alone in the city more than ever before and armed with an understanding of their bodies as currency (certainly this was key among commercial messages), the young modern was not only getting noticed but developing a tawdry reputation and becoming vilified as a temptress. Portrayal of this dangerous character was epitomized by the dancing girl. Although images of dancing girls appeared harmless through a contemporary lens, in the 1920s they represented recklessness and vice. 1920s fashions only exacerbated the threat of the image. In her short skirt, sleeveless dress and freed of her long hair and big hat the dancing girl explored and occupied the space around her with ease and in alarming new ways. Dance halls, often referred to as 'dens of vice', were highly suspect, not only because they provided wild heterosocial spaces where girls might be accosted or harassed by male patrons, but because girls themselves were thought to be manipulating these spaces and the weakness of male patrons and using their own bodies for their own personal gains.

³⁵⁴ Byron Stauffer, "Are Women to Blame? For the loss of the old-time standards of morals" *Everywoman's World* (April 1922): 8.



Figure 68: E. Ward Smith, "The Dance Halls of Dawson" *MacLean's Magazine* (January 1919): 14.

In an article entitled "The Dance Halls of Dawson" the city clerk unveils the underbelly of the Klondike and its most pernicious patrons – the dance hall girls. These women, he reports, come to dance with men, get them drunk and take their money, even using "knockout drops" in the "roughest places" to drug men and forge their tabs.³⁵⁵ Dominated by men, places like Dawson City were seen as prime hunting ground for 'loose women' willing to use their bodies to get what they wanted. These dancing flappers were the party girls

³⁵⁵ E. Ward Smith, "The Dance Halls of Dawson" *MacLean's Magazine* (January 1919): 14.

of the 1920s. Artists often drew them with their arms flailing, cheek-to-cheek with their dance partners, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. These 'menaces to society' were serious concerns for social critics who argued for the dangers of "undesirable instincts" aroused by jazz music and the moral impact of cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption.³⁵⁶ One short story, "Try and Reform the Women" went so far as to argue that women were simply copying the wild behaviours of single men (having no originality of their own) in the hopes that she might attract a man who could tame her.³⁵⁷ But in another short story a divorce lawyer argues that even marriage assured nothing for reckless flappers were the reason for a growing divorce rate.³⁵⁸

But center stage among concerns was sexuality. Critics were on red alert about the larger consequences of the sexual indiscretions of flappers, their "vicious habits and promiscuous lovemaking."³⁵⁹ The link between dancing girls and sexual promiscuity was a short one. "One must hold up

³⁵⁶ A.N. Plumtree "What shall we do with our flapper?" *MacLean's Magazine* (June 1, 1922): 64; Gertrude E.S. Pringle "Is the flapper a menace?" *MacLean's Magazine* (June 15, 1922): 19; Ray Thacker "Divorcing the Boy from the Cigarette" *Everywoman's World* (October 1914); John R. McMahon "Jazz corrupts U.S. Farmers" *MacLean's Magazine* (April 15 1922): 34; Anne Shaw Faulkner "Where does Jazz lead?" *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1921): 27; Ernest W. Mandeville "Are non-boozers glooms?" *MacLean's Magazine* (August 15, 1925): 37.

³⁵⁷ Raymond Knister, "Try and Reform the Women" *Chatelaine Magazine* (August 1928): 10.

³⁵⁸ Leslie Gordon Barnard, "Firelight Folly" *Everywoman's World* (September 1922): 3.

³⁵⁹ Gertrude E.S. Pringle "Is the flapper a menace?" *MacLean's Magazine* (June 15, 1922): 19.

one's hands in holy horror" wrote one author, "at the spectacle of youngsters in the 'teens making what is commonly termed 'whoopee'... But when one witnesses the same spectacle among the supposedly mature, then one may well ask what the world is coming to."³⁶⁰ The task of creating drawings to complement this editorial hit the desk of artist J.S. Hallam, who had drawn the images of the incarcerated flapper for *Chatelaine* the month before. Hallam chose a boisterous dance party to characterize 'whoopee' and could stop there, for the secondary insinuation of 'whoopee' as sex could easily be extrapolated from images of dancing girls. Artists heightened the social anxiety that dancing flappers produced by drawing them in public and in groups, which the city increasingly allowed for, bringing bodily expression and sexuality into public view. Hallam took this one step further in his short story sketch by giving the viewer the perspective of being part of the party, seated with the young couple facing the viewer in the dance scene. As a painter, Hallam pulled from the high art tradition of establishing the subject-voyeur relationship in art that portrayed women and he carries over the technique into his ink sketch of dancing youth with a blatancy only found in commercial art.

³⁶⁰ An In-Between, "Ready-made youngsters" *Chatelaine* (April 1929): 5.



Figure 69: An In-Between (pseudonym), "Ready-made youngsters" *Chatelaine* (April 1929): 5.

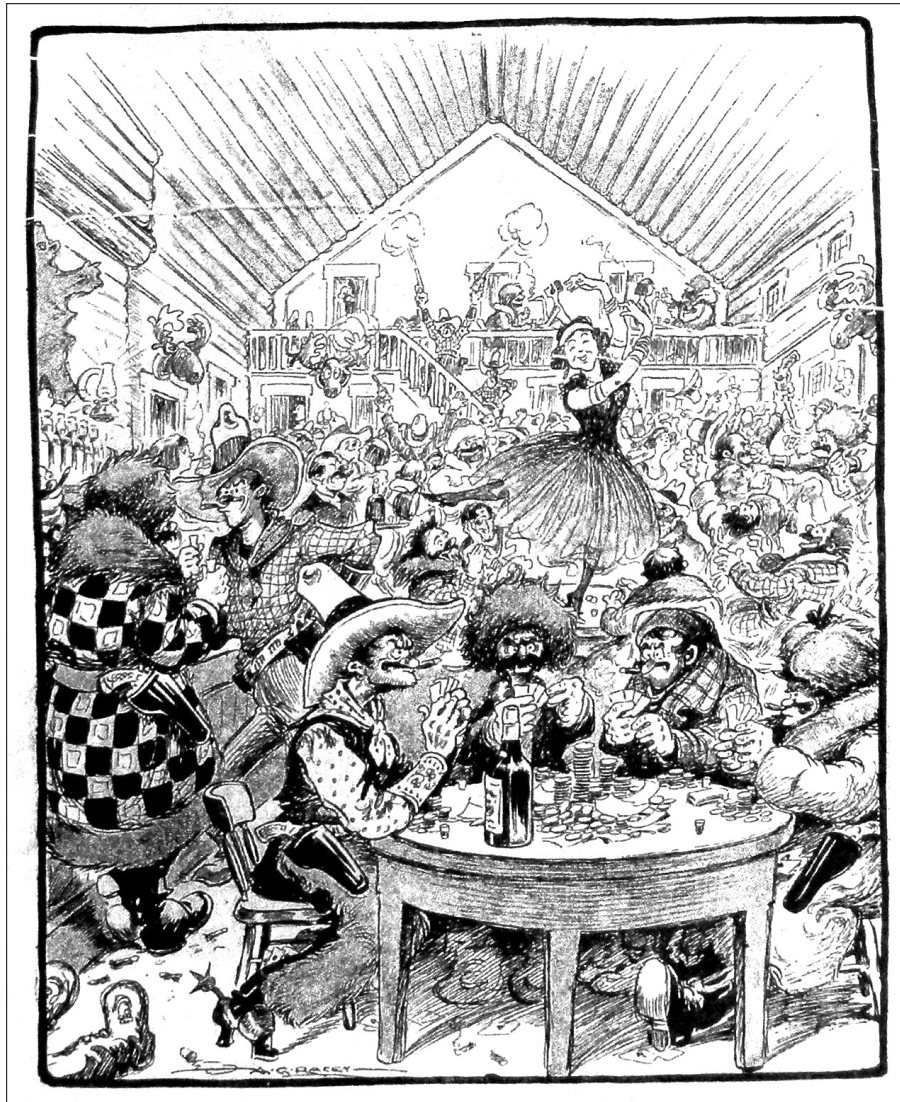


Figure 70: A.G. Racey (Illustrator), "Life in Canada as the Americans would have it" in Norman Reilly Raine, "A Cartoonist looks at Life" *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1925): 18.

It seemed the dancing flapper was not confined to fancy urban scenes but could also be found in artistic work portraying frontier communities, carrying the familiar metaphor for vice. Artist A.G. Racey,

whose cartoons were heralded as “indicat[ing] the trend of public thought³⁶¹” used the dancing flapper as centerpiece to a male dominated Canadian saloon. Dancing on a table with one leg in the air and arms flailing, she embodies the lawlessness and uncultivated nature of saloon culture and the frontier more widely. She doesn’t seem to mind the men looking up her skirt and doesn’t seem bothered by the random gunfire exploding throughout the saloon. In fact, it seems that nothing of the saloon circus fazes her. Although she is dancing alone she is not the only women in the room – two more flappers are hanging out on the balcony, smoking cigarettes and drinking booze with male patrons outside two doors leading to private business quarters of prostitutes. In fact, considering the reputation of flappers, she herself would likely be considered one of the vices in the room.

Attesting to Racey’s artistic skill, his work had many layers. This cartoon was a spoof of how Americans view life in Canada. He separated the viewer from the scene with a table and gambling scene of which the viewer is not a part, furthering the unreality of the parody image. Creating a joke of what Americans think of Canada becomes a statement about what Canada is not and deflects the humour toward American perceptions rather than frontier life in Canada. Nonetheless, the flapper image is a useful, if laughable, figure

³⁶¹ A.G. Racey (Illustrator), “Life in Canada as the Americans would have it” in Norman Reilly Raine, “A Cartoonist looks at Life” *MacLean’s Magazine* (October 1, 1925): 18.

in communicating unruliness. The fact that the flapper appears so regularly in cartoons and that her persona is so uniformly constructed is a testament to her familiarity. She would not be functional as a reappearing cartoon character if there were not a commonly held stereotype of her embodiment.

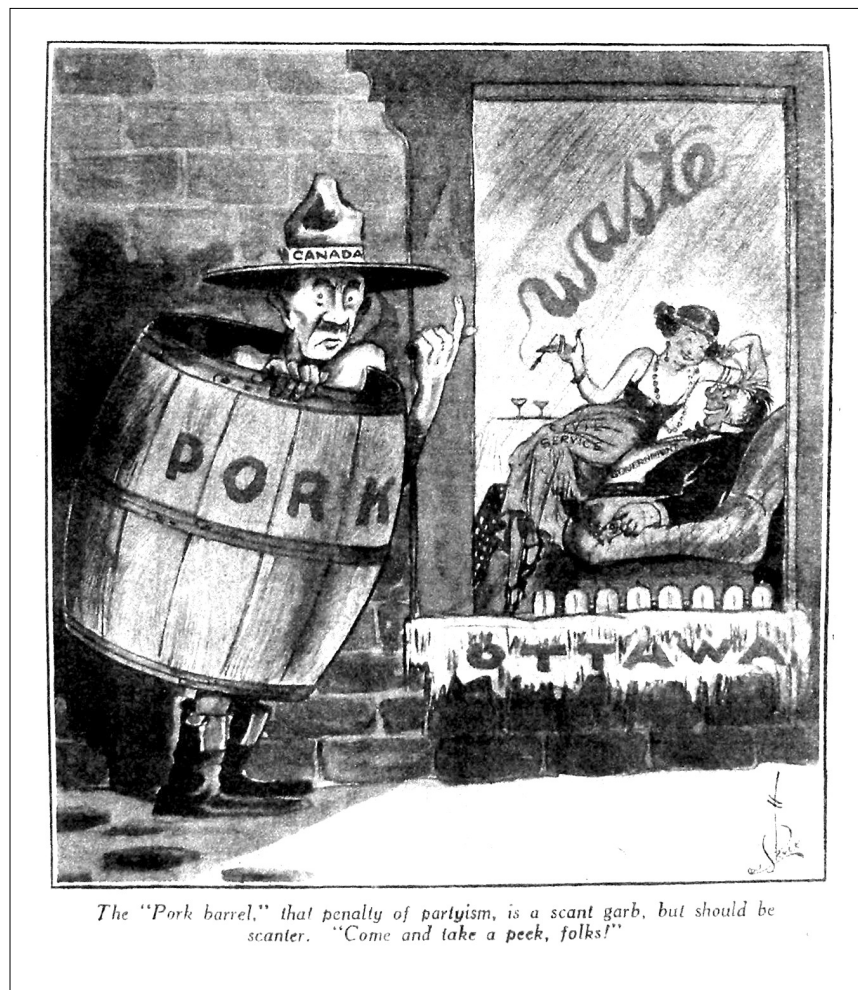


Figure 71: G. O'Leary (Illustrator), "Ottawa's Orgy of Extravagance" *MacLean's* (15 January 1924): 9.

The satirized flapper was no less potent when she stopped dancing. Her simple presence spoke volumes. As a symbol of dysfunction she was often used by cartoonists to critique politicians or the state of the nation. Perceived as a product of mass consumption and social degradation, the flapper embodied frivolousness, greed, and waste. An article expressing public frustration with irresponsible government spending uses the visual language of sex to demonstrate widespread disgust with the players involved. The article is titled "Ottawa's *Orgy of Extravagance*" and charged with the task of visually encapsulating the author's views, artist Lou Skuce employed the flapper as protagonist. Peeking in through a window to "Ottawa" we witness a sordid affair taking place between a portly "government" and a wasteful flapper labeled "civil service." She dresses in the latest fads, smokes, drinks and flirts, burning her energy on self-indulgence instead of public service. She is the ultimate symbol of corruption, her body bearing all the signals of modern anxiety that characterize the critiques of the young modern.



Figure 72: Jimmy Frise (Illustrator) in Eric Clement Scott, "Is Canada Going U.S.?", MacLean's Magazine (March 1, 1930): 8.

In one unusual case, the flapper image gets taken up as allegory for nation. Normally, artists turned to classical allegories to communicate nation

in magazine pages but in the context of the debate on American cultural influence on Canada, the classical image was not functional and thus commercial artist Jimmy Frise used the iconography of youthful vulnerability and conspicuous consumption embodied in the flapper. In a 1930 *MacLean's* article, "Is Canada going U.S.?", "Miss Canada" is being courted by a swarthy "Uncle Sam."³⁶² The author's concern that "Canada is merely following the popular lead [of American culture and values] and is joining the chorus" is communicated flawlessly by Frise's flirty representation of Canada.³⁶³ This modernized allegory borrowed from the iconography of American popular culture, from which Canada in these years was struggling to identify herself apart. Although strapping 'Jack Canuck' is also present in the cartoon (on the facing page), he seems powerless against the American charm of 'Uncle Sam' who is luring young and frivolous 'Miss Canada.' This purposeful choice is telling of how Frise and his contemporaries understood classical allegory and its limitations. Classical allegory, as stoic and unmovable would not succumb to Uncle Sam's temptations and would be unbelievable in this role. Young women were often used as symbols for the modern they were also framed as particularly vulnerable in their shallowness and naiveté. Her penchant for consumer trifles and the latest trends is

³⁶² Jimmy Frise (Illustrator) in Eric Clement Scott, "Is Canada Going U.S.?", *MacLean's Magazine* (March 1, 1930): 8.

³⁶³ Jimmy Frise (Illustrator) in Eric Clement Scott, "Is Canada Going U.S.?", *MacLean's Magazine* (March 1, 1930): 8.

evidenced in her body and dress, and indeed conspicuous consumption of American trends and attitudes were seen as the ultimate threat to Canadian cultural preservation. A portly and concerned 'Mother England' observes, but 'Miss Canada' has a mind of her own. The classical allegory had limitations in lending meaning to discourses on nation when those discourses focused on anxiety and concern.

In advertisements, use of the flapper image was not to signal danger or anxiety but to signal the glamour and freedom of the flapper lifestyle. In ads flappers sold goods – their embodiment of freedom, fun and self-actualization, however fabricated, made them a success story, the subject of admiration, and thus very good sales girls. Context mattered a great deal where the flapper image was concerned and commercial artists took up images of flappers differently in editorials as they did in ads. Where in editorials a dancing flapper may have represented the debate over female promiscuity and related fears, the same visual representation in ads would have represented the star of the show – the fashionable and popular glamour girl who always gets her man. In order to sell something, an image had to be admired, but for the purposes of editorial critiques, imagery had to be lamentable. The double life of the flapper image uncovered that it was not fixed in its meaning and that images communicated based not only on what they represented but on the ways artists built up the contexts that

surrounded images. One author arguing for the disconcerting impact of the “advertising artist” wrote,

Until we can say we are bringing to bear as great an influence within family life as outside propaganda is producing every day, we cannot claim to be waging anything but a half-hearted battle...for if there's anything a younger generation feels it duty bound to do, it is live up to the fetish that is built around it.³⁶⁴

The flapper image meant different things in different contexts and also meant different things to different generations of viewers and the tone set by the work divulged for whom it was intended. The celebratory and encouraging images of flappers that filled advertisements were targeted at youth. Images that communicated overindulgence and folly were aimed at older viewers for whom the flapper threatened everything they had contributed to building.

Sex and the Silver Screen

In silent films, film-makers explored relaxing ideas about sexuality by playing out scenarios in which female characters' success or downfall was rooted in her sexual behavior. As we saw with Dolores in *Back to God's Country* (1919), flirtatiousness had its limits, for any good movie heroine

³⁶⁴ An In-Between, “Ready-Made Youngsters” *Chatelaine* (April 1929): 3.

remained chaste at heart. It wasn't uncommon for film heroines to have to fight for that virtue, however, for it seemed among the most sought after loot for movie villains. Indeed it seemed almost fashionable to fight off the advances of would-be suitors, for as one male movie star insisted, "the treat-em-rough guy seems to have increased instead of declined with the advancement of women."³⁶⁵ For some, women's increased emancipation meant that men had to work harder to maintain traditional gender relations between the sexes. Heartthrob silent film actor Tom Meighen, featured in *Everywoman's World* in 1920, was labeled "the movies' most successful caveman." He argued, "the so-called freedom of woman is the Frankenstein of the twentieth century...The caveman who bosses her and shows her – and everybody else – that what he says goes is the one prize excuse for returning to the dear departed days of her slavery. The most active fear of women who say 'NO'," he said, "is that you will take her at her word." Although this man sounds as though he was in character when giving this interview (he was *actually* quoted as saying that he based his philosophy on the old adage, 'A woman, a dog and hickory tree; the harder you beat them the better they be') he encapsulated the dynamic of the rough male in film who attempted to take what women did not give willingly.

³⁶⁵ Tom Meighen, "Confessions of a Caveman" *Everywoman's World* (November 1920): 13.

Films categorized female characters into two key tropes – the (often 'loose') flapper protagonist and the chaste heroine. The flapper protagonist was often either trouble herself, or a magnet for danger. Viewers were likely not terribly shocked when Betty Baker, a flirtatious party-girl thrill-chaser in *His Destiny* (1928) gets abducted by a man who realizes she has also been flirting with a number of other men at the Calgary Stampede, for the film characterizes her as “more trouble to her father than a penitentiary full of prisoners.”³⁶⁶ She won't return his affection so he kidnaps her on horseback and when a savior cowboy appears to be gaining on them the abductor tries to kill her and himself by jumping off a cliff. Betty is saved by the cowboy's fancy lasso skills and, visibly impressed by his show of skill, she flirtatiously retreats with him behind a tree and the film ends.

Filmmakers had no qualms with portraying female protagonists as blatantly using their bodies and feminine charms to get what they wanted. The Port Arthur Amateur Film Society produced three films in the twenties, two of which featured wily flappers. In *A Race for Ties* (1929) Marion, a young flapper who has returned home from school for the winter break, sets out in high heels and flapper togs to help her Aunt Sarah (the heroine of the film) save a business deal gone wrong. She decides to give up trekking through the snow when it gets too tough and seeing the bad-guy's car approaching

³⁶⁶ British Canadian Pictures Ltd. *His Destiny* (1928; Calgary, Alberta). National Archives of Canada, Thunderbird Films Fonds: ISN 135760. VHS.

on the road she lies down in the snow playing 'damsel-in-distress' to get his attention and successfully diverts him from undermining the family business. By the end of the movie she even manages to land herself a stand up fiancé.

In *Sleep Inn Beauty* (1929) Daisy is a waitress at an inn where she has developed an affectionate relationship with the inn-keeper's moocher son, Clarence.³⁶⁷ When Daisy enters the inn's bathing suit beauty contest for the prize money, Clarence decides to be the judge and they scheme to win the contest. When Clarence announces Daisy the winner and produces the prize money, Daisy reaches over and snatches it, claiming "That's mine!" since she has earned it, and grabbing him by the back of the neck she adds, "And you're mine!" She roughly but comically leads him into the woods by the back of the neck, but not before a Justice of the Peace performs a shot-gun ceremony in the forest. These fast and frivolous girls follow the popular prescriptions of loose and conniving flappers, but not all female protagonists were so flippant about their virtue or sexuality.

Some female protagonists resolved to protect it at all cost. In *Back to God's Country* the villain Rydal spends the entire film scheming to possess Dolores but he underestimates her cleverness and determination in maintaining her virtue and saving herself and her wounded husband. Chastity

³⁶⁷ Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society. *Sleep Inn Beauty* (1929; Port Arthur, Ontario: Produced by Shebandowan Films, 2004). The Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society Collection.

is central to the integrity of Dolores' role as a heroine. Although the film projects Dolores' virtue as the golden egg to be guarded, similar respect is not paid to the virtue of Inuit women who appear very briefly in a boat scene. As the large boat Dolores and her husband have been abducted on docks on the icy North-East coast, a number of young Inuit women are invited on board as the crew throw a rowdy party. When members of the crew accost a couple of young (and seemingly very out of place) Inuit women, the musical accompaniment does not shift in the typical way to denote danger. A sexual assault of the women continues on its course as though the assault is insignificant. When Rydal attempts to rape Dolores the score takes a dramatic turn, becoming vigorous and dark, expressing the turmoil, struggle and danger. This is telling of the ideas help by Shipman film crew toward the non-white female body and raced ideas of virtue. Dolores' body, as a symbol of white nationhood (and on the frontier, white colonialism and civilization) was being projected as far more valuable.

In *Cameron of the Royal Mounted* (1921), sweet and lovable Mandy is nursing a baby goat when she is sexually assaulted by a farm hand who declares, "I've made up my mind to collect that kiss you owe me."³⁶⁸ He grabs her forcefully and with one hand on her breast he tries to kiss her. She fights back and successfully frees herself from his grip. Neither Dolores nor

³⁶⁸Winnipeg Productions Ltd. *Cameron of the Royal Mounted* (1921; Winnipeg, Manitoba). National Archives of Canada, British Film Institute Fonds: ISN 20712. VHS.

Mandy could be characterized as flappers. They dress modestly in long skirts, laced boots, full blouses, aprons and they've maintained their long curly hair. (For a bout of time away from home in the city, however, Dolores does sport flapper fashions, but she is quite unhappy and cannot wait to return to her wilderness home and way of life). Both these women tote guns to protect their homes and loved ones. They both have special relationships with the animals, and above all, they are modest and chaste – central to the construction of the 1920s Canadian heroine.

Undermining Strong and Successful Women

Strong and successful women appeared often in visual culture. Sometimes these images represented fictional women but it wasn't uncommon to see images of real women – frontier women, businesswomen, politicians, teachers, nurses, and athletes – particularly in magazine pages. Increasingly, viewers were exposed to the work of photographers which, although seemingly more real, incorporated artistic conventions of framing, placement and association to manipulate readings of the image. Images of strong and successful women balanced the line between celebrated womanhood and dangerous woman. By virtue of their placement outside the domestic sphere these representations were modern projections of woman, but artists, photographers and editors carefully mediated the limits of

these projections, making choices that contained or neutralized the female image and its disruptive potential for action and leadership.

As the north and the west became increasingly accessible women ventured into the frontier with greater ease. Principal of Havergale College, Elen Knox, encouraged women to head west: "... you will be taking your place among the world's adventurers and explorers, and you will be opening out a trail which thousands of girls will tread after you."³⁶⁹ Of course, Knox was not suggesting that women go it alone: "...while men can and do farm single handed, no man does it from choice, and no woman ought ever to attempt it."³⁷⁰ As Sarah Carter argues for the manipulation of cultural imagery in Manitoba, "ideas about the vulnerability of white women (and the role of white men as their heroic protectors) were drawn not only from British colonial culture but also from the American symbol of white female victimization, the 'Indian captive'."³⁷¹ Fear over the loss of women's virtue was undeniably underpinned by racist beliefs but it also reflected a deep-rooted understanding of the female body as a symbolic icon of nationhood – in the capture and domination of the body lays the ultimate undermining of the integrity of nation. In her exploration of constructions of place, Gaile McGregor examines the Canadian sense of being-in-the-world and proposes

³⁶⁹ Knox, *The Girl of the New Day*, 70.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 204.

³⁷¹ Carter, *Capturing Women*, 10.

that "the most critical Other for people living in a frontier is nature."³⁷² With the wilderness as the Other in these images of frontier women the female form embodied the identity of self, or in other words, the nation. These female figures functioned allegorically as nation, extending into the wilderness and marking white Canada's stronghold on the west.

ARE WILDERNESS WOMEN HAPPY?

Yes!

by
**JACK
PATERSON**

OUR new northern development has a noticeable feature in the number of women who are living on the edge of things—in comfort. This is a fact that for some reason has been rather successfully obscured. A young engineer, leaving to reside in a mining country, hears friends gasp when his wife who has never been out of the city, decides to tag along. The friends at once take charge. They load her up with outing togs, lead her down to a shooting gallery for target practice, impress her life insurance, phone the press photographers, and then implore the husband to make her stay in the city.

They hold teas for the staunch little pioneer. They rally round her with many an "Oh, my dear!" as though she were hopping off on a solo flight to Greenland. Many of the candidates themselves have strange ideas of the North. I have known—I mean heard—of modern girls who, when leaving for the wilds, went so far as to purchase woollen underwear. Incredible, you say. True; but it demonstrates to what length they will go—the girls.

To the city girl a sojourn in the bush looms up as a thrilling life fraught with unceasing danger and hardship. The young woman going there is regarded as having reached the peak of sacrifice and martyrdom. Her friends pity her—for a while. Then, when her letters become more brief and she fails to send all the white-hot epistles promised, they pity her still more and forget her. She's dead. Buried in the bush with a heartless husband.

When a year later she returns for a visit, garbed in present-day brevities instead of



The girl of the party lugged big loads to ease time on the portages.

No!

by
**RUTH
PATERSON**

WHAT Jack Paterson says may all be true, but there's more to it than just that. Men see things but oftentimes they forget. If a man meets an attractive woman he remembers her. One who is hard on the eyes he forgets. Likewise he remembers incidents regarding women that are bright and have a kick. The ordinary, drab, everyday occurrences are forgotten.

It is true men go around like tramps in the bush, very often because they can't be bothered changing. They turn up at dances in breeks and boots. A woman must appear as she does in the city. If not—well, you can guess who would be first to complain. A pioneer woman must never look like a pioneer.

The fact of frontier women being treated with more than average consideration is well known. No matter who or what a man may be he shows proper respect for a respectable woman. The other kind of woman, while not common, may be readily picked out by arm bruises or frequent black eyes. The bush bootleggers have a song parody which might very appropriately be sung once or twice a month—"Her Blue Eyes Are Black Eyes Now!"

"In the north a woman is treated as a queen." Yes, but only so long as she conducts herself as one. Things that are common among city women would be frowned upon by these he-men-of the wilds. All make-believe is brushed aside. If they like you, they say so. If they don't, they say nothing—if left alone.

Men who return from the north will tell you that all the women are crazy about it. Why is this? Simply because frontier women are like women everywhere. They know

Figure 73: Jack Paterson and Ruth Paterson, "Are Wilderness Women happy?," *Chatelaine* (February, 1930): 6.

³⁷² Gaile McGregor, "A Case Study in the Construction of Place: Boundary Management as Theme and Strategy in Canadian Art and Life," *Invisible Culture* [online], no. 5 (2003): Appendix 1.

Portrayals of pioneering women of the wilderness reflected a complex negotiation of gender ideals, female heroics and perceptions of the frontier. Robust female bodies toyed with normative ideas of the gendered body, but necessarily so in order to imply proficiency within the rugged landscape.³⁷³ Symbols of normative femininity (legs, skin, contours, and cleavage) are fewer, and the body takes on qualities of a robust femininity. A *Chatelaine* article debating the happiness of wilderness women depicts a young woman lugging a rucksack on a portage, in her tall boots, riding pants, and a men's-style button down shirt. Her pumped up quadriceps, her exposed forearms, and her flat chest might have her confused as a man if it were not for her feminine facial features. Artist R.W. Major rendered this 'wilderness woman' as a woman's head on a man's body. This wasn't terribly strange – the fashion pages were filled with images of the female body with a boyish shape. Allusions to gender ambiguity made their way across mediums but appeared differently depending on their use. Male-bodied figures functioned well in high art and in editorials about navigating the frontier, but only the boyish form would do when dealing with fashion or anything related to the flapper.

³⁷³ For example see: Jack Paterson and Ruth Paterson, "Are Wilderness Women happy?," *Chatelaine* (February, 1930): 6; Edith M. Cuppage, "The Modern Diana Hunts," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1923): 58; Dorothy G. Bell, "This Energetic Farmerette Even Cleared Stumped Land", *MacLean's magazine* (January 15, 1923): 46; Edith G. Bayne, "Forestry for Women" *MacLean's Magazine* (January, 1920): 93.

For R.W. Major's wilderness woman, the subtext works to remind readers that she is, "The girl of the party [who] lugged big loads to save time on the portages."³⁷⁴ Major tempers her independence by adding a wilderness companion carrying the canoe, who we see through her trousered legs and if this doesn't assuage anxieties about her solitude, the float plane in the air assures that she is not so far out in the wild that she cannot be reached by modern means.

Articles about real women on the frontier were explicit in their framing of the women they featured. Magazines created spectacle of these women – their uniqueness derived from their transcendence of the female role, but their normalcy reinstated in assertions about their domestic proficiency and viability as a wife. Mrs. J.E. Wark of Sproat Lake "is proving her equality with men" out in remote B.C. In frumpy head to toe clothing, Mrs. Wark poses for the photo bracing a shotgun. The article assures readers, it is true that Mrs. Wark "is devoted to outdoor life and the woods, yet she combines domesticity with her hunting qualities and is both the best cook and shot within miles."³⁷⁵ British Columbian bush ranger Miss. Marianne Keene "shoes her own horse, pitches her own tent, and paddles her own canoe... she

³⁷⁴ Jack Paterson and Ruth Paterson, "Are Wilderness Women happy?," *Chatelaine* (February, 1930): 6.

³⁷⁵ Edith M. Cuppage, "The Modern Diana Hunts," *MacLean's Magazine* (October 1, 1923): 58.

knows her country like a book. The Indians are her friends."³⁷⁶ The photo of her renders her nearly invisible and shapeless, under her layered cape in the B.C. forest. The author insists however, that Miss. Keene "was a dainty little creature, essentially feminine."³⁷⁷ Single farmerette, Miss Ruth Eden claimed, "The absolute freedom is what appealed to me most in living alone." The article boasted she learned the ropes of farming as a "hired man" outside Toronto, smoked cigarettes when she was in the Flying Corps, and had "to wrestle with" the land to clear it of stumps. The photo of Miss Eden, however, softens ones impression of her. A slim young woman, she is dressed in a feminine and fashionable large collar, a tie, and with a flapper-style band in her hair. Photographed as a fashionably modern young woman, (attire likely unreasonable for land-clearing) there appears to be hope yet for this independent farmerette to settle down and wrap her arm around a husband instead of her trusty steed.

³⁷⁶ Edith G. Bayne, "Forestry for Women" *MacLean's Magazine* (January, 1920): 93.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Wark, hunter and trapper, goes alone over the steep places for deer, bear, or panther. Few women would care to

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MRS. J. E. WARK,
of Sproat Lake, Vancouver Island.

Figure 74: Edith M. Cuppage, "The Modern Diana Hunts," MacLean's Magazine (October 1, 1923): 58.



Figure 75: Dorothy G. Bell, "This Energetic Farmerette Even Cleared Stumped Land", *MacLean's magazine* (January 15, 1923): 46.

These negotiations reflect a complex politics of gender relations in visual culture. With outdoor farm labour coded male, images of women settling land subvert "male heroics" – if women do it, too, how do men lay

claim to it as theirs? ³⁷⁸ In the mid-twentieth century genre of the "wilderness wife" examined by Randall Roorda, the main purpose of wilderness wives was "establishing households and communities to supplant the wilderness they confront."³⁷⁹ Their domesticity (real or imagined) helped to manage potential gender transgressions. Roorda observes that in writing produced by pioneer wives conventional domesticity prevailed, along with the idea of women as "bearers of civilized virtue among wild men and even wilder beasts."³⁸⁰ Articles about frontier women in the 1920s emphasized their domestic abilities in order to manage the elements of their character or work that might be considered masculine domain. Unmarried farmerette, Ruth Eden, was even photographed alongside her faithful horse "Bill" in the absence of a husband to reinforce that she is not alone. Mrs. J.E. Wark is photographed with her dog at her side. The two women's presentation also speaks to their age and marital status. Miss Keene is a slim figure dressed fashionably, albeit conservatively, while Mrs. Wark, a plumper, older woman, is not. Transgressions of gender and sexuality were disruptive to construction of a stable colonial project, which was also true of race. Even though, as Kathryn

³⁷⁸ Jo-Anne Fiske, "And the Young Man Did Go North (Unfortunately): Reflections of Issues in Gender and the Academy," in *This Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment*, ed. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, Catriona Sandilands (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 58-59.

³⁷⁹ Randall Roorda, "Wilderness Wives: Domestic Economy and Women's Participation in Nature," *ibid.* (Vancouver), 37.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

McPherson argues, by 1914 the Prairie West was multi-ethnic, this is not evident in visual culture.³⁸¹ The white female body was a key element of stable and celebratory constructions of the Canadian west.

Mastheads that accompanied these articles also made clear what was truly considered 'Women's Work.' Although it seemed that mastheads were innocuous design motifs for magazine sections they were not completely decorative. The *MacLean's* articles about women at the frontier all appeared in the section entitled "Women and Their Work." The masthead to this section did not change month to month in consideration of the feature and persistently aligned the image of mother-and-child with 'women's work.' Despite the cautiously celebratory tone that characterized articles about women's work outside mothering, the masthead continued to remind readers that the ideal of women's role as mothers and their place in the domestic sphere was not flexible.

³⁸¹ Kathryn. McPherson, "Was the "Frontier" Good for Women? Historical Approaches to Women and Agricultural Settlement in the Prairie West, 1870-1925.," *Atlantis* 25, no. 1 (2000): 76.

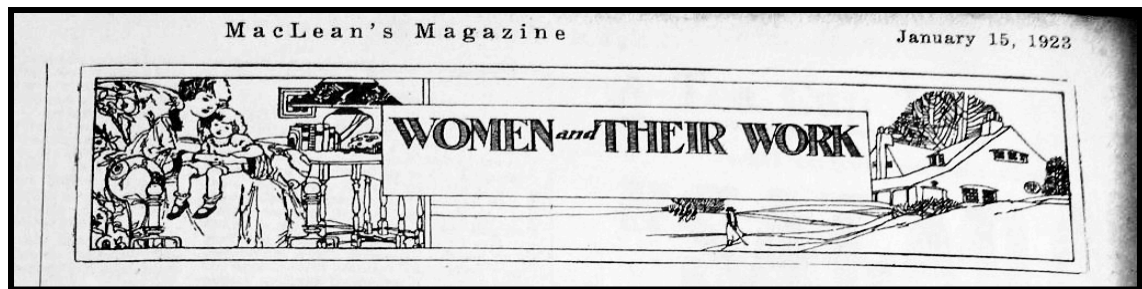


Figure 76: Women and Their Work (Masthead), *MacLean's Magazine* (January 15, 1923) 65.

The medium of film enjoyed the unique luxury of projecting a story through extended time and thus could portray multiple and contradictory constructions of women on the frontier. The most famous of these heroines, 'Dolores' of *Back to God's Country*, had to outsmart and outrun an evil villain and his goons across treacherous icy terrain to save her badly injured husband, and she wasn't afraid to use a gun to do it. 'Dolores' undergoes a transformation in the film, from innocent and nurturing nature-lover to invoking nature's potential for ferocity. The blue filter that accompanies this leg of the film accentuates their icy surroundings and the steely threat of the gun. Her dress personifies her change in mood and purpose. Her natural body is played down and her "natural instincts" played up - her fur collar resembling a lion's mane symbolizes her ferocious resolve to save her husband's life. The character's image oscillates between normative ideals of femininity and the role of strong frontierswoman.



Figure 77: Still scene capture from: Canadian Photoplays Ltd. Calgary, "bathing at waterfall scene," & "Pulls a gun on the villain scene", *Back to God's Country* (1919; Alberta: Digitally Remastered Version, Milestone Film and Video, NY, New York: 2000).

In 1929 an amateur cinema society in Port Arthur, Ontario produced *A Race for Ties*, a low-budget comedy about a family fighting for a contract on railway ties.³⁸² In this film, Aunt Sarah battles the snowy landscape of northern Ontario to beat out a competitor for the much needed contract. She sets out dressed for the elements, outfitted in layers, boots and snowshoes, resembling other frontier women from magazines. When her niece, Marion, realizes her Aunt forgot something important, she races out after her. However, unwilling to shed her party clothes and heels, she is not dressed for the task and cannot catch up. Even when she tries to stop a business competitor of her father's from reaching the deal site and snagging the contract, her 'damsel-in-distress' act fails and only slows the man down. Aunt Sarah, on the other hand, reaches her destination, albeit too late to make the deal.

The attempts of the two women to navigate the landscape is where the story of Canadian womanhood was being explored. A frivolous young 'Marion', so tied to her feminine trifles that she refuses to be practical, fails in her mission to catch up to her Aunt. 'Sarah' is practical and determined and successfully weaves her way through the snowy woods to her destination. The image of Sarah mirrored the images of frontier women appearing in editorial photographs of the 20s. Her body is covered by her clothing and her

³⁸² Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society, *A Race for Ties* (1929; Port Arthur, Ontario: Produced by Shebandowan Films, 2004). The Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society Collection. DVD.

projection on screen is that of a capable and savvy wilderness woman. Marion's image, on the other hand, taps into two families of iconography – the dramatic modern girl images of advertisements and in this scene, the erotically placed high art nudes in landscape. What tied these two families of art together was self-display – an awareness that the body is being observed and a willingness to please the viewer. This quality wasn't present in images of savvy frontier women where the focus was on her abilities.



Figure 78: Still scene captures : "rushing to save the family" & "playing the damsel". Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society, *A Race for Ties* (1929; Port Arthur, Ontario: Produced by Shebandowan Films, 2004). The Port Arthur Amateur Cinema Society Collection. DVD.

The author of the script, Dorothea Mitchell, was a single woman who made her mark as a pioneer in the lumber industry of Northern Ontario, earning her the affectionate name, "Lady Lumberjack."³⁸³ Her experience as

³⁸³ Michel S. Beaulieu, and Ronald N. Harpelle (Ed), *Lady Lumberjack: An Annotated Collection of Dorothea Mitchell's Writings* (Thunder Bay, ON: Lakehead University, 2005).

a successful woman pioneer no doubt influenced her writing of 'Aunt Sarah' for whom she could find no one willing to play the role and had to play it herself. Actress Nell Shipman also had creative influence over her character, 'Dolores' in *God's Country*. She altered the role of the female protagonist from the original story written by the famous James Oliver Curwood, downplaying the role of the dog hero and giving 'Dolores' a more prominent role as heroine.³⁸⁴ These two Canadian writer-actors created images of the frontierswoman as strong and capable and demonstrated growing artistic agency among female artists in constructions of gender.

However, before one identifies these sequences as a celebration of a new modern image of woman in film, one must address the issue of temporality. These constructions of female heroics and mastery of the landscape are always temporary in cinema narratives. Dolores begins the film alongside her father living in a woodland cabin. She is not alone. Indeed, she is almost never alone – even she ventures into the woods she is accompanied by a giant brown bear with whom she is friends. Despite the tragic death of her father, the film ends at the same cabin, but still Dolores is not alone. She is alongside her husband and now holds a new baby, reaffirming her domestic place as mother and wife. For Aunt Sarah of *A Race for Ties* this is no less true. Her flight into the landscape is her only sequence outside the home and by

³⁸⁴ Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939*, 106.

the film's end she has traded in her snowshoes for an apron and returned to her role as surrogate mother to her brother's family.

Where film had the luxury of exploring an entire story line through one character, which could portray her as heroine but return her to the domestic hearth, magazine editorial images had to communicate both women's success and contain her at the same time. From famous activist politicians to accomplished business women magazine pages were a place where prominent Canadian women were both celebrated and simultaneously undermined. It was standard fare for magazines to provide glowing accounts of the struggles and accomplishments of prominent Canadian women. *Everywoman's World* in particular proudly and unapologetically exuded their feminist edge and boasted the about the New Day that women were creating. Yet, articles in *Everywoman's World* and its competitors religiously adopted the cameo as presentation motif of choice for its images of great Canadian women. Popularity of the cameo was perhaps at its height during the Victorian Period as it was a favorite piece of jewelry worn by Queen Victoria. It wasn't uncommon for photographs to be matted in this style and became an institutionalized way of presenting photographic portraits of women. Even *Chatelaine*, which began publication in 1928 and was perhaps the most visually modern of the mass circulation magazines, adopted this motif. Although seemingly benign, perhaps even reverent,

cameo consistently and systematically visually decapitated Canada's most powerful women. Cutting off their arms, their legs, rendering them actionless, and hiding their breasts and hips served to negate their bodies, their reproductive and nurturing capabilities and metaphorically stripped them of physical agency. Cast in Victorian styling, these women were framed as out of fashion, and traditional and bore no resemblance to the vibrant drawings of domesticated women in wringer washer ads who had all their limbs and the space to move them. This artistic use of the past visually associated Canada's leading women with outmoded aesthetics and bygone politics and undermined their influence in a decade obsessed with the modern.

EVERYWOMAN'S WORLD FOR OCTOBER, 1917 13

They Have Left the Beaten Path

And are Blazing New Trails for Other Energetic Women to Follow

By MADGE MacBETH



MISS SMITH

An Invitation to You

CANADA is alive with women who make it a better place in which to live.

That's why it is Canada. Every community has at least one woman of whom other women are intensely proud, a woman who is doing something big for her part of the country. You know a host the one in your section, but do you know about the one in mine? No! Do you know why we do not demonstrate sufficient enthusiasm for the people worth while; we try to throw admiration and encouragement under a base exterior and we try to take every good thing for granted. Let's change all that. Let's be honest— Tell me about the women you know; send me their photographs and 500 words, and I will not only tell you about some other women but will send you a \$2.00 bill as well, if your material is good.

Tell me about women who have succeeded **IN SPITE OF—**; tell me about *Women Who Paid for Their Holidays While Having Fun*; about one who scrimped and saved out of a small allowance that John or Mary might go to College.

Help me to introduce our Worth While People, one to another and we'll have the most "bang-up" Canadian party you ever imagined.

Yours faithfully,
MADGE MACBETH.



MISS FYLES

Figure 79: Madge MacBeth, "The Have Left the Beaten Path," *Everywoman's World* (October 1917), 13.

The cameo was not the exclusive representational mode for successful female professionals, for sometimes the frame was expanded to include the shoulders and waist-line. These photographic reproductions of women were somewhat more modernized as they were rectangular and streamlined. No doubt photographers had a great deal of authority over women's poses. Taking only a handful of shots for any given article the photographer would have gone to great lengths to position the subject. For a group of women who likely required extensive use of their hands in manipulating the tools of their trades, it's astounding how few hands are visible. Whether behind a desk, in a standing pose or seated in a chair, women's hands were made inactive by folding them together, or invisible altogether by tucking them away. A photograph of French nurse, feminist and writer Clemenceau-Jacquesmaire which appeared in *La Canadienne* is not unique in how the subject is posed. Her hands are visually amputated, tucked into the breast flap of her nurse's apron. She is relaxed and leaning against something – although she is dressed she is not doing anything. Her bodily pose is the antithesis of the action that marks her success. Rather, she resembles the popular image of the 'good Canadian girl' often reproduced in commissioned paintings and donning the covers of magazines. In short, the message is a clear extension of anxieties that existed over the flailing arms of dancing flappers – good girls don't move.

Un Article de Mme Clemenceau-Jacquemaire

LES LECTRICES de LA CANADIENNE n'ont pas oublié la visite faite à Montréal par Madame Clemenceau-Jacquemaire, écrivain distinguée et fille de Y. George Clemenceau, le "grand Tigre" de France. Cette visite faite à la conclusion de la guerre, à un moment où les destinées du monde paraissent encore incertaines, où l'on attendait avec un espoir mêlé d'anxiété les décisions du "Conseil des Cinq," cette visite faite au moment où l'héroïque premier ministre de France occupait l'attention du monde entier, a été un événement que l'on a fêté comme il fallait.

Madame Jacquemaire, qui était en mission aux États-Unis — son passage au Canada n'étant ainsi qu'un incident contrôlé par l'officialité — a commencé d'écrire ses impressions d'Amérique. L'excellente revue parisienne *Femina* a publié récemment son premier article

très blessantes de la presse. L'activité féminine qui paraît insatiable s'étend à tous les sujets et à la politique en premier lieu. On sait combien la question du suffrage féminin est brûlante là-bas, alors qu'elle est si endormie chez nous.

En Amérique, une femme prend catégoriquement parti et se dit, d'un ton résolu, démocrate ou républicaine.

Les clubs de dames sont aussi nombreux, aussi importants, aussi riches, aussi sérieusement organisés que ceux des hommes. Celles qui en font partie y vivent davantage qu'à leur propre foyer, y provoquent des réunions où les intérêts nationaux sont examinés, débattus et jugés. C'est un lieu de conférences où sont accueillis de la plus charmante grâce du monde les étrangers de passage. Les membres du club y prennent la parole publiquement en toute occasion et c'est un talent presque



Mme Clemenceau-Jacquemaire, en infirmière.

Figure 80: "Un Article De Mme Clemenceau-Jacquemaire," *La Canadienne* (September 1920): 4.

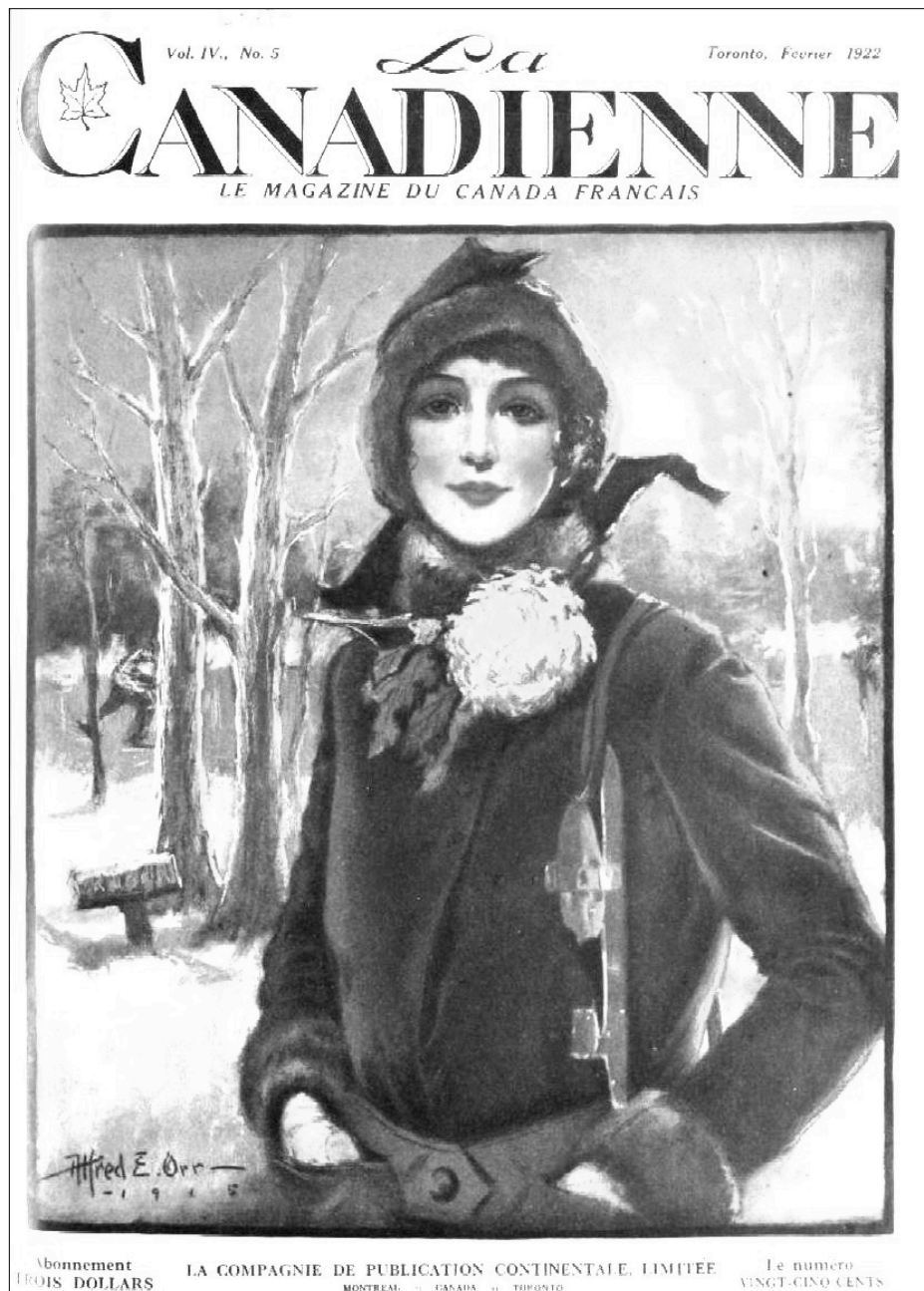


Figure 81: Alfred E. Orr (Illustrator). *La Canadienne* (Fevrier 1922): cover.

Conclusion

If ever there was a cautionary tale of feminine misbehavior it was the legend of La Corriveau. Convicted of murdering her husband and suspected of witchcraft, village beauty Marie-Josephte Corriveau of New France, was hung in 1763. In what could be considered the most heinous of punishments, her body was placed in a hanging cage in public space to be scavenged and decimated by birds. In the 1920s this story had not lost its chilling potency and inspired a number of artistic works that rearticulated the story of deception, punishment and the body.³⁸⁵ Alfred Laliberté's bronze sculpture depicts La Corriveau in the cage alive – augmenting the horror of imagining her body ravaged by starvation, the elements and hungry scavengers. Viewers of the 1920s would have remembered the legend upon encountering Laliberte's sculpture, and might have been reminded that public space was not only a place of possibility and transgression but also a place danger and display.

Place and space were central to these discourses on anxiety. Even though the wilderness and the city were thought to have conflicting influences - the virtuous natural world standing in opposition to the vice-ridden modern urban scape – the wilderness offered equal opportunity for

³⁸⁵ For example see: Alfred Laliberté, "La Corriveau" c1928-32, Bronze, Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec.; Charles Walter Simpson, "Le squelette de 'La Corriveau', dans sa cage de fer, terrorisant un voyageur, in *Légendes du Saint-Laurent*. Montréal : Canadian Pacific Railway, 1926, p. 24.

exploration of the body, bodily freedom and anonymity. Nudes in landscape for example were traditional in one sense and a product of the modern psyche in another. Produced in the style of modernism, much of 1920s art articulated the very paradox and tension that characterized modernity. It seems then that although place influenced readings and understandings of the body and bodily experience within particular settings, it was the body that remained the determining factor in readings and expressions of anxiety. Even set in landscape, the female nude could not always fly under the radar. Expressions of sexuality raised red flags that even the virtuous landscape could not counter.

Certainly, the city remained the primary focus of critics and reformers where women in particular were thought to be easy prey as workers and nightlife patrons. Sometimes however, women were the source of danger, portrayed as conniving temptresses. Although visual discourses on danger and anxiety most often circled white women, divulging a preoccupation with white virtue and reproduction of white nationhood, non-white women were sometimes visible. In a 1920 article by Emily Murphy, Asian female bodies were used in both photographic form, exemplifying the “open-eyed insensate in the dread Valley of the Shadow of drug”, and in

allegorical form to symbolize the siren-like lure of drug use.³⁸⁶ Humour and spectacle often framed the few stories featuring native or black Canadians, diffusing signs of racist anxiety over their presence. In the 1930s artists began to paint and sculpt black women more than they ever had before. Particularly in the work of Prudence Heward these female figures divulged a great deal about perceptions and representations of race and the female body.

Of course, images of anxiety had a counterbalance – the ‘good’ or ideal Canadian girl. These white women were easily spotted on magazine covers and in paintings by their fresh beauty, tempered sexuality and submissive poses. Arms often folded together or invisible outside the frame, these women were the antithesis to the flailing flapper or the erotic lounging nude. They took up very little space and in large numbers such as images of girl guides or sporting teams they stood in controlled groups and wearing uniforms suggesting that they were subject to a disciplinary regime that regulated their time and their bodily movements. Ultimately, the key concern sat with sexuality. To concerned citizens and critics it seemed that the New Day had heralded more than opportunities for women, but insatiable desires to do as they pleased. Images not only reflected evolving gender ideals and freedoms in art but also fear about women and their bodies. Public reactions

³⁸⁶ Emily F. Murphy, *The Grace Drug Menace*, *MacLean's Magazine*, (Feb 15, 1920): 10.

to these images also divulged the limitations of public tolerance for displays of sexuality and the perceived impact they would have on viewers. Conservative girls and good mothers were the stuff that nations were built of. Images that reflected anything outside that were the markers of danger and provokers of anxiety.

CONCLUSIONS



Figure 82: *Portrait of Elsie Wilson Kohl* c.1920s. Private Collection of Marie-Lynn Hammond.

Sometime in the 1920s modern woman Elsie Wilson Kohl left a loveless marriage to follow her heart, and her pilot-lover Ted Dobins, to Nelson, British Columbia. A scandal to her family, Elsie was the quintessential flapper - a free spirit and globetrotting fashionista. This portrait, taken in Nelson, reserves Elsie's place among the most fashionable of Canadian women in the twenties. She indulged, as mass consumer culture could only hope, in fashion, travel, cigarettes, and alcohol and succeeded in reproducing the iconic image and

lifestyle of the modern flapper, much to the dismay of those around her. She had slighted the expectations of her well-to-do family and tarnished their reputation, abandoned her role as wife and mother, and lived life against the grain. Elsie was well aware of how she was viewed unfavourably as a modern woman by more traditional critics and wrote about it in a poem called "The Conversation" which fell into the hands of her granddaughter upon her death.

As I lay on the walnut sofa, / Just dropping off to sleep,
I hear two voices talking, / So opened my eyes to peep.

Now I know you won't believe me, / But it's perfectly true I declare,
'Twas the old tea caddy chatting, / With the little mahogany chair.

"I long again for the old days, / Ah me! They were full of grace,
When the maidens could drop a curtsy, / And the ladies wore mittens of lace.

There were tales that were worth the hearing, / There was wit alas now
grown rare,
And the men were gallant gentlemen," / Quoth the little mahogany chair.

"These modern days are appalling, / Bobbed heads, cigarettes, bare
knees.
It fairly makes my inlay warp," / Said the caddy, "to watch their teas."

"Golf and Bridge or the movies, / Is the only language they speak,
Or, should they happen to spy me, / 'I say, what a jolly antique'."

They both gave a sigh and were silent, / So I roused myself with a shake,
To make sure I had not been dreaming, / But I'm positive I was awake.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁷ Elsie Wilson Kohl, *The Conversation*, c.1920s. Private Collection of Marie Lynn Hammond. Printed with permission.

Elsie's portrait bore many of the visual cues that separated dangerous women from virtuous women. With her bare shoulders, short hair, and a cigarette in hand she resembled a number of images of flappers that incited anxiety among viewers about real Canadian women and the state of the nation seemingly in their hands. But staring into the fire, Elsie's pensive pose and serious expression allude to the modern tension she must have experienced. No doubt, Elsie was fully engaged with the visual iconography of the flapper and would have experienced the slippages between image and lived experience.

Although images were a part of real women's lives in the 1920s, they by no means reflected the lived experiences of women in Canada. Modernity, freedom and independence were unevenly enjoyed across the nation. Indeed, images of women threatened to undermine lived experiences of women in these years, particularly feminist efforts. In the same way that New Deal art and theatre participated in the containment of feminist discourse in the United States³⁸⁸, the rhetorical use of the female form in Canadian visual culture masked feminist issues by placing the image of 'woman' in front of the body politic. Women were made the objects of 1920s discourse far more frequently than the subjects. Narrowly defined tropes

³⁸⁸ Barbara Melosh, *Gender and American History since 1890* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), conclusion.

ensured that images of women remained symbolic tools and not an invitation to discuss feminist issues or live out the projected image.

Artistic use of the female form exploded in the 1920s. As mass printing, mass distribution and filmmaking gained momentum the speed at which images of women were being circulated and projected was unprecedented. Even high art, once separated as high culture, was appearing in magazines and in shopping malls, blurring the boundary between high art and mass art. Though the mediums of magazine, film and high art were thought to be operating on different planes, they shared commonalities in the visual language of the time. A number of painters, for instance, worked as commercial artists to earn income, which not only resulted in the carryover of iconography between genres but between artists as well. The mass circulation of images in the 1920s also meant that artists were exposed to the same repetitive barrage of symbols and conventions as everyone else in the decade, which they used to their advantage. This repetitive barrage constituted the solidification of female images into tropes that artist used communicate ideas about gender, citizenship, modernity and nation.

As the decade wore on, artists evolved images to meet changing sentiments. Modernity, in particular, informed this evolution. The classical allegory for instance, was adorned with modern elements such as bobbed hair and the maple leaf. As nationalist feeling grew artists began to fashion

the woman in landscape as a way of expressing Canadian nationhood through the intersecting symbols of wilderness and the female form. Modern representations of youth and motherhood and primitive representations of non-white peoples and immigrants underpinned the visual discourse on citizenship and the national future. Too many modern signifiers, however, could mark a modern girl's (and a nation's) descent into immorality. As editorial artists and cartoonists demonstrated in their magazine work, images of flappers out in the city, dancing, or drinking and smoking were the quintessential imagery of social unraveling and used to communicate the ills of society, from rising rates dance-hall knock-out drugs to government misspending.

The unevenness with which modernity was taken up and used in visual culture reflected co-existing and conflicting perceptions of the modern. Being modern was necessary to citizenship but being too modern signaled danger. When modern representation intersected with modern activity, as they did in the image of the dancing flapper, the figure became unmoored from good representation of nation. Successful images of good mothers could not afford to be both modern in representation and activity – a mother's modest modern dress implied she was up with the times (particularly new scientific approaches to childrearing), but she was drawn sitting with her babe in arms or performing household chores. Allegories for nation were

tempered by their stillness and successful women were most often either rendered bodiless in cameo or hidden in layers of heavy clothing. Artists negotiated the use of “modern” as a visual signifier based on how it served their purpose and were careful not to imbue an image with too much of a good thing.

Unevenness in the use of modernity was also evident across mediums. How the modern was taken up by artists varied according to the politics of image creation in a given artistic environment. In the 1920s, abstract modernism fell outside acceptable artistic boundaries, marginalizing the work of figure artists who projected the body in cubist form, but the high art milieu allowed artists some degree of expression in the body. Androgyny was one way that the modern was inscribed on the female body and it appeared in both high art and commercial fashion art. Painters and sculptors enjoyed a greater degree of freedom with bodily nudity than commercial artists, so androgyny was explored through muscle tone and in arms, legs and chest and in ambiguous facial features. In the fashion pages, androgyny was suggested strictly through dress and was understood to be temporary. Films were able to combine expressions of the modern through both dress and bodily movement because story lines could establish a protagonist as upstanding instead of a single static image. Similarly, the woman in landscape motif appeared across mediums but artists mediated it differently

in each. She was most often nude in paintings, fashionably dressed in advertisements, overdressed in editorials and dashing across the screen in films. Each with its own rules of engagement, the culture and capabilities of mediums shaped how artists articulated the modern.

Overall, Canadian artists were in tune with international trends in art and representation. Many studied or travelled to France, Spain, England and the United States to gain experience, see exhibitions and absorb the influence of established artists and teachers. Art produced in Canada, therefore, was not produced in a vacuum. It was mimicking global conventions of style and bodily projection. Just as the Modern Girl Around the World project illuminated for countries like Japan, Australia and South Africa, images of the young modern woman were taken up similarly by artists around the world – particularly her metropolitanism and her connection to the world of consumption. But national idiosyncrasies nuanced the modern girl differently from nation to nation – nuances that reflected domestic politics of citizenship, race and sexuality. In Canada, discourse on the negative influence of American culture tempered the flapper image against the over-consuming, over-confident and overtly sexual flapper of the United States, producing a slightly more conservative image of the Modern Girl. At the same time, Canadian modern girls were travellers, drivers and lovers of the wilderness and Canadian artists constructed the modern girl image along the

lines of savvy and independent, even if she was never drawn doing these things alone. Perhaps the most avant garde body of work that came out of 1920s Canada was from the studios of cubist painters (who were heavily criticized and pushed out of artistic circles) and from the Montreal Beaver Hall Group, where Prudence Heward and Edwin Holgate's work stands out in its expressive intersection of woman and landscape and in their address of androgyny through the body. Public responses to works of art divulged the limits of social tolerance to modern interpretations of the female body and simultaneously, the desire for images to serve as national symbols. Modern nations appropriated the image of woman as part of nationalist iconography in the 1920s because of the power of the female form to express the will of the artist. The connections between modernity, nation and woman were made in the visual material of the decade, written on the bodies of women.

In her work on the classical allegory, Marina Warner proves that "woman" mattered to "nation" and the classical allegorical female form is that result. Here we've asked, does woman matter to nation when nation is articulated through modernist forms or as a 'modern project' and does it take particular national form as Canadian? The answer is unequivocally, yes. Artists used images of women to establish a visual discourse that connected woman with nation in two important ways; Firstly, artists aligned woman and nation, intending for the inherent modernness of the female image to infuse

the Canadian nation with the same quality. Secondly, artists drew on the female reproductive role and on women's roles as caregivers, nurturers and civilizers to visually express debates and ideas on national wellbeing and the national future. Artistic projections of woman were anything but haphazard. In a climate where the search for national distinction intersected with the growth of the female body as the symbol of the modern it was only one small step to the full-on appropriation of the female image by artists in the visual discourse on nation.

For Elsie Wilson Kohl, images that were projected around her likely informed her vision for her own body and for her life, but ultimately she was the only true artist of her own female form. In the early stages of this project, separating the images from real women seemed difficult, even if it was obvious that the two were not directly linked. Perhaps closer to the truth is that the link between the two runs unevenly in one direction. Artistic work may not necessarily have been informed by the lived experiences of real women, but for many real women who idolized what they saw, artistic representations informed how they saw themselves. The 1920s was only the beginning of the mass reproduction of the female form and appropriation of the female image by artists. With today's images of women being even more complex, subversive and more abundant than ever, the work of decoding what we see has become a challenging task. My hope is that this project

contributes to the spirit of feminist work that unpacks the visual imagery that belittles and undermines women in everyday life.

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Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

Art Gallery of Ontario

Canadian War Museum

Galerie d'art Leonard & Bina Ellen, Université Concordia

the LaM (Lille Métropole, musée d'art moderne, d'art contemporaine et d'art brut)

Hart House, University of Toronto

McCord Museum of Fine Art

McMichael Canadian Art Collection

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