

## ‘Virtue and the Meanings of Manliness in Upper Canada’

My work begins where Taptoo! leaves us: the creation of this ‘baby colony’ and the – somewhat prescient – image of a young boy and a toy ship. I am particularly interested in the relationship of gender in the growth of Upper Canada, particularly the formation of gendered discourses promulgated just before the outbreak of the War of 1812 and the ways in which notions of manly – and ‘British - virtue helped underpin appeals to the colonists to ‘stay loyal’ during the war. As well as exploring these discourses, this paper also will consider some of the implications of these images and ideals of virtuous British manliness for both femininity and Aboriginal masculinity.

Taptoo! makes it clear that, while Upper Canada was indeed a small colony, it also was part of a larger transatlantic world, one which had seen the political upheavals of the late eighteenth century: the American and French Revolutions and the growth of British radicalism. Such a context also marked by the expansion of British colonial power of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. To these political revolutions and imperial developments we must add the (often inter-related) religious revolutions: the rise of evangelicalism in both Britain and the northeastern US. Although in socio-economic terms the colony’s ‘middle-class’ was not discernable until the 1840s, middle-class formation in these larger, transatlantic contexts also influenced developments in Upper Canada, both before and immediately after the War of 1812. Competing class values – those of a more bourgeois middle-class vs. a would-be ‘gentry’ elite – helped shape debates over issues such as dueling, temperance, and discussions of consumerism.<sup>1</sup>

Taptoo! has much to say about the creation of ‘the Loyalists,’ both in what was becoming the U S and in the context of the new British colony. The historical records suggests that gender relations were an integral part of the Loyalists’ experiences, since the colonial state dealt with them in ways that reflected distinct notions of men’s and women’s places in colonial society. As my fellow-historian Janice Potter-Mackinnon has demonstrated, women Loyalists were an unwanted presence in the refugee camps established to deal with the Loyalist exodus. Denied independent support by the colonial government, their contributions to Loyalist cause were overlooked and ignored and their only means of securing support was to emphasize their helplessness and feminine dependency.<sup>2</sup> Such a situation differed from that of the American Revolution, in which American women’s engagement with the republican effort was publicly performed and publicly acknowledged, its legacy the creation of the ideology of republican motherhood.<sup>3</sup>

Although publicly disseminated, written sources produced in the colony were scarcer in the 1790s and early 1800s than in the decades after 1812, nevertheless some surviving materials suggest that patriotism continued to be framed publicly in masculinist terms. Such were the terms used in addresses to the Lieutenant-Governor, for example, by bodies such as the Loyal Association of the Home District, or Niagara's 'mechanics and husbandmen, who assured Peter Hunter of their honesty, industry, and usefulness as men.<sup>4</sup> And in the then-Anglican Rector of York, John Strachan's, 1810 Discourse on the Character of King George the III, written in honour of the monarch's birthday, loyalty, manliness, and national virtue were intertwined, with the hope that such qualities would bring about prosperity and happiness.<sup>5</sup> Strachan's reflections on the king's public and private lives intertwined the two realms and provided a framework for Upper Canadians (at least those sympathetic to Strachan's world-view) to envision and practice loyalty to the crown and nation. George, Strachan believed, had accomplished much for his subjects: he had behaved magnanimously toward the Irish and toward Catholics, had ended the slave trade, promoted judicial independence, and supported British culture.<sup>6</sup> All of these 'leading points of the reign of our gracious sovereign'<sup>7</sup> had come about because of Strachan's elevated domestic life, his ability to act as a virtuous and good father within his family and thus within the nation. Public virtue flowed from his private morality: his ability to govern his wife and children with kindness and fairness was transferred to the national and imperial sphere.<sup>8</sup> Such a state of affairs was unlike that suffered the late Louis XV of France, whose children had fallen prey to anarchy and immorality (brought back from America), and who had not acted like a wise and prudent father (instead, he had behaved in an unmanly and effeminate fashion). He had allowed corruption – both by seducing another man's wife, destroying the latter's home, and introducing his decidedly depraved mistress to his court – to debauch both his home life, the French court, and thus the nation.<sup>9</sup> Strachan's Discourse thus presented messages for both familial and political life: if the former lacked virtue, the latter would suffer serious and deleterious consequences.

As the threat of war loomed in the year after Strachan's pamphlet was published – and intensified in the winter of 1811-12, his themes of loyalty, patriotism, and the fate of Upper Canada as resting in the hands of virtuous men – became even more prevalent in political discourse. The military and colonial government issued various proclamations, general orders, and special addresses to the colony's residents;

these, alongside editorials and letters were published in the Kingston Gazette, the only paper to appear continuously throughout the war.<sup>10</sup>

Upper Canada, these statements made clear, was under threat, externally and internally; images of chaos, violence dominate these writings and colonial boundaries might at any moment succumb to the besieging forces of chaos, anarchy, rapacity, and immorality. Only loyal and virtuous Upper Canadian men could battle American viciousness. And Americans were not just to be feared because of their designs on Upper Canadian territory; they also were products of a nation that condoned slavery and thus were prone to tyranny and effeminacy, as they exploited the labour of others, rather than engaging in honest, manly industry.<sup>11</sup> Instead, they were depraved, savage, and barbarian; they would wreck brutal havoc on the Upper Canadian landscape. 'Our fertile plains, and the fruit of our industry are no doubt temptations every way calculated to excite their avarice, and gratify their abominable and licentious passion for plunder,' a 'A Loyalist' warned the Gazette's readers.<sup>12</sup> Sexual chaos and destruction was not limited to an Upper Canada personified as feminine: the colony's women were under threat. These writers were quick to prophesy the 'liberties that may be taken with the weaker and unprotected female sex by the unlicensed Banditti that may compose this army,' as one put it, adding 'I present merely an out-line, and leave it to the feelings of every husband and father to fill up the picture.'<sup>13</sup> It was not officers, though, but 'common soldiers' who were expected to be violent and sexually vicious. Unspoken assumptions about class run through these imagined future scenes of brutality and destruction.

The antithesis of this 'army of savages,' as 'A Loyalist' described the American forces to the Gazette, was the Upper Canadian militia, who would meet and stare them down. And in doing so they would be acting as husbands, as fathers, and as sons. This conception of manly virtue was, like George's, particularly British but moreover it also was Christian. After all, in the heat of battle bold manliness, even when exercised by men who were otherwise paragons, might fall temptation to the kinds of vicious and bestial elements that undermined and degraded American troops. Thus various colonists invoked the symbol of the Christian soldier, who fought on humane and just principles (and not for revenge or material gain).<sup>14</sup> Such a manly image was, to be sure, an abstract one but as such it might appeal to Anglican and Methodist, Loyalist and recent immigrant, thus smoothing over the all-too-real divisions in colonial society (ones of which the colonial government was well aware and perceived as potentially treasonous).<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, this figure could reassure Upper Canadian womanhood that they were being protected by a beneficent patriarchal force. Wives, daughters, and sisters might rest easy, knowing that their own troops would not succumb to the American forces' vicious masculinity and violence.

The figure that most readily embodied the Christian soldier's qualities was Isaac Brock. Brock's death at Queenston Heights in 1812 gave those engaged in shaping patriotic discourse with a powerful symbol of the Christian soldier, a man who sacrificed all for the colony and the imperial tie. Prior to his death Brock was discussed in very similar terms as Strachan's King George: he was an able commander who ruled justly and without tyranny, despite the fact that martial law had been declared. And, like Strachan, it was Brock's 'private merits' which 'gain the hearts of all who know him' and reassure colonists that his power would never be abused.<sup>16</sup> Such promises were not just routine, for throughout the war the colonial government was plagued by its militia's absenteeism, farmers' reluctance to supply army provisions, and an obdurate assembly that refused to pass legislation strengthening the military's powers.<sup>17</sup> While Brock's family life was not commented on extensively (as a single man without legitimate offspring he could not compete with George's large brood), nevertheless late-nineteenth-century commemorators wrote about his tender affection for his sister and other family members.<sup>18</sup>

In all these discussions of the need for loyal British manliness to come to the colony's defence, were there any other ideals of masculinity? And what about women? The colonial press praised the 'brave bands of natives' that fought as Britain's allies, attributing to them the status of men who, although reluctant to seek out conflict, would nevertheless be justified in defending themselves and their property when under threat.<sup>19</sup> And later the figure of the Shawnee chief Tecumseh would capture the imaginations of the War's historians, who often treated him as a semi-mythological figure.<sup>20</sup> But there was a degree of ambivalence, both at the time and in historians' accounts, about Native allies: 'brave warriors' could be tomorrow's archetype of a rapacious savage. While individuals such as Tecumseh might inspire admiration, in the aggregate Native warriors were a different question. Although publicly Brock praised the Six Nations for their past and continuing support of the crown, in private he wrote of the need to restrain Native allies, suggesting that they did not follow the same rules of manly conduct in battle typified by the Christian soldier.<sup>21</sup> Such observations, along with constructions of Native men that focused only on corporeal markers of 'culture' without explaining their significance or meanings within Native society - their dress,

body paint, hairstyles, jewelry, and lack of clothing – consigned them to a different sphere of masculinity than the gallant militia, rendering their motivations unknowable and irrational.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, being ‘other’ might invoke fear because of a perceived lack of virtuous manliness. For the non-Native women of Upper Canada, however, being ‘other’ meant something rather different, as my discussion of manliness engaged in the protection of women and children suggests. During the war years – and well after – no symbol of patriotic and engaged womanhood (such as a Marianne or a Britannia) emerged as a counterpart to the Christian Soldier (Laura Secord’s commemoration was not widespread until the 1890s and beyond).<sup>23</sup> However, women were not completely absent from the wartime theatre of patriotism and loyalty. In 1813 The ‘Patriotic Young Ladies of York’ presented a special banner to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiment of York Militia and received public thanks for their creation.<sup>24</sup> As well, the fact that the ‘home front’ of this war was at times quite literally staged on the homes of colonists, meant that the colony’s women were of course caught up in conflict. Compensation claims filed across the province after the war list domestic and agricultural goods, furniture, homes, crops, livestock and farm buildings.<sup>25</sup> Women and children had to be evacuated from the garrisons at Niagara, York, and Kingston, and provisions had to be made for soldiers’ wives and families.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, these sources suggest just how directly the war impinged on women’s lives. Yet even those few women who have left a record of spying, smuggling, and taking up arms when faced with direct danger rarely appeared as ‘actors’ in official narratives. And when they did, official discourses and proclamations represented their work as loyal patriots much more narrowly than that of men’s endeavours: sewing banners, clothing, and bed linen.<sup>27</sup>

The women of Upper Canada would have to look elsewhere for significant images of active feminine virtue: in the ideology of domesticity as the hallmark of both virtuous femininity and masculinity and in humanitarian sentiment that might find political and social expression in charitable work for the colony’s churches, missionary work with Native peoples, the temperance movement, and the abolitionist movement of the 1850s.<sup>28</sup> But that would be the subject of another narrative.

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- <sup>1</sup> For a discussion of these issues, see Cecilia Morgan, Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850 (University of Toronto Press, 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Janice Potter-Mackinnon, While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993).
- <sup>3</sup> While the Revolution did not lead to automatic equality for white, middle-class, Protestant women, nevertheless different kinds of ideological and political spaces within the new nation and public sphere were created for and by them. For discussions of these issues see Linda Kerber, Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (University of North Carolina Press, 1980).
- <sup>4</sup> Upper Canada Gazette, 21 Aug. 1794; Canada Constellation, 6 Sept. 1799
- <sup>5</sup> John Strachan, Discourse on the Character of King George the III Addressed to the Inhabitants of British America (Nahum Mower, 1810).
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 21-8, 37-8
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 38
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 8-9
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 49-50
- <sup>10</sup> See Carl Benn, 'The Upper Canadian Press, 1793-1814,' Ontario History 60, no. 2 (June 1978): 91-114.
- <sup>11</sup> See, for example, Kingston Gazette, 28 Jan. 1811; 28 Feb. 1812.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 28 Feb. 1812.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 28 Jan. 1811.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 20 April 1813; Strachan, Sermon Preached at York Before the Legislative Council and House of Assembly, 2 Aug. 1812, Public Archives of Ontario.
- <sup>15</sup> For discussions of threats from within the colony, see Kingston Gazette, 18 Sept. 1812; 28 July 1812.
- <sup>16</sup> See, for example, Kingston Gazette, 7 Nov. 1812 and 20 April 1813.
- <sup>17</sup> W. W. Weekes, 'Civil Authority and Martial Law in Upper Canada,' in Morris Zaslow, ed., The Defended Border: Upper Canada and the War of 1812 (Macmillan, 1964).
- <sup>18</sup> Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord (University of Toronto Press, 2002), 142-3.
- <sup>19</sup> Kingston Gazette, 28 July 1812; also Brock's public 'Proclamation,' 22 July 1812, in E. A. Cruikshank, ed., The Documentary History of the Campaign upon the Niagara Frontier, 3: 135-8.

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- 20 Herbert C. W. Goltz, 'Tecumseh,' Dictionary of Canadian Biography (1983), 5:795-801; also Coates and Morgan, Heroines and History, 143.
- 21 Brock to Colonel Proctor, 25 Aug. 1812, in Cruikshank, ed., Documentary History, 3:303.
- 22 See *ibid.* for correspondence: Lieutenant-Colonel Harvey to Colonel Claus, 15 July 1813, 6:236; Sir George Prevost to General Drummond, 17 Feb. 1814, 9: 88-9; Lieutenant-Colonel Harvey to Colonel Matthew Elliott, 17 Dec. 1813, 9:23; and Prevost to Drummond, 17 Feb. 1814, 9:188-9.
- 23 For Secord's commemoration, see Cecilia Morgan, "'Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance": The Placing of Laura Secord in Narratives of Canadian Loyalist history,' Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 5 (1994): 195-212.
- 24 Kingston Gazette, 20 April 1813; also Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, 'A Historic Banner,' Transactions of the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Toronto 1 (Feb. 1896): 20.
- 25 War of 1812 Losses Claims, Dept. of Finance, Upper Canada.
- 26 Drummond to Prevost, 15 July 1814, in Cruikshank, ed., Documentary History, 1:60; Mrs Hannah Janoway to her sister-in-law at Fort George, 14 Sept. 1814, *ibid.*, 2:230-1; William H. Merritt's personal note, 8 July 1813, *ibid.*, 6:208-10. See also Brian Leigh Dunnigan, 'Military Life at Niagara, 1792-1796,' in Richard Merritt, Nancy Butler, and Michael Power, eds., The Capital Years: Niagara-on-the-Lake, 1792-1796 (Dundurn Press, 1991).
- 27 Sarah Willott, 'Statement,' in Cruikshank, ed., Documentary History, 4:229; Merritt, *ibid.*, 6:98-9; Montreal Gazette, 20 April 1812, cited in *ibid.*, 6:116-18.
- 28 See Morgan, Chapters Three-Five, in Public Men and Virtuous Women.