

Challenging the Status Quo:  
Prudence Heward's Portrayals of Canadian Women  
from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Grace Powell

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art History

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## **Abstract**

Challenging the Status Quo: Prudence Heward's paintings of Canadian women from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Grace Powell

This thesis analyzes a number of paintings of Canadian women by Prudence Heward (1896 – 1947) and traces the ways in which her art production was an important indicator of a shift in gender relations as she commented on the socio-political position of women within the historical context of Canadian nationalism and the rural to urban population shift from the 1920s to the 1940s. At the same time, Heward's paintings are analyzed to trace proposed relationships between these concerns and the formal changes she incorporated into her works during the years covered by this thesis. The paintings' backgrounds, which had been no more than colour backdrops to the figures in her early years, became increasingly important as she challenged the status quo in which white women were confined and naturalized in their motherhood and care-giver roles and black women were "othered" because of their race. The thesis accomplishes this by comparing Heward's paintings to the Group of Seven, as well as to that by other artists from North America and Europe.

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**Introduction.**

This thesis looks at how the artwork by Prudence Heward (1896-1947) challenged the ways in which women were represented from the 1920s to the 1940s. I argue that her works challenged gender assumptions vis-à-vis women and questioned nationalist visions of what it meant to be Canadian. Her physically robust women are positioned close to the picture plane, dominating the picture space and challenging conventional images of demure and passive femininity. The way in which she positioned her figures against the landscape comments on the changes in the demographics of Canada from a predominantly rural population to an urban one and challenged the virile image of Canadian nationalism projected by the landscape paintings of the Group of Seven in their endeavour to create nationalist art. At the same time, her images of Black women call attention to the racial constitution of Canadian identity, and suggest other ways in which the status quo might be pictorially investigated and commented on.

Although Heward painted landscape and still life, as well as children, I deal only with certain of her portrayals of women. She preferred to call most of her sitters “figures” rather than “portraits” as her works tackle issues wider than the portrayal of one particular individual.<sup>1</sup> Although her figures are pictured as individuals, she gave her paintings generalized titles which, together with the way in which she chose the background against which the figure is posed, indicates less a specific amplification on the individual, and more an issue of a

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Braide, *Prudence Heward, 1896-1947: An Introduction to Life and Work* (Montreal: Walter Klinkhoff Gallery, 1980), p. 18.

generalized gender and racial concern. It is the interplay of the individualized figure and the background against which the woman is juxtaposed, that creates Heward's powerful representations in which she comments on and challenges the status quo. I do not deal with the question of portraiture *per se* at any length, as this is a complex and wide-ranging topic that has already been comprehensively dealt with and would deflect from the main strands that I follow in my argument.<sup>2</sup>

Heward's development as an artist is traced from her early works, *Eleanor and Miss Lockerby*, both of 1924, to one of her last works, *The Farmer's Daughter* of 1945.<sup>3</sup> By including the development discernible in her work, it is possible to establish a certain correlation between the changes in her work and the changes and flux that women experienced in their lived realities. For reasons such as length limitations, certain works are excluded, including *Rollande* of 1929. Even though this work is important in Heward's artistic development, there has already been more extensive scholarship on this work than any other of Heward's paintings of women.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> There is an extensive critical literature on portraiture. Some of the most useful are Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). The latter has an extensive list of further readings on pages 227-234.

<sup>3</sup> This work is dealt with briefly by Marielle Aylen, "Interfaces of the Portrait: Liminality and Dialogism in Canadian Women's Portraiture Between the Wars" (M. A. Thesis, Carleton University, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> Some of the references for critical work on *Rollande* are Shirley Kathleen Emeny, "Plurality and Agency: Portraits of Women by Prudence Heward" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1999) in which Emeny devotes an entire chapter to discussing this work; Lynne Pearce, "The Viewer as Producer: British and Canadian Feminists Reading Prudence Heward's 'Women,'" *RACAR* Vol. 25 nos. 1-2 (1998), pp. 94-102. Edith-Anne Pageot, "The Ambiguous Critical Reception of the Exhibition 'Canadian Women Artists' at the Riverside Museum, New York, 1947," *RACAR* Vol. 27 nos. 1-2 (2000), pp. 123-134; Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986), p. 59; and Barbara Meadowcroft, *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1999), pp. 72-73.

A.Y. Jackson in his address on the occasion of Heward's memorial exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in 1948 summed up her artistic achievements thus: "her name may be added to those few who pioneered in building up a Canadian tradition in painting."<sup>5</sup> In this tribute, not only did Jackson recognize Heward's contribution to Canadian painting, but he also praised her as a gifted artist and as one who helped reinvigorate figure painting at a time when landscape dominated the art scene in Canada, although less so in Montreal. Unfortunately, however, we have little first-hand knowledge of Heward's personal life or convictions. Although she corresponded regularly with Isabel McLaughlin these letters reveal very little about her art. However, in almost every letter she wrote about her on-going battle with her health, suffering from frequent colds, debilitating hay fever and asthma.<sup>6</sup> These letters also display her upbeat sense of humour, even when her health continued to deteriorate,<sup>7</sup> and her fun-loving nature, as her letter dated December 2, 1935 attests: "I have a mass of very big bruises to remember your party by. I lie in my bath and count them for my amusement."<sup>8</sup> These letters do not reveal her political and social leanings and no diary appears to exist. Even though she

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<sup>5</sup> A.Y. Jackson, *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward 1896 – 1947* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1948), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> For example in a letter dated May 17, 1935, she writes: "I was in bed for a week with hayfever. I'm just beginning to feel myself again; how these attacks keep pulling me back and down, no one knows how much." Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, 2033.37, Box 8.

<sup>7</sup> On Nov. 17, 1944, Heward writes to McLaughlin: "I was completely undressed [at the doctor's] and called out to him 'Oh Doctor, is it alright if I keep on my bracelet.'" At the end of the letter she includes a sketch of a naked woman with her right arm covering her breasts and her left arm decorated with a bracelet, stretched out towards the viewer. *Ibid.*, Box 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 8.

shared close friendships with a number of fellow artists, these shed little light on the details of Heward's thought and although these friendships were important to her, I will deal only briefly with this subject, which has been dealt with in depth by Barbara Meadowcroft in her book titled *Painting Friends*.<sup>9</sup> Natalie Luckyj expresses this lack of knowledge about her interior life as follows: "Her life, her thoughts and her travels are not well documented. Many of those closest to her - friends, family and contemporaries - are no longer alive."<sup>10</sup> The paucity of material on Heward's own perspectives regarding her art leaves ample room for the art to speak for itself, and for critics to make polysemic interpretations.

A brief review of the current literature on Heward allows me to position the contribution this thesis makes to the scholarship on Heward. To date, the only published book devoted entirely to Heward is Natalie Luckyj's *Expressions of Will* - an exhibition catalogue of 1986.<sup>11</sup> It is still the foundational research text on Prudence Heward. The three-part essay describes Heward's life, reviews the critical reaction to her work, and surveys paintings chronologically in describing Heward's style and choice of subjects while insisting on the individuality and originality in her artistic development. The exhibition history of each work included in the exhibition is documented and serves as a useful reference but, unlike this thesis, it does not focus on interpreting Heward's work

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<sup>9</sup> Meadowcroft 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Luckyj 1986.

within the changing role of women during her lifetime. Janet Braide's small catalogue written for an exhibition on Heward held at the Klinkhoff Gallery in 1980 closely relates Heward's biography to her paintings, while at the same time insisting on her "distinct personal style,"<sup>12</sup> influenced by her academic training at the Art Association of Montreal (AAM) and her artistic experiences and training in Paris. Braide's brief observations on certain of Heward's works reveal her appreciation of Heward's skills as an artist as well as her ability to produce "characterizations [that] are thought provoking and subtle".<sup>13</sup> Both Luckyj and Braide provide useful surveys of a woman artist, but differ from my thesis in not locating Heward within her Canadian historical context.

Lynne Pearce's article titled "The Viewer as Producer: British and Canadian Feminist Reading Prudence Heward's 'Women'" is based on a small sample of readers of her feminist book whom she polled on two works by Heward, *Rollande* of 1929 and *Girl at a Window*, 1941.<sup>14</sup> Her conclusion points to a complex interweaving of subjectivities that "include the artist and the artist's models *alongside* the subjective projections and introjections of the viewer."<sup>15</sup> Her conclusion is that the reading of texts of "'the woman produced' will always escape the formal and ideological limits that the act of representation seeks to

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<sup>12</sup> Braide 1980, p. 10

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Pearce 1998. The poll was conducted among readers of Pearce's book titled *Feminism and the Politics of Reading* (London: Arnold, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 95.



impose upon her.”<sup>16</sup> Pearce thus examines the production of meaning in works of art.

My work also differs from two recent theses that deal with Prudence Heward.<sup>17</sup> Marielle Aylen positions the portraits by Liliás Torrance Newton, Paraskeva Clark, Jori Smith and Prudence Heward, as falling within the gap between the dominance of landscape by the Group of Seven and non-figurative art after 1950. Aylen discusses Heward’s portraits of children and deals only briefly with Heward’s representations of women in *Mrs Zimmerman* and *Farmer’s Daughter*, positioning them within the liminal space in which women’s newfound, independent subjective positions were not supported by Canadian society.<sup>18</sup> Although there is a certain overlap in the conclusions reached in Aylen’s work and in the current thesis, the latter also examines, in detail, the changes over time in Heward’s subject matter as well as her challenge of the gender and racial bias in Canadian nationalism: something that Aylen does not do. Shirley Kathleen Emeny examines three portraits focusing on Heward’s subversion of the following recognizable icons: the habitant (*Rollande*, 1929); the female beauty, (*The Bather*, 1930) and the figure within the landscape (*Hester*, 1937). Emeny positions *The Bather* as “a painting [that is] candidly about the female body,”<sup>19</sup> and positions the figure within the Western tradition

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> Aylen 1996; Emeny 1999. Aylen also produced a small catalogue for an exhibition based on her thesis titled *Making Faces: Canadian Portraiture Between the Wars* (Ottawa: Carleton University Art Gallery, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Aylen 1996, p. 90 – 93.

<sup>19</sup> Emeny 1999, p. 38.

of painting nudes. In *Hester*, Heward “mirrors back to spectators the position of power they occupy in relation to the figure, and forces a conscious consideration of that position.”<sup>20</sup> Emeny argues in *Rollande* that Heward produced a work that subverted the traditional roles assigned to women within French-Canadian society. I do not deal with *Rollande* in any detail, as this work has received more critical attention than any other of Heward’s paintings and Emeny’s interpretation would largely overlap with the contention in this thesis that Heward in her paintings challenged the social and political status quo in Canada.<sup>21</sup>

Charmaine Nelson positions Western art and museum practice in the production and display of representations of black women, as evidence of both colonial racism and gender-biased practice.<sup>22</sup> Among the many works by Canadian artists discussed, Heward’s painting of *Dark Girl* is interpreted as evidence of sexual stereotyping, and both *Dark Girl* and *Hester* are interpreted as displaying the inherent inequality of power relations between a white female artist and black model. For Nelson, the despondency in the black models’ expressions, and their unclothed bodies, reveal the colonialist sexual and racial hierarchies at play in Heward’s production. This interpretation is at variance with the one proposed in this thesis in Chapter Two.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 61. See Chapter Two of this thesis for discussions on *The Bather* and on *Hester*.

<sup>21</sup> See note 4 for a listing of other critical texts on *Rollande*.

<sup>22</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, “‘Coloured Nude’: Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy.” M. A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995. See also *Through An-Other’s Eyes: White Canadian Artists – Black Female Subjects* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1998) and “‘Coloured Nude: Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy,’” RACAR Vol. 22, nos. 1-2 (1995), pp 97 – 107.

As is clear from this review of existing scholarship, a dominant concern in this thesis is the relationship between Heward's art on the one hand, and political, social and economic history on the other. However, in order to create a more comprehensive picture, the historical context in which Heward worked is examined through a feminist optic. The granting of the franchise as well as the increases in the number of women working outside the home are positioned as outward signs of the shift in attitudes towards women that was taking place in Canada from the 1920s to the 1940s. The changes were not uniform throughout Canada and did not always bring about the lived realities and differences to women's lives that had been hoped for by those who welcomed them or by the more conservative elements that feared negative societal consequences. This was particularly true in Quebec, where the legal framework lagged behind that of the rest of Canada in recognizing women as adults rather than minors in regard to property rights. Certain works by artists in other countries are briefly contrasted with Heward's paintings and the social and political milieu is compared to that in Canada.

Anna Johanssen comments that Heward was "brought up in a difficult time. Mid-Victorian women knew exactly where they stood...we have a great deal of freedom – they were just in between ...they had a difficult time."<sup>23</sup> Heward was neither a mid-Victorian woman, nor was she living in 1994 when Anna Johanssen made this comment; instead, she fell into the generation of

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<sup>23</sup> Anna Johanssen in *By Woman's Hand* [film] by Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie; producers Merit Jensen Carr, Pepita Ferrari, Kent Martin; co-produced by Animations Piché Ferrari and the National Film Board of Canada, (Montreal : National Film Board of Canada, 1994).

women who lived during a time when attitudes towards women were undergoing significant changes. I agree with Johanssen's statement, but I also think that through her art Heward took an active role in challenging attitudes at a time when the position of women was in flux politically and sociologically.

## Chapter 1.

### Early Work: Prior to 1929.

In this chapter Prudence Heward's development as an artist is traced and her work is located within the context of the changing sociological and political framework in Canada and, where relevant, with regard to works by artists located elsewhere. A brief description of her biography and of her art training is included. The artistic milieu in Montreal and Canada is discussed and placed within the socio-historical context of the United States, Germany and France during this timeframe to highlight the similarities and differences in the changes women were experiencing in their lives. At the same time, the changes that can be discerned in Heward's painting techniques and in her choice of subjects are examined.

Prudence Heward was born in Montreal to affluent parents in 1896. Her father, Arthur R. G. Heward, was an executive with the Canadian Pacific Railway. Her mother was Sarah Efa Jones, daughter of Chilion Jones, who was one of the architects of the original parliament buildings in Ottawa; his wife (Heward's grandmother), Eliza Jones, was so successful at running her own dairy farm that she wrote a book detailing her business success.<sup>24</sup> Prudence Heward's family formed part of the English establishment in Montreal.

According to her nephew, John Heward, she grew up in

a very stable family, though it had its tragedies: the children died young. My Grandfather died very young, so it was a highly matriarchal

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<sup>24</sup> Eliza M. Jones, *Dairying for a Profit; or, The Poor Man's Cow* (Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1894) referenced in Barbara Meadowcroft, *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1999), p. 183.

family. My grandmother was a very strong Victorian matriarch and Aunt Prue was very devoted to her – the children were very devoted to her and we'd all go there<sup>25</sup> on a Saturday afternoon – almost mandatory. My Uncle Chil<sup>26</sup> would go almost every day to see her after work.<sup>27</sup>

Heward was the sixth of eight children. She was sickly as a child and was educated at home. Her exposure to art began at an early age with modeling for her sister Dorothy, who was taking art lessons at the Art Association of Montreal (AAM).<sup>28</sup> Dorothy Heward exhibited a sketch titled *Prue, Portrait Sketch* at the *Spring Exhibition* of the Art Association in 1910 and another work titled *Prudence* in 1911.<sup>29</sup> Art was considered a fashionable pastime for young women, as it had been in previous eras.<sup>30</sup> Barbara Meadowcroft describes art lessons for young ladies as follows: “Drawing was part of a young lady’s education at the turn of the century, but few women became professional artists.”<sup>31</sup> Heward took her first art classes when she was twelve.<sup>32</sup> She was sixteen when her father and two of her sisters died and a memorial stained glass window was placed in their church, the Church of St

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<sup>25</sup> This refers to Heward’s home at 3467 Peel Street.

<sup>26</sup> This refers to Chilion Heward, Prudence Heward’s brother.

<sup>27</sup> John Heward interview, October 3, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Natalie Luckyj, *Expressions of Will: The Art of Prudence Heward* (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986), p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Evelyn de R. McMann, *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts formerly Art Association of Montreal: Spring Exhibitions 1880-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 173.

<sup>30</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Meadowcroft, *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 27.

John the Evangelist.<sup>33</sup> With the outbreak of the First World War, her mother moved the family to London to be close to her three sons – Brian, who was studying at Cambridge University, and Jim and Chilion, who were soldiers. The eighteen-year-old Heward, her sisters and her mother helped in the war effort by working for the Red Cross. Little is known about exactly what she did during this time, though she is thought not to have done any painting.<sup>34</sup>

After her return to Montreal in 1918 and continuing until 1924, Heward took art lessons at the AAM with William Brymner (1855 -1925) and Randolph Hewton (1888 -1960) as her teachers. The time spent at the AAM was to prove to be of lasting significance to her in a number of ways. William Brymner, although he suffered a stroke in 1918, continued to teach at the AAM until 1921 and his training was to have a lifelong influence on Heward's work. An untitled manuscript written by Brymner expresses his philosophy by insisting that acquiring the skill of drawing was of utmost importance; "At the foundation of all graphic and plastic arts is drawing."<sup>35</sup> Yet for Brymner the ability to draw did not in itself make an artist. He considered that "a work of art must be dual in its nature: a perfect thought in perfect form."<sup>36</sup> Thus, not only did Brymner encourage the development of form as a necessary skill but also painting as an

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<sup>33</sup> This window as well as two plaques placed close by commemorating Prudence Heward and her sister Honour can be seen at the Church of St John the Evangelist, located at 139 President-Kennedy Avenue in Montreal.

<sup>34</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> William Brymner, "There is No Royal Road to Success..." Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Archives, Fonds William Brymner, 1, p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

expression of “thought and character.”<sup>37</sup> In his encouragement of his students to develop their own style, he wrote: “An art training should not teach you to imitate anyone, but should teach you how to study and help you to see with your own eyes.”<sup>38</sup> He more fully expressed this idea in another untitled manuscript:

The individuality of the artist will make him express his emotions by means of that side of nature that appeals to him. Perhaps he chooses altogether unconsciously. His mind is overpowered by the one idea he wishes to express and he eliminates all details that hinder its expression. In fact he does not see the, to him useless, details at all; he only uses what will make the idea apparent.<sup>39</sup>

Thus Brymner encouraged both individuality and technical skill; a laser-sharp focus, without the inclusion of extraneous details that could deflect from the expression of the artist’s ideas. A.Y. Jackson, who was also taught by Brymner at the AAM, summed up the contribution he felt Brymner gave to his students:

Brymner as a painter represented the style of the older generation, but as a teacher he was one of the best friends an artist could have. Sympathetic and tolerant, he encouraged his pupils to express themselves with complete freedom while stressing the need of a thorough technical training.”<sup>40</sup>

Heward internalized Brymner’s precepts over time, and brought together technical skill with the focused expression of ideas in which she eliminated extraneous details, and produced arresting paintings of Canadian women.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> William Brymner, “After two or three years study...” Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Archives, William Brymner Fonds, 5, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> A.Y. Jackson, *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward 1896 – 1947* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1948), p. 7.



Among the art to which Heward and her fellow students were exposed at the AAM was landscape, including works of Maurice Cullen (1866 -1934), Marc-Aurèle Suzor-Coté (1869 -1937) and of the nascent Group of Seven. One fellow student, Anne Savage, recalled the excitement that had been felt at the AAM in 1919:

“Old Brym’, as we called him, came to the studio door and said ‘You’d better all go upstairs – something has happened in the Print Room’. We ran down to see the first exhibition of Tom Thomson’s sketches – a torch had been lit in Northern Ontario....the struggle for creative Canadian painting had begun – the traditional European bondage had been broken.”<sup>41</sup>

The later dominance of the works by the Group of Seven in Canada lent legitimacy to landscape as a genre and diminished the importance of the portrayal of the human figure, but at the AAM - especially in Heward’s day – Brymner and Hewton emphasized a French tradition of figure painting, whereas the Ontario College of Art emphasized landscape.<sup>42</sup> Brymner had trained under William Bouguereau (1825 -1905) in France, where the human figure was considered the *sine qua non* of painting. Brymner had instituted figure drawing from semi-nude models at the AAM: classes which women students could attend, in addition to copying pictures of the human form or working from casts of Greek sculpture.<sup>43</sup> Natalie Luckyj views Brymner as being important for his “encouragement of individual styles, but also because he introduced the

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<sup>41</sup> The opening address by Anne Savage at Heward’s memorial exhibition in Montreal, May 13, 1948, NGC Archive, filed in “Heward, Prudence (Efa): Documentation 1927-1952 # 1”.

<sup>42</sup> Charles C. Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 39.

<sup>43</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 45.

idea of French modernism which incorporated the figure as a legitimate practice.”<sup>44</sup> Studying in Europe, as part of the training for professional artists, especially in France, which was the pre-eminent destination for western artists, was *de rigueur*, and Brymner reinforced this perception.

In 1921, when Brymner no longer taught at the AAM, Randolph Hewton was hired. His term was short-lived and ended as the academic school year drew to a close in 1923 -1924.<sup>45</sup> By 1924 advanced classes had been suspended due to declining enrollment. Hewton’s influence on Heward’s work has not been documented elsewhere, but it is noteworthy that certain of his works share a similarity with a number of Heward’s paintings.



Fig. 1  
Randolph Hewton  
*Miss Audrey Buller*, 1919 -1920  
Oil on canvas 100.7 x 81.8  
National Gallery of Canada



Fig. 2  
Randolph Hewton  
*Miss Audrey Buller* c.1924<sup>46</sup>  
Oil on canvas 127.1 x 122.2cm  
National Gallery of Canada

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Luckyj in *By Woman’s Hand* [film] by Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie; producers Merit Jensen Carr, Pepita Ferrari, Kent Martin; co-produced by Animations Piché Ferrari and the National Film Board of Canada, (Montreal : National Film Board of Canada, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Victoria Baker, *Modern Colours: The Art of Randolph Stanley Hewton, 1888-1960* (Hamilton: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> The National Gallery of Canada in Cybermuse lists the date as 1922-1923 whereas Victoria Baker lists the date as 1924. See Baker 2002, pp. 29 and 53.

Both paintings (figs. 1 and 2) picture Audrey Buller, one of Hewton's art students. The work painted in 1919-1920 was exhibited at the *Spring Exhibition* in 1921, and the *Montreal Star* art critic noted "the striking color-scheme – rich red against a green and blue background – [that] affords an unusual example of arresting contrasts."<sup>47</sup> This comment highlights Hewton's strong work as a colourist: an aspect that did not always draw favourable attention from critics.<sup>48</sup> His AAM influence as a colourist was noted at the 1922 *Spring Exhibition* by the *Montreal Witness* critic, S. Morgan-Powell, who complained of the "pernicious influence of the modernist...you see portraits in bright colours against astonishing backgrounds...a row of them...christened 'the jazz wall'".<sup>49</sup> In the French-language press, critic Paul Dupré expressed shock at the cacophony, but added that fortunately the works shown were produced mainly by students.<sup>50</sup> Heward's *Miss Lockerby*, 1924 (fig. 6, p.23), with its striking colour contrasts of yellow background with the vibrant turquoise of the dress, uses a different palette from that of Hewton, but creates an equally vivid and unexpected colour contrast.

Hewton's later portrait of Audrey Buller (fig. 2) is an example of a theme he often used in his works - women in brilliantly coloured clothing posed out of

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<sup>47</sup> "Portraits are Feature of Art Exhibition," *Montreal Star*, April 5, 1921.

<sup>48</sup> See Baker 2002, pp. 20-24.

<sup>49</sup> S. Morgan-Powell, "Portraits at Exhibition are outstanding Feature," *Montreal Daily Star*, March 27, 1922; also cited in Baker 2002, p. 24.

<sup>50</sup> Cited in Paul-André Linteau, *Peindre Montréal 1915-1930: Les Peintres de la Montée Saint-Michel et leurs Contemporains* (Quebec: Musée du Québec, 1996), p. 98. Heward's *Mrs Hope Scott* was exhibited. See Evelyn de R. McMann 1988, p. 174.

doors. As the art critic for the *Ottawa Citizen* wrote when the portrait was exhibited in the 1927 Royal Canadian Academy exhibition: "Hewton's portrait of Audrey Buller is a dignified and unusual thing. The treatment of the golden sheen of the gown and the use of the landscape background make it notable."<sup>51</sup> The striking colour of the gown and the formal pose of the sitter emphasize the incongruity of the stone on which she is seated as well as the landscape against which she is pictured. Heward, in many of her later paintings, uses similar elements in her compositions but I will argue that they differ from Hewton's work in that the backgrounds situate the figures within a setting that creates a political and/or social comment on the figure Heward portrays, and that the interplay between the figure and the background creates works that are the instantiation of Heward's ideas rooted in the social and political changes that women in Canada experienced during this time of flux. Thus the similarity between certain works by Hewton, like *Miss Audrey Buller* (fig. 2), and many of Heward's paintings will be seen to lie in the elements used in the composition, rather than in their social and political significance.

In addition, both Hewton and Heward spent time with Edwin Holgate (1892 -1977), visiting him while he was in Charlevoix county in 1923.<sup>52</sup> His painting *The Lumberjack*, 1924, bears similarities to fig. 2 in terms of composition, with the figure pressed close to the picture plane and the

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<sup>51</sup> "Exhibition of Contemporary Canadian Art has Resulted in Fine Picture Collection," *The Citizen* (Ottawa), January 12, 1927; also cited as a source in Baker 2002, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> See Brian Foss, "Living Landscape," in *Edwin Holgate, 1892-1977* ed. Rosalind Peppall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), p. 39.

landscape as background. Thus Heward had contact with artists who placed figures prominently within the Canadian landscape before she left Montreal to continue her studies abroad.

In 1925 Heward left for Paris to continue her art training at the Académie Colarossi with the former Fauve artist Charles Guérin, and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with Bernard Naudin.<sup>53</sup> Paris was the centre of the art world at the time and she was exposed to more experimental and modernist art than she would have seen in Canada.<sup>54</sup> It is also possible that she could easily have seen the hugely popular theme of women in landscape as, for example, at the annual exhibitions of the Société des Artistes Français.<sup>55</sup> She returned to Paris in 1929 to study at the Scandinavian Academy, where Per Krohg was teaching, after scuttling her plans to study with Andre L'hote after hearing that he only graduated artists who painted in his own style.<sup>56</sup> Anne Savage, in speaking about Prudence Heward at her 1948 memorial exhibition held in Montreal, said: "She understood all the various aspects of French painting – she delighted in it and appreciated it – Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso – but she didn't come back a Matisse or Picasso - she came back Prudence Heward."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> See Anne Savage remarks in this thesis note 41.

<sup>55</sup> See Brian Foss's reference to these works in his essay on Holgate's figures in the landscape. Foss 2005, p. 45.

<sup>56</sup> Luckyj 1986, pp. 32-33 and Joan Murray, *Isabel McLaughlin: Recollections* (Oshawa: The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, 1983).

<sup>57</sup> Anne Savage 1948. Joan Murray who was a close friend of Isabel McLaughlin, stated that neither Heward nor McLaughlin registered for any classes at the Scandinavian Academy, sleeping in till noon and sketching and painting there in the afternoons. Her statement was made on Oct. 4, 2008 at the inaugural conference of the Canadian Woman Artist's History Initiative held in Montreal Oct. 2-4, 2008.

Heward's time at the AAM was important in yet another respect. It was there that she met artists who were to become lifelong friends and supporters.<sup>58</sup> Heward formed a particularly close friendship with Sarah Robertson, with whom she took walks on Mount Royal, close to her home and studio on Peel Street, and the two artists delighted in discussing the colours and shapes of what they saw as they walked together.<sup>59</sup> A. Y. Jackson references the "close collaboration with her friend Sarah" in Montreal as well as the painting picnics at Fernbank, Heward's family cottage, in which Robertson participated.<sup>60</sup> A number of the women artists Heward met at the AAM were associated with the Beaver Hall Group, which although short-lived, from 1920 to 1922, was important at a time when the friendships she formed created informal networks of critique, encouragement and exchange, as women artists were barred from joining such artists' associations as the Pen and Pencil Club.<sup>61</sup> Susan Avon, in her M.A. thesis on the Beaver Hall Group, cites a passage from the minutes of a meeting of the Pen and Pencil Club dated April 1<sup>st</sup> 1922, stating that, even as guests, no women were permitted to attend the entertainment at the annual

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<sup>58</sup> For a detailed examination of the influence that the friendships formed at the AAM had on the Beaver Hall artists and on Heward, see Barbara Meadowcroft 2002. Heward developed a close friendship with Isabel McLaughlin whom she met while she was in Paris in 1929 and Heward maintained correspondence with her throughout her life.

<sup>59</sup> Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie 1994.

<sup>60</sup> A. Y. Jackson 1948, pp. 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> There are a number of publications dealing with the Group and their significance, some of which are by Joyce Millar, "The Beaver Hall Group: Painting in Montreal, 1920 – 1940," *Woman's Art Journal* Vol. 13 (Spring/Summer 1992), pp. 3-9, and Barbara Meadowcroft 1999. Susan Avon investigates the barriers women artists faced in her thesis titled "The Beaver Hall Group and its Place in the Montreal Art Milieu and the Nationalist Network" (M.A. Thesis, Concordia University, 1994).

Festival.<sup>62</sup> The Arts Club, although not in Montreal, formed in 1913, was an invitation-only men's club of prominent artists, architects, writers and art lovers. It held exhibitions featuring members' works as well as work by invited guests including works by women artists.<sup>63</sup> The members of the Group of Seven were all men and A.Y. Jackson, in a conversation with Heward's nephew Heward Graffety, said: "I wanted her to join the Group of Seven, but like the Twelve Apostles, no women were included."<sup>64</sup> Heward was invited to exhibit her works with the Group of Seven in 1928 at the Art Gallery of Toronto and again in 1930 and 1931<sup>65</sup> and some of her works were also exhibited with the Royal Canadian Academy in 1924, 1926-1929 and 1936.<sup>66</sup>

Maria Tippet points to the increase in the number of art schools in Canada between the wars as well as the encouragement given to women artists by Eric Brown, director of the newly reopened (1920) National Gallery who included them in exhibitions and bought their work.<sup>67</sup> Artists such as Anne Savage (1896 -1971) were able to earn their living in the art world by teaching

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<sup>62</sup> Avon 1994, p. 30.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-34.

<sup>64</sup> Heward Graffety, *Portraits from a Life* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, c.1996).

<sup>65</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 121.

<sup>66</sup> Evelyn de R. McMann, *Royal Canadian Academy of Arts: Exhibitions and Members, 1880-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c.1981), p. 185.

<sup>67</sup> Maria Tippet, *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Viking, 1992).

or as with Lilius Torrance Newton (1896 -1980), by painting portraits, even when the art market was restricted due to the Depression in the 1930s.<sup>68</sup>

The American art scene during this time frame, considered in terms of barriers and opportunities for women artists, has a number of similarities with that of Canada. Kirsten Swinth argues that “refinement” in art, which centered on the training that took place at art schools, was valued and had led to a professionalization of art before the 1890s. This resulted in women competing in the art world. As a reaction against what was perceived as a “feminization of culture” in the 1890s, due to the increasingly important roles that women played, especially as patrons and taste-makers, there was a masculinization of culture and of art during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt from 1901 to 1910 with his call for “the strenuous life” and the hyper-masculinity that was cultivated during this time.<sup>69</sup> The *New York Herald* reviewer of the 1907 winter exhibition at the National Academy of Design wrote: “Although it [the exhibition] contains pictures which are beautiful and many that are dainty and pretty, the exhibition does not lack in the strong and the virile.”<sup>70</sup> Swinth argues that “the ideal of cultural refinement [was replaced] with the lauding of culture as the expression of an authentic self that was by evolution restricted to white men. True art displayed a virile selfhood.”<sup>71</sup> Marian Wadle argues that although the

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<sup>68</sup> There are many articles and books on both these artists, among which see Barbara Meadowcroft 1999, and Dorothy Farr, *Lilius Torrance Newton, 1896-1980* (Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1981).

<sup>69</sup> Kirsten Swinth, *Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870 – 1930* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.



women during this period encountered exclusionary practices, they produced a large body of work that was exhibited.<sup>72</sup> Thus Heward, like many women artists of her time, both in America and Canada, had a mixed reception – barred from many male networks and clubs, yet with exhibition possibilities for her works.

Both Janet Wolff<sup>73</sup> and Wardle write on Kathleen McEnery Cunningham (1885 -1971), an artist who shares certain similarities with Heward. Like Heward she studied in Paris in 1908, contrary (in Cunningham's case) to the advice given by her American art teacher, Robert Henri.<sup>74</sup> Two of her works were exhibited at the *Armory Show*, the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, in New York in 1913, and she was widely exhibited and well-known during her lifetime. Both works exhibited at the *Armory Show* were nudes: a favourite subject of Heward's as shall be seen. One of these, *Going to the Bath*, c.1905 - 1913 (fig. 3), shows two women set close to the picture plane against a simple blue background, with one of the figures looking out directly at the viewer.

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<sup>72</sup> Marian Wardle, "Thoroughly Modern: The 'New Woman' Art Students of Robert Henri" in *American Women Modernists: The Legacy of Robert Henri, 1910-1945* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Art; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, c.2005), pp. 1-30.

<sup>73</sup> Janet Wolff, *AngloModern: Painting and Modernity in Britain and the United States* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Eleanor Tufts, *American Women Artists 1830 – 1930* (Washington, D.C.: International Exhibitions Foundation for the National Museum for Women in the Arts, 1987).



Fig. 3  
 Kathleen McEnergy Cunningham  
*Going to the Bath*, c.1905-1913  
 Oil on Canvas 127.3 x 78.7cm  
 Smithsonian American Art Museum

Cunningham also participated in a suffrage art exhibition at the MacBeth Gallery in New York in 1915 where art produced by one hundred women was on display,<sup>75</sup> and, like many other women in the suffrage movement in the United States and Canada, maintained that granting women the franchise did not disrupt their commitment to their traditional roles within the family or signal social disruption.<sup>76</sup> Like Heward, Cunningham mainly painted her friends, most often women, and did not have to earn a living from her art, but unlike Heward her dual role of wife/mother and artist served to undermine her artistic aspirations.<sup>77</sup> In an undated *Self Portrait* (fig. 4) she pictures herself as an artist with her painter's smock and paintbrush in hand while on the table behind her

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<sup>75</sup> Mariea Caudill Dennison, "The Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture by Women Artists for the Benefit of the Suffrage Campaign," *Woman's Art Journal* Vol. 24 no. 2 (Autumn 2003 - Winter 2004), pp. 24-30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>77</sup> Wolff 2003. See chapter 2 for a detailed account of Cunningham's life and work.



Fig. 4  
 Kathleen McEnery Cunningham  
*Self Portrait*, n.d.  
 Oil on canvas, 127.3 x 78.7  
 Collection of Maria Cunningham

are more of her artist's tools. Her arm on her hip and her direct gaze indicate her self-confidence and her bobbed hair portrays her as a modern woman. Although Heward appears not to have portrayed herself in her paintings<sup>78</sup>, she would paint Mabel Lockerby (1882-1976), a Montreal artist, in two works that will be discussed at greater length below.

In 1924 Heward painted a work titled *Eleanor* (fig. 5), which was exhibited at the *AAM Spring Exhibition* the same year<sup>79</sup> as well as with the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.<sup>80</sup> This work is signed on its verso and is dated February 1924 with the full name of the sitter given as Eleanor Mary Reynolds. The emphasis on form, conveyed by Heward's well-honed drawing skill, is evident in this work.

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<sup>78</sup> Barbara Meadowcroft contradicts suggestions by Luckyj that *Girl under a Tree* was a self-portrait in *Lasting Impressions: Celebrated Works from the Art Gallery of Hamilton* (Hamilton: Art Gallery of Hamilton, 2005), p. 140. John Heward summed it up as "possibly a self portrait, psychologically." John Heward Interview October 3, 2006.

<sup>79</sup> McMann 1988, p. 174.

<sup>80</sup> McMann 1981, p. 185.



Fig. 5  
Prudence Heward  
*Eleanor*, 1924  
Oil on Canvas.64.8 x 64.8 cm  
Private Collection

The figure is outlined in strong delineation against a nondescript background so that the focus is on the woman. The roughly textured background serves as a contrast to the smooth brushstrokes of the figure and face. The contrast of light and dark further serves to focus attention on the sitter's face. With only her upper body pictured but placed at a slight angle to the picture plane, the woman is not directly facing the viewer. Instead she has a softer stance, with very little modeling of the body itself, while what appears to be a decorative ribbon affixed to her dress serves to emphasize a femininity not evident in the portrayal of her neck, which is pictured as wide and solid. By contrast to the solidity of her neck, the woman's face looks small. In stark counterpoint to the lack of modeling in her torso, Heward has carefully modeled her face. The shadow under her chin serves to continue the contrast of her dark hair against her face and to emphasize the contour of her jaw line and the structure of her face. The slight

angling of the face away from the viewer, together with the rather distant look in the sitter's eyes, creates an introspective demeanor. In this sense Heward has used a rather conventional approach; that is, one that sets the woman up to be gazed at by the viewer. The viewer is undisturbed by any active, direct engagement from the sitter and this confirms John Berger's observation that "*men act and women appear*".<sup>81</sup>

Another Heward work, titled *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6), though undated, is similar in style and is considered to have been painted around 1924.<sup>82</sup>



Fig. 6  
Prudence Heward  
*Miss Lockerby*, c.1924  
Oil on Board, 59 x 45.7cm  
Private Collection

The work portrays the artist Mabel Lockerby who was, like Sarah Robertson,

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<sup>81</sup> See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 47. For a complex and nuanced deconstruction of the representation of gendered power, see also Linda Nochlin, "Women, Art and Power," in *Women, Art and Power, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), pp 1-36.

<sup>82</sup> Natalie Luckyj 1986, p. 79.

also a member of the Beaver Hall Group of artists.<sup>83</sup> Heward has not portrayed her within her professional framework, nor does she reveal or give any clues as to these character traits.

This work has many features in common with *Eleanor* (fig. 5), but also some differences. Both are sensitive portraits of women who do not confront the viewer although Lockerby was considered to be opinionated and unconventional.<sup>84</sup> Both works show the shoulders set at an angle to the picture plane but do not represent the distinguishing features of the female body. In *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6) the work is cut off above the bust-line but the heart-shaped cut of the dress reveals the sitter's skin, and is echoed by the shape of the face, albeit at an angle, so that the repetition of shapes may not be apparent at first glance. The striking colour of the turquoise green dress is roughly textured, serving as a contrast to the tone and the smoother texture of the skin. The soft yellow background emphasizes the lines of the clearly delineated sitter and, as in *Eleanor* (fig.5), does not comment on or add information to the figure portrayed. We know that Mabel Lockerby was an artist, but there is no reference in the work to indicate her profession, unlike such paintings as Kathleen McEnery Cunningham's *Self Portrait* (fig. 4) or Cecilia Beaux's (1855 -1942) painting of *Mrs Marcel Kahle, 1925-1926* (fig. 7);

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<sup>83</sup> For more information on Lockerby see Barbara Meadowcroft 1999, as well as Barbara Meadowcroft, *Mabel Irene Lockerby* (Montreal: Walter Klinkhoff Gallery, 1989).

<sup>84</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 86.



Fig. 7  
Cecila Beaux  
*Mrs Marcel Kahle*, 1925 –1926  
Details and location unknown

a miniature-portrait artist. Beaux has portrayed Kahle in elegant surroundings indicative of her wealth as well as showing her artist's tools, although they do not occupy a prominent position and she is not pictured in the process of painting.<sup>85</sup>

*Mrs Marcel Kahle* was a commission, so Beaux's choice of how she portrayed her may not have been solely her prerogative, but it and the *Self Portrait* (fig. 4) by Cunningham demonstrate that some American women at this time were being portrayed within a professional setting that comments on and fills out details of their lives within their portraits.<sup>86</sup> Although Heward did not paint on commission, such early works as *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6) have no more than a colour backdrop to the figure without giving the viewer any hints about the lives of these women. In both works the women

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<sup>85</sup> Tara Leigh Tappert, *Cecilia Beaux and the Art of Portraiture* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), p. 143.

<sup>86</sup> Heward's financial situation, in which she produced her work without the restrictions placed by patrons' requirements, permitted her a greater degree of freedom to express her ideas boldly and in an unadulterated fashion as she honed her skills, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

have their heads turned away from the viewer, but in *Miss Lockerby*, instead of a distant, passive look, the portrait reveals an alert gaze. What is clearly displayed is Heward's draftsmanship, the skill Brymner considered the basis of artistic endeavour. The tentative use of patterning seen by the repetition of shapes in *Miss Lockerby* would assume growing importance in the techniques Heward was to employ as she continued her art training and as she developed her painting skills and used patterning to add visual interest to her works. Heward would paint *Lockerby* again in 1928, and the discernible difference in the portrayals will be discussed later to demonstrate Heward's representation of the changing position of women within Canadian society.

Both *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6) and *Eleanor* (fig.5) were included among the works sent by Canada to the 1925 *British Empire Exhibition* in Wembley, England, where the works that caused a stir amongst British critics were by the Group of Seven,<sup>87</sup> while works by such artists as Heward and many members of the Beaver Hall Group reflected more conventional styles.<sup>88</sup> In reviewing the Canadian section of the exhibition, the *Sunday Times* art critic wrote that "The figure painters are not equal to the landscapists yet" but he noted that *Miss Lockerby* demonstrated "a very promising, simply painted head."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 79 ; Brian Foss 2005, p.53, Note 21.

<sup>88</sup> Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1995). See pages 22-33 for the reactions in Canada to the works by the Group of Seven where tastes in art were more conservative than in Europe and where many art critics reviewed the modernism of their works negatively. Dennis Reid, *The Group of Seven* (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1970) details the controversy surrounding the selection of paintings for the British Empire Exhibition pages 170 – 173. See also Wiley Grier and A. Y. Jackson, "Two Views of Canadian Art" from *The Empire Group of Canada Speeches 1925* (Toronto: The Empire Club of Canada, 1926), pp. 97-113.

<sup>89</sup> "Art at Wembley," *Sunday Times*, May 10, 1925; this source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 39.



As was noted above, in 1925 Heward spent time in Paris studying at the Académie Colarossi and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Not much is known of her activities while she was there, except that André Biéler commented that she revealed her conservative background by living on the right bank while all the other artists lived in the bohemian *quartier* on the left bank.<sup>90</sup> Heward's nephew, John Heward, similarly commented on the two worlds that she inhabited in Montreal, where she lived with her mother at 3467 Peel Street:

Tea every afternoon within the Victorian decorated style of the house. In one sense Aunt Prue's world was on the top floor – her art-deco bedroom and studio & where her artist friends and she would spend time. One would be invited up there from time to time, for a cup of tea or she would paint me sometimes – but those are lost. There was that sense of a slightly different world, because you know, her friends would often come to tea with my grandmother, but just as often go up to her room – to that world.... It was almost a separate apartment; a large studio. She did have some sort of sitting room up there... I think it was just a section of the studio.

Despite this conventional approach to daily life, Heward continued to develop her painting skills as can clearly be seen in her work *At the Theatre*, 1928 (fig. 8). On the occasion of the *Fifth Annual Exhibition of Canadian Art* in Ottawa in 1930, an article was published in the *Regina Saskatchewan Leader*: “[Heward] is on her way to Paris at present so is missing the comments overheard in the gallery that both ‘Rollande’ and a second picture ‘At the Theatre’ show a deciding advance over her prize- winning canvas of last year.”<sup>91</sup> [That prize-

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<sup>90</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> “Prudence Heward pictures noted. Young Montreal artist shows at Ottawa Pictures of Vigour and Character,” *Regina Saskatchewan Leader*, Tuesday February 4, 1930; also referenced in NGC Archives, “Heward, Prudence (Efa) 1896-1947 Documentation 1927-1952. Book 1”.

winning canvas was *Girl on a Hill*, 1929, (fig. 21) discussed at greater length below.]



Fig. 8  
Prudence Heward  
*At the Theatre*, 1928  
Oil on canvas 101.6 x 101.6 cm  
The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

Heward used eye-catching patterning in the sitters' black dresses and focussed on a variety of geometric shapes to add compositional interest to *At the Theatre* (fig. 8).<sup>92</sup> A. Y. Jackson reviewing her first solo exhibition at William Scott and Sons (Montreal) in 1932 commented: "Interesting lighting, atmosphere and design mark 'At the Theatre' in which the spectator looks across the backs of the audience toward the stage."<sup>93</sup> Heward used a limited palette for the two sitters so as not to distract the viewer's attention from the bold shapes. One sitter's dress is patterned with a curvilinear, irregularly

<sup>92</sup> For a passionate appraisal of this work as well as several other works by Heward see James Campbell, "Young Girls and Old Boys: The Art of Prudence Heward and Edwin Holgate," *Border Crossings* Vol. 25 no. 2 (June 2006), pp. 68-75.

<sup>93</sup> A.Y. Jackson, "Paintings by Prudence Heward Placed on Exhibition in Montreal," *Gazette* (Montreal), April 27, 1932.

shaped motif, and both sitters have their backs exposed so that the black dresses serve as a bold contrast to their exposed and highlighted skin, emphasizing that the viewer is looking at the backs of the women. The inverted parabolas of the pale skin of the women's backs are offset by the inverse pattern created by the chair-backs. Heward partly disguised this patterning by placing the blue shawl over one of the red chair-backs, so that the repetition of colour is broken. The rounded shapes are further extended to the heads of the sitters, not only those closest to the picture plane but also those of the other spectators. Heward portrayed their features, if visible, without modelling, and showed simply the outline of the profile and shoulder of the woman closest to the stage, without painting in the eyes, eyebrows or mouth, while at the same time clearly outlining the shapes of their heads against the blue background. In contrast to the shapes of the heads, the three straight lines in the background provide a rectilinear emphasis, so that the heads in the foreground are boldly contrasted with the rectilinear patterning in the background. Heward spaced these straight lines unequally to provide this contrast. The straight line to the viewer's left balances the raised arm of the sitter on the right, whose profile is clearly imaged as she looks at what is likely a programme held in her right hand. *At the Theatre* thus develops to a high pitch the tentative inclusion of patterning seen in *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6).

Heward produced an unusual composition by presenting her sitters with their backs turned to the viewer. Women at the theatre or attending concerts had been vividly portrayed by many artists, including Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Renoir, stating that the “sexual narrative impugns the status of the young woman so prominently on display” as the theatre was “the site of overt sexual commerce and thus possible compromise to a lady’s reputation.”<sup>95</sup> Renoir’s work features the woman clearly as the one on display; Pollock describes her as “the beautifully painted ‘painted’ lady [who] becomes the spectacle at the spectacle.”<sup>96</sup> The man with his binoculars is the one doing the observing and Renoir captures within one frame the distinctive gender roles that men and women in public were conventionally expected to exhibit. A later work, *At the Concert* (fig 10), was originally to have portrayed Monsieur Turquet, the under-secretary for the fine arts, together with his family, but was altered to portray a woman and a girl in a theatre box. The girl is pictured at an oblique angle but the woman faces the viewer and, although her head is turned at an angle towards the girl, there is no engagement between the two. Instead, the woman is rather passively on display - gazed upon by the viewer and the theatre audience. There is no stage pictured in the painting and this serves to emphasize that the location of the gazes takes place within the audience.

Mary Cassatt, too, portrayed women at the theatre,<sup>97</sup> *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, 1879 (fig.11), and *At the Opera*, 1878 (fig. 12), illustrate the differing representations she employed. In *Woman with a Pearl*

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<sup>95</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Mary Cassatt: Painter of Modern Women* (Thames and Hudson Ltd., London 1998), p. 144.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* See pages 141 – 147 for a description of these works as well as pp. 148 – 150 for a selection of works by Cassatt at the Fourth Impressionist Exhibition in 1879, many of which feature women at the theatre.

(1814-1919) and Mary Cassatt (1844-1926). In *La Loge*, 1874 (fig. 9) and in *At the Concert*, 1880 (fig.10), Renoir portrayed women fulfilling their conventional gender roles by being on display. Although these works by Renoir predate *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) by half a century, these earlier images had become icons of women attending theatre performances by the 1920s when Heward chose to paint a similar theme.



Fig. 9  
Auguste Renoir  
*La Loge*, 1874  
Oil on Canvas, 80 x 63.5 cm  
Courtauld Institute, London



Fig. 10  
Auguste Renoir  
*At the Concert*, 1880  
Oil on canvas, 99 x 80 cm  
The Clark Art Institute,  
Williamstown.

According to the Courtauld Gallery's website for the 2008 exhibition *Renoir at the Theatre: Looking at La Loge*, "at the heart of the painting [is the] complex play of gazes enacted by these two figures seated in a theatre box." Renoir captured the audience that attended performances as well as "the interest in the theatre and particularly the loge as a space for social display [that] was also harnessed by the booming fashion industry which catered to the aspirational middle class."<sup>94</sup> Griselda Pollock also references this work by

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.courtald.ac.uk/gallery/exhibitions/2008/renoir/furtherinfo>. April 23, 2008.

*Necklace in a Loge*, Cassatt painted the woman's body at a similar angle to that of the woman in Renoir's *At the Concert* (fig. 10); she is positioned with her upper body facing the viewer, although the arms are placed differently than they are in the Renoir. The off-the-shoulder dress offers a display of flesh, but



Fig. 11  
Mary Cassatt  
*Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*, 1879  
Oil on canvas 80.3 x 58.4cm  
Philadelphia Museum of Art



Fig.12  
Mary Cassatt  
*At the Opera*, 1878  
Oil on canvas, 80 x 64.8 cm  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

she also holds a fan: a symbol of modest femininity. Her eye-catching dress with its floral decoration, and her hair are in similar tones to the setting. Pollock draws particular attention to the mirror behind her that reflects the lights of the theatre and suggests Cassatt's possible influence on Édouard Manet (1832-1883) in his *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, 1881-1882. In *At the Opera* (fig.12) Cassatt represents a woman positioned and presented quite differently from *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge*. This woman's body is not positioned to be displayed. Rather she is at an oblique angle to the viewer and she looks intently through her opera glasses, completely ignoring the gaze of the viewer

and the audience. Furthermore, her body is covered by black clothing and her dark hair is partly covered by a black bonnet, all of which create a sombre figure, rather than the colourful image in *Woman with a Pearl Necklace in a Loge* (fig. 11).<sup>98</sup> Cassatt, however, has pictured a man among the audience, in the background in the second-tier loge, with opera glasses. He is looking not at the stage, but at the sitter. The figure of the woman occupies most of the picture frame and, although she is clearly the protagonist who dominates the looking, Cassatt nevertheless has included a reference to conventional gender roles, with her sitter simultaneously occupying both an active and a passive role as the observer and the observed. In none of these works by Renoir or by Cassatt is the stage anywhere to be seen. The implication in these works is that the spectacle is the audience, not the performance.

Heward's painting of this theme was thus related to a number of precedents. However, *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) positions the women not facing the viewer (as was the conventional portrayal), nor even at an oblique angle, but instead places the viewer firmly behind the women, subverting the expected view of women on display.<sup>99</sup> Although the stage is empty Heward included it in the work, unlike the examples by Renoir and Cassatt, thus drawing attention to the audience being in the theatre to see a performance, rather than emphasizing the display and the looking that take place among the members of

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<sup>98</sup> Her clothes are in keeping with attending an afternoon matinee rather than being the clothing worn for an evening at the theatre. Cassatt has used the contrast in the clothing as an additional reinforcement of the different representations of these two women.

<sup>99</sup> See also Loren Lerner, "From Victorian Girl Reader to Modern Woman Artist: Reading and Seeing in the Paintings of the Canadian Girl by William Brymner, Emily Coonan, and Prudence Heward," *CCL/LCJ* Vol. 33 no. 2 (2007), pp 19-50. Lerner asserts that *At the Theatre* is "a depiction of a girl's right to look and appraise in a public space."

the audience. Furthermore, the woman in the black patterned dress is reading her program in preparation for the performance, thus further emphasizing that this work is not about the spectacle of the audience, but about attending a performance. In addition, the audience, arranged in rows and viewed from behind, appears to consist only of women, thus removing the representation of the gaze along conventional gender roles. Thus, rather than being on display in public like the women pictured in *La Loge* (fig. 9), *At the Concert* (fig.10) and *Woman with a Pearl Necklace* (fig.11), Heward's women, unaccompanied by men, are pictured as being involved in and occupied with their own interests in a public space. Furthermore, the viewer is drawn into the position of being a spectator, just as the sitters are, closing the usual gap of the viewer as observer and the figure portrayed as the observed: an approach used by Heward herself in earlier paintings such as *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Miss Lockerby* (fig.6). The models Heward used were Sarah Robertson's sisters: another feature of many of her works, in which the models used were family and friends, reflecting the friendship Heward shared with other women and her reluctance to use models other than her acquaintances.<sup>100</sup> *At the Café* (fig.13) is another painting that demonstrates her use of friends as models.

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<sup>100</sup> In a letter to Isabel McLaughlin in 1945 Heward writes: "I hope to get to painting this next week – I have some models coming to see me tomorrow. I hate interviewing them." Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, 2033.37, Box 9.





Fig. 13  
Prudence Heward  
*At the Café*, n.d.  
Oil on Canvas, 68.5 x 58.4cm  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

*At the Café* is an undated canvas, but it appears to have been painted in 1928 or 1929.<sup>101</sup> This is another work picturing Mabel Lockerby,<sup>102</sup> but it shows a number of differences from *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6), painted four years earlier. First, both the title and the background indicate that this work is about something other than a portrait of a woman. Although there is very little information available on this work, it was probably exhibited for the first time in 1948, when it was loaned to the National Gallery by Heward's mother for Heward's *Memorial Exhibition*.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Barbara Meadowcroft 1999, p. 73 gives the date of around 1928; the MMFA archive file # 1950.1036 does not ascribe a date but included in the file is a photocopy of the exhibition catalogue by Meadowcroft 1989, on Mabel Lockerby, in which she cites a date of around 1929. The canvas is signed in the lower right hand corner as "P.Heward", but there is no date or title anywhere directly on the canvas, only labels affixed to the back.

<sup>102</sup> MMFA Archive file 1950.1036.

<sup>103</sup> My thanks go to Jacques Des Rochers, Curator of Canadian Art at the MMFA, for his help in accessing confidential archival files and checking the canvas. It was donated to the MMFA in 1950 by Heward's family. The RCA exhibition listings indicate that *At the Theatre* was exhibited in 1929, but *At the Café* was exhibited neither at the MMFA nor at the RCA. See Evelyn de R. McMann 1981 and 1988.

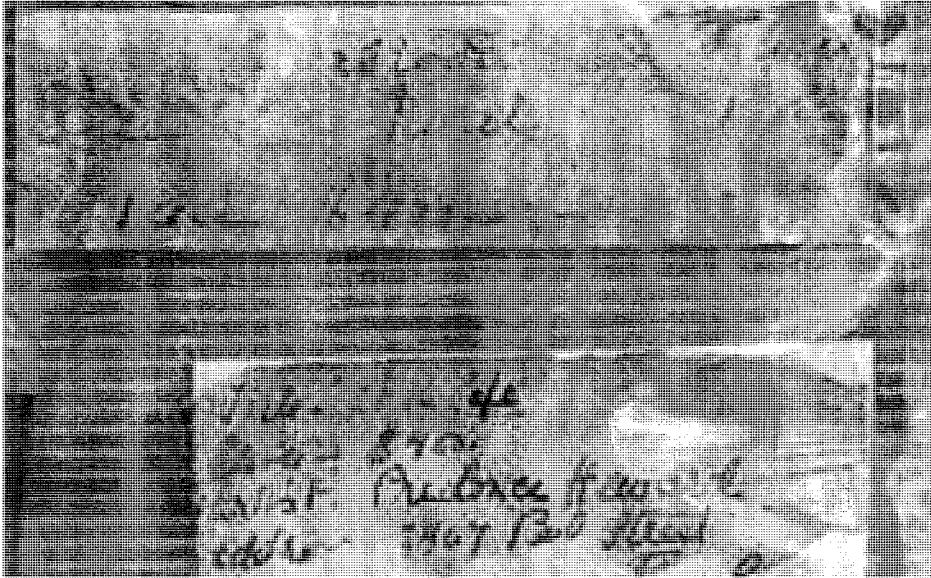


Fig.14  
 Verso of *At the Café* (cropped)  
 Photo MMFA, Christine Guest.

In an enlargement of the labels affixed to the rear of the canvas (fig.14), the first label is in a very bad state and is virtually indecipherable except for price of \$400.00. The second label is clearly readable, listing the title as “At the Café” with the artist “Prudence Heward” and her address. John Heward, Prudence Heward’s nephew, has indicated clearly that Heward named her paintings herself<sup>104</sup> and since this work was painted around the same time as *At the Theatre* (fig. 8),<sup>105</sup> it seems almost certain that the title *At the Café* (fig.13), reflects her intention to portray a woman sitting in a public space. Heward has not included any outward appearances of being in a café with indications of glasses or cups, so that her sitter is portrayed without any extraneous detail deflecting attention from her solidity. Heward had developed her own way of

<sup>104</sup> Interview John Heward October 3, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 73.

conveying her ideas in painting but heeded Brymner's teaching that extraneous detail dilutes the effect of a visual image conveying an idea. The two figures pictured behind the sitter are painted in similar blue tones to the background and as such are not prominently figured, though they are clearly discernible. They are positioned so that Lockerby is imaged as sitting back to back to them, so that she is clearly portrayed as occupying a space in which the only other figures represented in the painting are men. The rounded shape of her head is positioned between the rounded shapes of the men's hats, continuing Heward's interest in patterning seen in *At the Theatre* (fig. 8). The faces of the men are barely discernible and only distinguishable because of their skin colour, thus not distracting from the female sitter, whom Heward painted as wearing bright red and blue. Heward created a confined space for the protagonist by picturing the men as being so close to her: an approach that she would move away from, as will be seen in the discussion of her later works. The sitter's face contrasts with the dark colours of the men and the background which together with the bright colour of her clothes indicates an enhanced approach to the use of colour that Heward incorporated into her composition and which draws attention to the boldness of the figure represented. With economical means, Heward maximized the space occupied by men in the café without distracting attention from the main figure, Mabel Lockerby. The men form part of the backdrop to her image and suggest the confining and still liminal public space that women in Canada occupied when sitting at cafes.

It is certainly possible that the sitter portrayed here was not unaccompanied – it is possible to imagine all kinds of scenarios with all kinds of different people - men, women, artists, even Heward herself, sitting in the café. But within the picture frame Lockerby is one woman positioned pressed up against two male figures. The featureless faces and symmetrical arrangement of these male figures could suggest that they are simply a backdrop, but what is clear is Heward's representation of a woman in a public space where the only other figures pictured are males. Furthermore, the sitter has jewellery on her left finger, but her ring finger, clearly visible, is unadorned, imaging her as a single woman in a café.



Fig.15  
Christian Schad  
*Sonja*, 1928  
Oil on canvas; 90 x 60 cm  
Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

A comparison with works painted at the same time in Germany offers some interesting insights into Heward's work. *Sonja* (fig.15), of 1928, a work by

Christian Schad (1894-1962), was painted in Berlin in the same year as *At the Café* (fig. 13).

The First World War had a profound effect on the countries that had fought in this conflict, whether they were the victors or had suffered defeat. In the aftermath of defeat, with the return of many physically and mentally handicapped soldiers and with the enormous war reparations of the stultifying Treaty of Versailles, Germany suffered economic catastrophe and hyperinflation. The Weimar Republic, set up after the collapse of the monarchy in 1918, lasted only from 1919 to 1933. During this unstable time Germany had fourteen chancellors within the space of fourteen years.<sup>106</sup> Yet Weimar Germany was also a time of great promise since “amid the conflicts and disasters, Weimar was also a moment of great political as well as cultural achievement.”<sup>107</sup> Germany, like many other nations saw many social and political changes, but unlike other nations there was no victory to be celebrated and issues and debates became socially divisive.<sup>108</sup> The political and economic situation in Canada and Germany differed hugely, of course, and art in Berlin was in keeping with the instability and disillusionment that were part of the cultural milieu in the aftermath of the war. On the other hand, German

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<sup>106</sup> Catherine Heroy, “Chronology” in *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 30-46. An overview of the most pertinent events of this unstable time can be found listed in this catalogue published for an exhibition held at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York from November 14, 2006 to February 19, 2007.

<sup>107</sup> Eric. D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Weitz’s book sets out the complex and mixed picture of Weimar Germany and presents the often contradictory social, political and gender values and beliefs.

women were granted the vote in 1918 as well as being granted constitutional equality.<sup>109</sup> In 1919, 41 out of 423 delegates elected to the National Assembly were women, a total of 9.6%, raising hopes that women would participate in large enough numbers to transform the face of public life. In the elections of 1924, this number was reduced to 6.7%, rising slightly to 7.3% in 1928.<sup>110</sup> Thus, although there was initial optimism about the role that women could play in Weimar Germany, disillusionment soon set in.<sup>111</sup> Katharina von Ankum considers that Weimar's contribution to the emancipatory potential for women was the social acceptability of the independent wage-earning life led between adolescence on the one hand, and marriage and motherhood on the other.<sup>112</sup> When the Depression led to high unemployment, married female civil servants were largely dismissed from their jobs, and by 1933 with the rise of the Nazis, women were revered for their roles as mothers and gender equality was no longer valued. During this time, that is after the First World War, Berlin became the capital of sexual licentiousness and permissiveness, in which all forms of sexual gratification were on sale, and it "epitomized modernity, daring,

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<sup>109</sup> For example, Article 109 proclaimed: "Men and women have fundamentally the same civil rights and duties; in Article 119: "Marriage is based on the equality of the sexes." See Helen L. Boak, "Women in Weimar Germany: The 'Frauenfrage' and the Female Vote," in *Social Change and Political Development in Weimar Germany* ed. Richard Bessel and E. J. Feuchtwanger. (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1981), pp. 155-173. See pp 160-161 for further details.

<sup>110</sup> Elizabeth Harvey, "The Failure of Feminism? Young Women and the Bourgeois Feminist Movement in Weimar Germany 1918-1933," *Central European History* Vol. 28 no. 1 (1995), pp 1-28. See p. 6 for the statistics.

<sup>111</sup> Maria Makela, "The Misogynist Machine: Images of Technology in the Work of Hannah Hoehc," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar German* ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp.106-127.

<sup>112</sup> Katharina von Ankum, "Introduction," in *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture*, ed. Katharina von Ankum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-11.

dangerous glamour and worldliness.”<sup>113</sup> With the brazen sexuality permitted and practiced in Berlin, respectable women were offered greater freedom to access public spaces than in Canada or even in most of Europe.

In *Sonja* (fig. 15) Christian Schad (1894-1982) used the Neue Sachlichkeit approach to art to portray a single woman sitting in a café-bar identified by the artist as the Romanische Café, a famous literary hangout in Berlin.<sup>114</sup> *Sonja*, a secretary, is fashionably dressed in a short black dress with a garçonnette haircut and sits by herself unashamedly displaying the accessories of the modern woman: a cigarette in a long holder and a pack of Camels, a brand of strong Turkish cigarettes.<sup>115</sup> On the table next to the cigarettes are a powder compact and lipstick, indicating a renewal of her makeup in public, and thus the modernity of Schad’s sitter. She is framed between two men, both of whom are only partially pictured, creating a similar scenario to the one seen in *At the Café* (fig. 13) by Heward. The sitter self-confidently inhabits this space, as seen in her direct gaze that confronts the viewer, and anyone else in the café-bar. Schad portrayed *Sonja* as the “emancipated, independent woman of the time, who, as a consequence of the First World War, had joined the

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<sup>113</sup> Ian Buruma, “Faces of the Weimar Republic,” in *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed. Sabine Rewald (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 15. This article gives a sense of the decadence that was part of daily life in Berlin. See also Weitz 2007, Chapter 8, “Bodies and Sex” pp. 297 - 330 for a description of the greater social and sexual freedom women experienced at this time and the differing reactions this evoked.

<sup>114</sup> Matthias Eberle, “Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany: A Brief History,” in *ibid.* pp 21-37. This article provides a good summary of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity) while at the same time highlighting the artists’ differing approaches. See also Weitz 2007, fig. 8.1, p. 306 for a photograph of a woman in the Romanische Café.

<sup>115</sup> Sabine Rewald, *Glitter and Doom*, p. 146.

workforce all over Europe.”<sup>116</sup> The table, champagne ice bucket and the black-suited man behind her squeeze her into a narrow space metaphorically suggesting a confined role; yet although Sonja gazes directly out from the canvas with an expressionless look on her face, nothing about her expression encourages anyone to approach her as she reveals that she is self-confident enough to sit alone. Matthias Eberle describes Schad's manner of portraying his sitters as “unapproachable, they maintain their distance.”<sup>117</sup>

Another work set in a café-bar, *The Journalist Sylvia von Harden* (fig. 16) of 1926, by Otto Dix (1891-1969), is a work in which he, as one of the artists known as the Verists, “distilled the appearance of each sitter so that they represented a type.

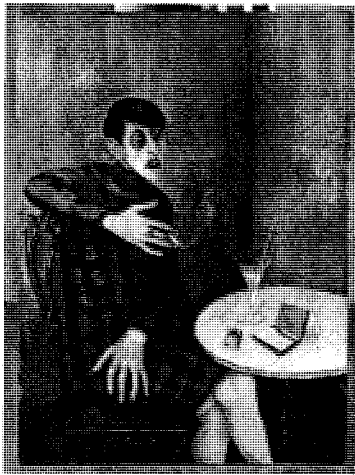


Fig. 16  
 Otto Dix  
*Journalist Sylvia von Harden*, 1926  
 Oil and Tempera on wood. 120 x 80cm  
 Musée national d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>117</sup> Eberle 2006, p. 28.



Ian Buruma agrees:” She [Sylvia von Harden] is certainly a type...But she is also a complete individual, with her tobacco –stained buckteeth, her absurdly large hands, her sleep deprived eyes.”<sup>118</sup> Dix had seen von Harden in the Romanische Café one evening, and felt that her unattractive features would permit him to capture what he saw as the ugliness of the era,<sup>119</sup> just as he had done in his many paintings of men in Berlin. The theme is similar to those of *At the Café* (fig. 13) and *Sonja* (fig. 15) – a woman sitting alone in a public place. But this work shares more features with *Sonja*, in that the place pictured is a café-bar and the women are smoking, conveying the image of the emancipated woman in Berlin at this time. Thus, although there are a number of similarities with Heward’s *At the Café* in their setting, the impression created by these works is very different. Women in Canada, like those in Germany, had been involved in unprecedented numbers in work outside the home during the First World War, thus breaking the more limited roles that women had experienced before the war, but a woman in a diaphanous black dress decorated with a prominently placed flower, her knees visible below the hem of a short dress, sitting alone, smoking in public, as *Sonja* is, was not appropriate for Mabel Lockerby in Canada in 1928-1929 when the reform and temperance movement was strong, although less strong in Quebec than in the rest of Canada.<sup>120</sup> Heward’s work thus reveals a much more conservative stepping out from the

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<sup>118</sup> Buruma 2006, p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> Exhibition catalogue *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, p. 134.

<sup>120</sup> Carol Bacchi, “Women and Reform,” in *Interpreting Canada’s Past, Volume Two: Post Confederation* ed. J. M. Bumstead (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 237-253.

private sphere, in keeping with the society in which she lived. Lockerby, in *At the Café*, is covered up to her neck without any skin (other than her face and hands) revealed and without the hallmarks of the modern woman shown in *Sonja*. The body language that Heward used to portray her - folded arms as well as her downward, askance look - indicate her unapproachability, but unlike *Sonja's* unwelcoming and direct, expressionless stare, hers is shown with a much more demure demeanor. Yet at the same time Heward "captures her independence and strength of character"<sup>121</sup> by using not only a strong triangular form that gives solidity to her image, but also a strong contrast of the red and black in her clothing, as well as emphatic modelling of her face.

It is noteworthy that both *Sonja* and *The Journalist Sylvia von Harden* bear the names of their sitters whereas Heward's work fixes the location in her title, unlike her earlier 1924 work titled *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6). Heward may here be seen to be commenting on the changing space that women were beginning to occupy in Canada, not only by attending performances in venues peopled mainly by other women as in *At the Theatre* (fig. 8), but also by portraying a woman sitting alone in a space in which only men are visible.

In Paris, too, at this time, artists were painting women in modes that reflected changing lifestyles. The First World War had shaken up traditional gender images, societal structures and traditions, and Mary Louise Roberts, discussing how the horror of trench warfare had tarnished the male image of heroic warriors and how women's occupation of jobs considered to be in the

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<sup>121</sup> Evelyn Walters, *The Women of Beaver Hall: Canadian Women Painters* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2005), p. 56.

male domain had upset traditional gender patterns, distinguishes between three types of construction of images of women in Paris after the war.<sup>122</sup> The first of these was the “modern woman,” who was independent and sexually free, outwardly identifiable by her short hair cut in a garçonne style and wearing flapper-style dress. I would add to this description by Roberts that this “modern woman” often smoked in public. The second was of “the mother” who represented tradition and was heavily promoted by the conservative elements within government and society.<sup>123</sup> The third image was of the single woman, a cross between the modern woman and the mother. She was celibate (unlike the “modern woman”), was economically independent, and raised questions about women’s suffrage, education and autonomy. Although Roberts distinguishes between three categories of women that are relevant to her study, in the discussion of Prudence Heward’s works in this thesis only two categories are useful – “the mother” and the woman who was her foil: a combination of the “modern woman” and “the single woman.” The term used for this combination in this thesis, is the “modern woman.” It is noteworthy that a number of Heward’s works use the term “girl” in their title (*Girl on a Hill*, *Girl with an Apple*, and *Girl Under a Tree*, to name a few) when the figure being represented would today be referred to as “woman.” Sally Mitchell argues that in England from 1880 to

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<sup>122</sup> Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917 – 1927* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>123</sup> Jules-Louis Breton, the French minister of hygiene, established awards for worthy mothers of large families known as “Medals of the French Family” in 1920. See “The French Decree Establishing Medals for Mothers (1920),” in *Women, the Family and Freedom: The Debate in Documents. Volume Two, 1880 - 1950* ed. Susan Groag Bell and Karen M. Offen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), pp. 308-309.

1915 girls increasingly became part of a separate culture which was bolstered by the publication of magazines and books which specifically targeted this demographic.<sup>124</sup> These “girls” achieved independence in their lives during the period in which they had left the parental home and before they entered the marital home. The term “girl” was no longer used after they entered marriage.



Fig. 17  
Produced for *Art-Gout-Beauté* magazine,  
Paris, 1921-33

Fig. 17 was produced for the fashion magazine *Art -Gout- Beauté*, produced in Paris from 1921 to 1933.<sup>125</sup> It well illustrates the changes that had taken place leading to the “modern woman” approach to femininity. In hairstyles, fashion favoured a short bob (the *garçonne*). In clothing, dresses emphasized a masculine, straight line rather than the curves of the bust and hips.

<sup>124</sup> Sally Mitchell, *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). See pages 1-9 for a more detailed description.

<sup>125</sup> <http://library.otis.edu/artgout.htm>. April 16, 2007.



Fig. 18  
 Tamara Lempicka  
*Portrait of the Duchess de la Salle*, 1925,  
 Oil on canvas, 161.3 x 95.9 cm  
 Wolfgang Joop Collection

Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980), Polish by birth, had fled to Paris from Moscow. In Paris she took painting lessons with André L'hôte, who influenced the development of her art.<sup>126</sup> She painted using an art deco style and achieved recognition with her works which “[match] the vertical cities...in the backgrounds of her canvases with those superb, arrogant characters downstage who often look us straight in the eye to give us their orders.”<sup>127</sup> In *Portrait of the Duchess de la Salle* (fig.18), we see the use of background to situate and comment on the life of the female figure within a modern city. The

<sup>126</sup> Alexander Borghese, “The Alien Gaze,” in *Tamara de Lempicka: Elegant Transgressions* (Montreal: The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>127</sup> Jean-Marie Drot, “Luxe, Calme et Volupté,” in *ibid.*, p. 7. For a more detailed analysis of de Lempicka’s style and influences, see the essay by Maurizio Calvesi, “Tamara, The Horizons of Style,” in *ibid.*, pp. 11-21.

woman is confident and self possessed, imaged in a bold stance more characteristic of male portrayals, an impression enhanced by the masculine clothes she is wearing.<sup>128</sup> Her dominant positioning focuses the viewer's attention on her, but the backdrop comments on the modernity of her life within a modern metropolis. De Lempicka's bold art, fleshy nudes, exotic and erotic figures, as well as her own bohemian lifestyle propelled her into notoriety in Europe in the 1920s and 30s at a time when women were admitted freely to the largest art institutions and exhibition societies in Paris but were mostly excluded - as anything other than muses, models and mistresses - from the circles of avant-garde artists.<sup>129</sup> Paula Birnbaum argues in her thesis on the Société des Femmes Artistes Modernes, an organization that existed in France from 1931 to 1938, that in the establishment of a separate organization created exclusively for women artists a deliberate commitment to the development of professional roles for women artists was being expressed.<sup>130</sup> However, within the social and political interwar context in France, a strongly conservative institutional and government-led reconstruction campaign permeated the lives of French citizens.<sup>131</sup> Even Picasso, the giant of modern art, subservient to no-one else's ideologies, who had led bold avant-garde experiments in art before

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<sup>128</sup> See Luckyj 1986, p. 59 and note 5 p. 73 for comments on the possible influence of de Lempicka's works on Heward's compositions. The pose, as Luckyj mentions, carries a strong affinity to the one in Heward's *Rollande*.

<sup>129</sup> Paula Birnbaum, "Femmes Artistes Modernes: Women, Art, and Modern Identity in Interwar France." (Ph.D. Thesis. Brawr College, 1996.)

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Kenneth E. Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). This book is a comprehensive socio-historical study of the influence on images in art and popular culture of the political swing to the right in France.

the war, can be seen to have foregone his experimental cubist style in preference for what has been named his “classical” period. In the early 1920s he produced a number of images of mothers and their babies in this style, of which the work below is an example (fig.19).



Fig. 19  
Pablo Picasso.  
*Mother and Child*, 1921  
Art Institute of Chicago

Paul, Picasso’s son, was born in 1921, the year this work was painted, but it was also the year that the *Exposition Nationale de la Maternité et de l’Enfance* took place in the Bois de Boulogne. Propaganda images of motherhood were ubiquitous and were used to communicate a woman’s civil and national duty to produce children. This can be seen in such works as a 1920 poster by H. Lebasque (fig. 20). This poster pictures a woman nursing one of her two children, referencing the duty of women to produce a number of children. Just as men are imaged as contributing to the reconstruction of France by their industrial production, so women are valued for their work in human reproduction.



Fig. 20  
H. Lebasque  
Poster for Peace Loan, 1920  
Private Collection<sup>132</sup>

A swing to the right from the left had taken place at the start of the war. At that time an appeal for a *union sacrée* in which differences were set aside to encourage citizens to rally to the defence of France, combined with the assassination of the socialist leader Jean Jaurès on the eve of mobilization, had given the power to the conservative right.<sup>133</sup> The right retained its power after the war and sought to return women to their traditional roles of being mothers and railed against the more liberated feminine elements that encouraged women to disguise their feminine attributes of busts and hips.

There were therefore two contradictory cultural messages in postwar France (and elsewhere) to which women were exposed and to which artists responded:

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 26.



In certain cases, contradictory images of sexual liberation and traditional femininity coexisted in the oeuvre of an individual artist, or even simultaneously in one specific work of art. Such a discrepancy addresses an ideological tension between progressive and conservative social values that all members of the FAM [Femmes Artistes Modernes] confronted as both women and artists in the interwar period in France.<sup>134</sup>

The bulk of Lempicka's works does not portray women in traditional feminine themes or visual imagery, but she did produce works of mothers with their babies, as in *Mère et Enfant* (fig.21) which in its classical allusions is evidence of the post-war *rappel à l'ordre*.



Fig. 21  
 Tamara Lempicka  
*Mère et Enfant*, 1931/32.  
 Oil on panel. 32.4 x 24 cm  
 Beauvais, Musée départemental de l'Oise

In Canada, but in Quebec in particular, motherhood was also presented as an essential characteristic of women. Although Heward lived within a predominantly English, Protestant milieu, she would have been aware of attitudes within the city and province in which she lived.<sup>135</sup> This propaganda

<sup>134</sup> Birnbaum 1994, p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> We know she had contact with the Biéler family, Swiss Huguenot immigrants whose family language was French.

was most evident within the French-language media since it was the Catholic Church in particular that promulgated women's duty to produce numerous offspring. In Quebec the French-Canadian population in particular was called upon to heed the call of the *revanche du berceau* and with the medicalization of motherhood, Andrée Levesque writes, "Le discours est alors uniformément nataliste,"<sup>136</sup> thus illustrating the strong emphasis placed on motherhood. Together with the pro-natalist stance within the official discourse in Quebec, whether from doctor, priest or politician, socially the most highly revered figures within the community, the mother was praised for her love and self-sacrifice. Church services at Lent in Notre-Dame church, in 1925 and in the following years, were filled to overflowing with women, segregated from the men and praised for their feminine "nature" and their obedience to their duties. These sermons were widely disseminated in the media and it was generally accepted that these nurturing and self-sacrificing characteristics were innate. For women who did not marry, this innate nature could be exercised as a nun, a teacher or by caring for parents.<sup>137</sup> As Levesque points out, not only were these prescriptions within discourse, but the laws, practices and institutions made these claims material to women's lives.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Andrée Levesque, *Résistance et Transgression: Études en Histoire des femmes au Québec* (Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1993), p. 71.

<sup>137</sup> For a more detailed account with many examples of the dominant discourse see Andrée Levesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919 – 1929* trans. M. Klein, (Montréal: Les Éditions du remue-ménage, 1994).

<sup>138</sup> Levesque 1994, pp. 40 – 52. Yet, in her book she also outlines the "deviant" behavior seen largely within the working classes and positions the "deviance" against the retrogressive norms in Quebec that were antagonistic to any form of modernism.

Infant mortality was high in Canada and worst in Quebec, where one in three babies died before reaching their first birthday and where gradual medicalization and scientism was applied to motherhood.<sup>139</sup> Yet, in spite of these mixed messages – women are ideally suited by nature to be mothers but on the other hand they need to receive training and medical advice from male doctors to be good mothers – the exhortation continued for women to follow their primary calling of producing babies.



Fig. 22  
*La Revue Moderne*  
April 1925

This image (fig.22), titled *Amour Maternel*, printed on the cover of the publication *La Revue Moderne* in April 1925, pictorially conveys the strong messages and influence that were promulgated by the church, the provincial

<sup>139</sup> Katherine Amup, “Educating Mother : Government Advice for Women in the Inter-War Years,” in *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* ed. Katherine Amup, Andrée Lévesque and Ruth Roach Pierson (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 190-210.

government and many sectors of society within Quebec.<sup>140</sup> This publication was among the first magazines to target the mass market of Quebec women, and although it featured advertisements and articles encouraging a rising consumerism among women, this cover - with its anachronistic juxtaposition of the modernist title of the magazine with the conservative photograph - reflects the extent to which the image of women was still intimately tied to motherhood.<sup>141</sup>

However, although Heward lived in Montreal where the French-Canadian society extolled women's value within motherhood, she did not paint women within a maternal composition nor within the nurturing role assigned to them in the dominant discourse. Even her paintings of children picture them alone and not within a maternal setting. *The Farmhouse Window*, 1938, located at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, for example, pictures a young girl staring out at the viewer with a wide eyed expression; yet she is not reaching out to the viewer, but dealing with her own interior world in a surprisingly mature manner for so young a child. Through her siblings, Heward was exposed to mothers with babies, but she chose to paint her nieces and nephews once they were older, thus confirming her choice not to create *maternité* images. The women in *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Miss Lockerby* (Fig. 6) are not pictured within a nurturing context either, but they conform to the traditionally accepted gender role of

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<sup>140</sup> Image reproduced in Lévesque 1994, p. 25.

<sup>141</sup> Suzanne Marchand, *Rouge à Lèvres et Pantalon : des pratiques esthétiques féminines controversées au Québec 1929-1939* (Lasalle, Québec : Hurtubise HMH, 1997), p. 28. This book is interesting in that it traces the rise of consumerism in Quebec while juxtaposing the enormous power the rigidly conservative Catholic Church exercised over the lives of the French Canadian population and the women in particular.

being on display, rather than meeting the viewer's gaze as an equal. On the other hand, however, I have argued that, as Heward honed her artistic skills, her works exhibited more complex portrayals of women's place within society as well as sophistication of composition, colour and form. Both *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) and *At the Café* (fig. 13) reveal the subtle interplay of Heward picturing the changes taking place socially, as they applied to unaccompanied respectable women occupying public spaces.

Another change that was taking place within Canada and Quebec was a population shift away from the countryside. The drift into the cities with the urbanization of the population, a drift that had begun at the turn of the century, continued apace, with its impact on the lives of both men and women.<sup>142</sup> In 1851 14.9% of the Quebec population was urbanized. By 1901 the proportion had risen to 36.1% and by 1931 to 59.5%.<sup>143</sup> The opportunity for paid employment for women within an urban environment was far greater than was available within a rural environment. Certain occupations provided positions that were often associated with the traditional female qualities of caring and nurturing, such as domestic work, nursing, teaching, selling in stores and that a working in the needle trade.<sup>144</sup> In addition, clerical work became "feminized" so minimum of training was required for what was seen as temporary work until

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<sup>142</sup> Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, trans. Robert Chodos, *Quebec: A History 1867-1929* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Publishers, 1983). In Chapter 8 titled "Quebec: An Urban Society," the authors trace the rise of urbanization in Quebec.

<sup>143</sup> Leroy O. Stone, *Urban Development in Canada: An Introduction to the Demographic Aspects* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967), p. 29.

<sup>144</sup> Graham S. Lowe, "Women and Work," in *Interpreting Canada's Past, Volume Two: Post Confederation* ed. J. M. Bumstead (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 395-420.

marriage, transforming what had largely been a male preserve into repetitive work with little chance of promotion for those who performed these tasks. From 1911 to 1921 the number of female clerks as a percentage of the total female labour force increased from 9.1% to 18.5%.<sup>145</sup> Thus, although women were an increasing part of the labour force, thereby gaining a greater degree of independence by earning their own income, the opportunities for the more highly paid professional positions remained a male preserve. *Girl on a Hill*, 1928, (fig. 23) among other allusions, references the rural to urban population movement as women moved into the cities and entered the workforce.



Fig. 23  
Prudence Heward  
*Girl on a Hill*, 1928  
Oil on canvas, 101.8 x 94.6 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

In stark contrast to *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Miss Lockerby* (fig. 6) *Girl on the Hill* bears many of the distinctive hallmarks of portrayals of women that Heward would continue to produce as she developed and honed her skills in

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p. 399.

representing her ideas of the changing roles of women. In 1929 this work won the prestigious Willingdon Prize<sup>146</sup> and the reporter for the *Morning Citizen* in Ottawa wrote: “The supremacy of Prudence Heward’s *Girl on a Hill* was unquestionable and the picture is one of the most vigorous and individual painted in Canada recently according to competent critics.”<sup>147</sup> The painting received a favourable mention in the *Revue Populaire*, with Johanne Biétry Salinger commenting: “Jeune Fille sur la Colline par Prudence Heward reste une solide peinture, de grande tenue et de composition bien soutenue.”<sup>148</sup> A.Y. Jackson in a letter to Sarah Robertson (postmarked Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> 1932) wrote: “The CNE [Canadian National Exhibition]...not much of a show...The Canadian section better hung than usual but a mixed lot...Prue’s *Girl on the Hill*...one of the outstanding things.”<sup>149</sup>

The woman is identified in *The Passing Show*, as Louise McLea, a professional classical and modern dancer, especially gifted in interpreting oriental rhythms. She had her own studio as well as designing the costumes for her own performances and those of her students.<sup>150</sup> She was, therefore, a professional and publicly known figure in Montreal, and Heward painted her as an easily recognizable person. Yet, the work is not titled with her name, just as

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<sup>146</sup> Lord Willingdon, Governor-General in Canada from 1926 to 1931 established the Willingdon art competition for excellence in painting, sculpture, literature and music in 1928.

<sup>147</sup> “Competitive Works on Exhibition at National Gallery,” *Morning Citizen*, Ottawa, May 17, 1929.

<sup>148</sup> Johanne Biétry Salinger, “L’Exhibition d’Art Canadien aux Etats Unies,” *Revue Populaire* Vol. 23 (March 1930), p. 7.

<sup>149</sup> NGC Curatorial Files, *Girl on a Hill*.

<sup>150</sup> *The Passing Show* Vol. 5 no. 1 (Oct 1930). Copy filed in NGC Curatorial files.

*At the Café* (fig. 13) did not name the sitter as Mabel Lockerby. As noted earlier, Prudence Heward titled her works herself, and this combination of generalization in the title with the particular in the image was to become a feature of many of her paintings in which she insisted on the public spaces her figures occupied, while muting their personal identities.<sup>151</sup>

The development of Heward's use of background as seen in *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) and *At the Café* (fig. 13) continues in *Girl on a Hill*. A.Y. Jackson, writing for the *Montreal Star* on the occasion of Heward's first solo exhibition at W. Scott and Sons in 1932, pointed out: "Miss Heward in her portraits never allows the setting to become just a background, but it is always an integral part of the picture. As a result her paintings are pervaded with a unity of form, feeling, colour and theme."<sup>152</sup> Heward used the trees to create the impression of a proscenium arch, also referred to as a "picture frame stage" in the theatre, to both frame the landscape in the background and to frame and position the figure close to the picture plane. The woman is portrayed as being on a raised level, a hill, just as a performer is on a stage – a particularly public place and the most public of the spaces that Heward had shown her figures occupying, at a time when Canadian women were breaking the private/public gender divide of earlier times. The sitter's simple but loose-fitting chemise dress, which minimizes the bust and waist line and reveals uncovered arms, neck and legs, is in keeping with the style of the more liberated fashions of the

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<sup>151</sup> My thanks go to Brian Foss for this observation.

<sup>152</sup> A.Y. Jackson, "Paintings by Prudence Heward Placed on Exhibition in Montreal," *Montreal Star*, April 27, 1932; copy filed in NGC Archive file "Heward, Prudence (Efa): Documentation 1927-1952 # 1.



day.<sup>153</sup> “The 1920s produced the postwar woman who appeared as a bosomless hipless and thighless creature”<sup>154</sup> – in other words, the “modern woman.” The allusion to McLea’s profession of modern dance is her bare feet, which are thrust prominently towards the viewer in an unusual pose that draws attention to them. She is therefore portrayed as a modern professional woman who looks out directly from the canvas, actively engaging the viewer on her own terms with her direct gaze.

What further differentiates this work from the earlier paintings discussed above is the insertion of landscape as a prominent theme. This was to remain a hallmark of many of Heward’s portrayals of women. This background contrasts with the wilderness that the Group of Seven was portraying by imaging the neat, cultivated fields that reference the cultural heritage of rural communities. Heward’s inclusion of landscape that references Group of Seven paintings will be discussed at length below in Chapter Two. In *Girl on a Hill*, Heward shows the landscape as devoid of humans cultivating the land, thus also differentiating it from the regionalist works of artists who were especially valued in Quebec: artists such as André Biéler, whose work is illustrated in fig. 24. Quebec artists, and especially francophones, used rural imagery to convey their traditions and cultural ties to the land, creating images that differed immensely from the “wilderness” images used by the Group of Seven as part of the Group’s attempt to create a Canadian national art.

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<sup>153</sup> Constance Eileen McCarthy Collard, *Woman’s Dress in the 1920s: An Outline of Women’s Clothing in Canada during the Roaring Twenties* (Burlington, Ontario: E.Collard, 1981). See pp. 17, 19 and 31 for hemline length and 19 and 31 for simple chemise styling.

<sup>154</sup> Op. cit., p. 15.

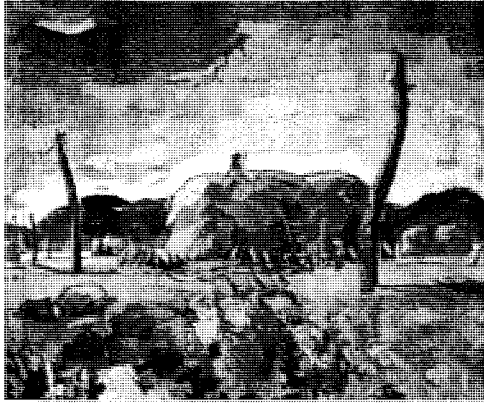


Fig. 24  
 André Biéler  
*Haying, Ile aux Grues*, ca 1928  
 Oil on Board  
 Private collection

Heward, too, used rural rather than wilderness imagery. The most striking aspect of her use of rural imagery is her refusal to link her female figures to an identification of women as nature. The fact that Heward presents a well-known urban figure with a rural backdrop and prominently pictures the soles of her feet covered with dirt, can also be interpreted as a reference not only to her modern barefoot dancing career but also to her recent ties to the countryside. Both these interpretations enrich the reading of this work. The road that is prominently featured disappears, blocked by the figure as if commenting on the unclear path that lay ahead. It is fitting that Heward's painting of a modern professional dancer was accompanied – in her winning of the Willingdon Prize – by public recognition of her professional status as an artist.

In this chapter I have demonstrated Heward's development from an artist who produced conventional portraits of women as seen in *Eleanor* and *Miss Lockerby*, to one who painted unusual compositions that comment on a

changing social milieu focusing on the public spaces that women were increasingly occupying in Canada without male escorts, and leading up to a painting in which a professional modern dancer is shown with a reference to the shift from a rural life to an urban one. Furthermore, Heward's choice of background to amplify the visual instantiation of these ideas was beginning to be a key component of her work. The changes that she brought into her art would continue to be incorporated into her works as her career progressed.

In the next chapter, Heward's works of the middle years, from 1929 to 1939, are examined within the social and political context in Canadian culture and society. Three of Heward's works are discussed: *The Bather*, 1930; *Dark Girl*, 1935 and *Hester*, 1937. These are works in which her choice of background played a crucial role as she challenged the status quo of the representation of women in the Canadian nation.

## Chapter 2.

### The Middle Years: 1929 – 1939.

In this chapter, three of Heward's paintings are discussed within the framework of the intersection of nation, gender and race. The Group of Seven and their dominance in the Canadian art scene is positioned as the visual embodiment of the Canadian ideal and the ideas of Homi Bhabha are elucidated to reinforce Heward's challenge to this status quo.



Fig. 25  
Prudence Heward  
*The Bather*, 1930  
Oil on canvas, 162.1 x 106.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Windsor

*The Bather* (fig.25) is discussed in terms of gender bias and at the same time, two of Heward's paintings of black women: *Dark Girl*, 1935 (fig. 26) and *Hester*,

1937 (fig. 27) are examined, since in my reading of these three works, Heward directly challenges the construction of Canadian identity and the position assigned to white and black women.



Fig. 26  
Prudence Heward  
*Dark Girl*, 1935  
Oil on canvas, 91.5 x 99cm  
Hart House, University of Toronto



Fig. 27  
Prudence Heward  
*Hester*, 1937  
Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 88.9  
Agnes Etherington Art Centre

Female suffrage was one of the most visible issues for feminism and lay at the nexus of the social and political change that was taking place in Quebec during the years 1929-39. Societal dislocation caused by increasing industrialization and urbanization had resulted in women in Canada taking a strong role in reforming social patterns by engaging in activities such as the temperance movement and promoting child welfare that nurtured their organizational skills that were utilized in fighting for the franchise. In the main, as Canadian women agitated for the vote, they did not set out to change

women's roles but to highlight their importance as society's nurturers and as "Mothers of the race."<sup>155</sup> Unlike suffragettes in Britain, women in Canada generally did not flaunt the law but used petitions and lobbying to bring about changes.<sup>156</sup> Political expediency related to conscription led to white women gaining the federal vote in 1918 and the provincial vote by 1922.<sup>157</sup> The exception was Quebec, where this right was not granted until 1940.<sup>158</sup>

The history of the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste (FNSJB) highlights the dominant conservative and nationalist forces at work in Quebec during the first half of the twentieth century. English and French women had worked together to reform society in Montreal under the umbrella of the National Council of Women of Canada. Some French-Canadian women, Marie Gérin-Lajoie (1867-1945), Josephine Dandurand (1862-1925), and Caroline Béique (1852-1946) had worked together with the English Protestant movement until 1907 when the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste (FNSJB) was founded.<sup>159</sup> The FNSJB was closely linked with the conservative Catholic clergy who saw female suffrage as a threat to the family. The archbishop of Montreal, Mgr Bruchési, declared: "There will be no talk in your

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<sup>155</sup> Carol Bacchi, "Women and Reform," in *Interpreting Canada's Past: Volume Two: Post-Confederation*, ed. J.M. Bumstead (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 237-253.

<sup>156</sup> Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Bruce & Co., 1988), p. 190.

<sup>157</sup> Edgar McInnes, *Canada: A Political and Social History* (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1969), pp. 484-489.

<sup>158</sup> Marie Lavigne et al., "The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Women's Movement in Quebec," in *A Not Unreasonable Claim. Women and Reform in Canada: 1880s - 1920s*, ed. Linda Kealy (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1979), p. 71.

<sup>159</sup> Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, trans. Robert Chodos, *Quebec: A History, 1867-1929* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Publishers, 1983), p. 446.

meetings of the emancipation of women, of the neglect of her rights, of her having been relegated to the shadows, of the responsibilities, public offices and professions to which she should be admitted on an equal basis with man.”<sup>160</sup> This attitude was shared by the government, with Henri Bourassa declaring: “The alleged ‘right’ to vote is only an aspect of the *functions*, the social *responsibilities*, that devolve on man as a result perhaps of his physical or mental structure but primarily of his position and duties as head of the family.”<sup>161</sup> However, agitation for the franchise and improvement of the economic and legal status continued among many of the French-Canadian women and Marie Gérin-Lajoie often played a leading role.<sup>162</sup> Married women in Quebec had the same legal status as minors and the husband had total legal authority concerning civil rights for both his wife and children until 1931.<sup>163</sup>

In spite of having gained the federal franchise, positions in the Senate were closed to women, leading to a Supreme Court verdict in 1928 that women were not “persons” and therefore not qualified to be appointed to the Senate in Canada. The Privy Council in Britain decided the word ‘persons’ included

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 446. There are numerous publications that deal with this subject. A succinct summary can be found in Paul-André Linteau et al., chapter 29, pp. 441- 450.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 448. See also Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, “Henri Bourassa and ‘the Woman Question,’ ” in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Womens’ History*, ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 104 -115.

<sup>162</sup> Marie Lavigne et al. 1979, pp. 73-76 and Paul-André Linteau et al. 1983, pp. 447-449.

<sup>163</sup> See Linteau 1983, pp. 187-188 for a description of the legal incapacity of women in Quebec.

females.<sup>164</sup> The effect of these gains for women had differing consequences. On the one hand, many within the dominant male cultural establishment feared that societal structures would collapse with dire consequences for the family. On the other hand, feminists looked forward to a new age of freedom and choices. Thus, both groups had expectations, either of fear or hope, of a "new day" and a "new era."<sup>165</sup> The consequence for the conservatives was a battening down of the hatches and a shrill and insistent promulgation of motherhood.<sup>166</sup> Similarities abound with the situation in France discussed in Chapter Two. Motherhood and the underlying attributes of a nurturing and supportive female nature, that had already been naturalized, were continued within this female stereotype. Carine Wilson, the first woman appointed to the Senate (in 1930), felt compelled to reassure her male peers of her priorities by confirming that "while engaged in public affairs the...mother of the family by reason of her maternal instinct will remain the guardian of the home."<sup>167</sup> In fact, many historians have noted the rise in what has commonly been dubbed "maternal feminism" with the interpellation of behaviour amongst women that

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<sup>164</sup> For a full discussion of this case see Beverley Baines, "Women and the Law," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* ed. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 157-183.

<sup>165</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), p. 1. See Introduction, pp. 1-5 for a succinct summary of the changes in and constraints on womens' roles during this period of flux. The rest of the book elaborates on this summary.

<sup>166</sup> Andrée Lévesque, *Making and Breaking the Rules: Women in Quebec, 1919 - 1939* trans. Yvonne M Klein (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1994).

<sup>167</sup> Franca Iacovetta, " 'A Respectable Feminist' The Political Career of Senator Carine Wilson 1921-1962," in *Beyond the Vote. Canadian Women and Politics*, ed. Linda Kealy and Joan Sangster (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 63.



reinforced the stereotype of gentle and nurturing femininity.<sup>168</sup> On the other hand, economically, women were increasingly taking positions in the workforce. By 1931 women represented 16.96% of the workforce in Canada; this number increased to 19.85 % in 1941.<sup>169</sup> In 1931 only 3.5% of married women worked outside of the home, reflecting the attitudes towards the importance of marriage, children and home-making.<sup>170</sup> In 1941 24% of Quebec women were employed outside of the home,<sup>171</sup> and although the federal government remained reluctant to call upon married women to join the war effort, by 1944 the labour shortages were so great that recruitment included married women with children.<sup>172</sup>

Little is known of Heward's personal convictions and no diary appears to exist. However, John Heward, in commenting on the women of the Heward family, stated: "My impression is of [a family of] strong women, but very contained in the social fabric of the time. Not revolutionary by any means. They had a social conscience but in a rather established way. They did charitable

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<sup>168</sup> Karine Hébert, "Une Organisation Maternaliste au Québec la Fédération National Saint-Jean-Baptiste et la Bataille pour le Vote des Femmes," *Revue d'Histoire Amérique Française* Vol. 52 no. 3 (Hiver 1999), pp.315-344. This article surveys the struggle for the female franchise in Quebec through the lens of maternal feminism.

<sup>169</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag 1988, p. 43. See chapter 2 "Working for Pay," pp. 41-80.

<sup>170</sup> Susan A. McDaniel, "The Changing Canadian Family: Women's Roles and the Impact of Feminism," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, ed. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), p. 428.

<sup>171</sup> Michèle Martin, "Women and Media in Quebec" in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, *ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>172</sup> Sandra Burt, "The Changing Patterns of Public Policy," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, *ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

work & so on.<sup>173</sup> On the other hand, he also stated that although Prudence Heward lived within a “gentle, genteel social environment ... she had a strong need or will to state something.”<sup>174</sup> Her nephew Heward Grafftey states: “She was physically frail but strong willed and had developed her own points of view on many subjects. Her strength of will and character showed in her paintings.”<sup>175</sup>

As was demonstrated in Chapter One, Heward’s art indicates an awareness of the position of women within Canadian society and she almost certainly recognized the possible power and influence that women could wield as franchised voters. It is also of significance that Prudence Heward never married or had children.<sup>176</sup> With the carnage that had been wreaked on young men during the First World War, the proportion of women to men of a marriageable age was decidedly skewed, resulting in many young women remaining unmarried and earning their own living.<sup>177</sup> Her friendship with women in the Beaver Hall Group confirmed she was not an exception and these and

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<sup>173</sup> Interview October 3, 2006.

<sup>174</sup> John Heward, interview in Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie, *By Woman’s Hand* [film] by Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie; producers Merit Jensen Carr, Pepita Ferrari, Kent Martin; co-produced by Animations Piché Ferrari and the National Film Board of Canada, (Montreal : National Film Board of Canada, 1994).

<sup>175</sup> Heward Grafftey, *Portraits from a Life* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, c.1996), p. 70.

<sup>176</sup> She did, however, maintain a relationship with her cousin, Frank, about whom she often wrote to Isabel McLaughlin referencing their almost weekly Saturday afternoon walks and more explicitly, in a letter dated March 14, 1936, stating: “I wish Frank didn’t have a wife and children.” Queen’s University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, file 2033.37, Box 8.

<sup>177</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Viking Press, 2007). Although this book is written on British women in England, it paints the picture of single women living within a society that expected marriage and motherhood of women. It portrays how women adapted to earning a living and building friendships to sustain themselves and shares a commonality with a number of countries, like Canada, that had participated in the war.

other close female friendships, as with Isabel McLaughlin, shielded her to a certain extent from the prevailing ideology and narrow validation of women as mothers. She did, however, live with her mother, and within the prevailing ideology caring for parents satisfied the nurturing and self-sacrificing ideal of women who did not marry and have children.<sup>178</sup> Of course, due to Heward's ill health, the roles in fact were reversed, with her mother caring for her. John Heward expressed the close relationship Heward shared with her mother: "My grandmother was a very strong Victorian matriarch and Aunt Prue was very devoted to her."<sup>179</sup>

Heward's artworks nevertheless make it clear that she railed against the "nurturing woman" stereotype, and sought to create a third space of dialogue outside the narrow confines of the dominant tropes of the virile, independent man and the "other," the white woman, naturalized as the nurturer, supporting her husband and children.

The theoretical framework that is used in discussing Heward's three works discussed in this chapter – *The Bather*, *Dark Girl* and *Hester* – is based on Homi Bhabha's concepts of stereotype, mimicry, hybridity and third space. This theoretical framework will enrich the interpretation of Heward's works and Bhabha's concepts are discussed before the paintings are examined. Usually Bhabha's theories are used in the context of colonizer and colonized, but his theoretical framework can also be used productively to situate the meaning of

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<sup>178</sup> Levesque 1994, p. 26.

<sup>179</sup> Interview October 3, 2006.

images in a much broader context. In addition, Homi Bhabha and commentators on his writing usually include a sentence that links race, gender and class, but the ensuing discussions that take place pivot on race as the dominant trope, with gender and class playing a subordinate and dependent role. Yet, when looking at these three works it seems that the ideology of nationhood, of identity, of politics, as well as the discursive and material experiences of Canadian women in the interwar period intersect with his concepts of stereotype, hybridity and third space. Homi Bhabha's theory can equally well be used to investigate the interplay that takes place between the dominant group – the group at the centre – and those viewed as “other”.

The creation of identity within nationhood relies heavily on fixity in the construction of otherness.<sup>180</sup> Groups that are “othered” by the dominant group are relegated to the margins and are spoken about in sweeping generalizations that employ a kind of timeless verb tense – the eternal present of ‘is’.<sup>181</sup> This “is” uses as its tool the concept of “nature” in which traits are naturalized and thus are not contingent and changeable. The stereotype is the main instrument of this fixing process. The dominant group enjoys fluidity within the cultural space; but the stereotype is denied this fluidity. “Others”, that is, those who are relegated to the margins, threaten the integrity and pretended universality and inevitability of dominant cultural norms and categories.<sup>182</sup> Because of an

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<sup>180</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 66.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71

inability to accept true alterity, the dominant forces subdue others by trying to fit them into categories of stereotypes which have been set by the dominant group.

The cultural "other", the one that the figure in *The Bather* (fig. 25) subverts, is the white woman who is labelled as nurturing and emotionally supportive. The black working-class woman who is labelled both as unskilled in her labour and sexually provocative in her role as "primitive" is subverted in *Dark Girl* (fig. 26) and *Hester* (fig. 27). Third space and hybridity theories are two means of looking at the interplay that exists between any dominant, normative practice and the "other". Hybridization comes in when one engages in the displacement of stereotypes. As mentioned previously, stereotypes rely on or are vehicles of fixing the other; they are representations that pretend to stand outside temporality, by, for example, being naturalized and therefore being immutable.

Bhabha indicates that there is no one homogenous political object.<sup>183</sup> Each political object, citizen or social being is determined in relation to others and political objects/subjects define their discursive positions in opposition to/in accordance with that which surrounds them. Customs and conventions are in no way fixed and hybridity encourages us to view them as already linked.

Third space opens up a site of discourse - a dialectical place - where neither social antagonism nor contradiction exists. In discursive temporality - in

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

third space - there is "*negotiation* rather than *negation*".<sup>184</sup> In this interstitial space of translation there is an opportunity for the construction of a new political object that need be neither colonizer nor colonized, to use Bhabha's vocabulary or, in my interpretation, fixed dominant group and fixed margins. The act of communication is not a dialogue between an 'I' and a 'you'. The production of meaning requires that both poles/places come together in a third space that is the home of neither one, nor the other. Third space takes place outside of the usual static temporality of cultural utterances, - outside of the domain of developmental hierarchy and of cultural fixity.<sup>185</sup>

The parts of Homi Bhabha's theory that are applicable to the interpretation of Heward's three paintings having been explicated; they will now be applied. The first step in the argument is to reiterate the monolithic nature of the construct of Canadian identity that closely linked geography and national character and to show how Heward challenged this status quo in these three paintings.

Both Carl Berger<sup>186</sup> and Cole Harris<sup>187</sup> write that Canada as a nation was constructed by using the geography and climate in the rugged and harsh north

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37.

<sup>186</sup> Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free" in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 3-26.

<sup>187</sup> Cole Harris, "The Myth of the Land in Canadian Nationalism" in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 27-43.

to create the myth of what E. W. McBride called a "conquering type of man."<sup>188</sup> Berger quotes Lawren Harris: "we were aware that no virile people could remain subservient to and dependent upon the creations in art of other peoples."<sup>189</sup> Note the use of the term *virile* as an ideal term for a nation, that is, not subservient and dependent. This terminology indicates the belief that a nation, to be recognized as an independent entity, must have the male-gendered characteristic of virility. Although this concept is common in the construction of nation and nationalism within many western nations, it is in the co-mingling and the interdependence of the visual image with the nationalist cultural context in Canada that to which I draw attention in my reading of the intersection of Prudence Heward's art and that of the Group of Seven.<sup>190</sup> The iconic image of the lone, buffeted, yet still standing, rugged pine symbolizes the strong and virile image of the lone individual heroically able to withstand the trials of climate and location. Charles Hill points out that Arthur Lismer had painted a windblown pine tree amid rocks and ice in 1916, but "the symbolic image of the single tree was first developed by Thomson in the two paintings he worked on during the winter of 1916-1917, *The Jack Pine* (NGC) and *The West*

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<sup>188</sup> Berger 1966, p. 20. This description, quoted by Berger, is drawn from an article published by E.W. McBride, "The Theory of Evolution," *The McGill University Magazine* no. 1 (April 1902), pp. 244-262.

<sup>189</sup> Berger 1966, p. 21

<sup>190</sup> Charlotte Macdonald of the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, after my paper on Prudence Heward at the Californian conference "Working Girls: Women's Cultural Production during the Interwar Years," October 2007, pointed out how New Zealand followed a similar nationalistic path during this time with Rita Angus' paintings providing many similarities to Prudence Heward's works.

*Wind* (AGO).<sup>191</sup> Recognizing its symbolic significance of this symbol, renditions of it were painted by several members of the Group of Seven, as in, for example, Arthur Lismer's *A September Gale - Georgian Bay* of 1921 (NGC), F.H. Varley's *Stormy Weather, Georgian Bay* (NGC), also of 1921, Frank Carmichael's *The Upper Ottawa, near Mattawa* (NGC) in 1924 and Lawren Harris' *North Shore, Lake Superior* (Vancouver Art Gallery) in 1926. These works reveal the frequency and the duration over time during which this image was rendered by members of the Group. Furthermore, to quote Maria Tippett: "the bushwacking image of the artists in search of the 'real' Canada was decidedly male."<sup>192</sup> Lismer used the term "bushwacking" in 1934 to describe the Group of Seven.<sup>193</sup> Charles Hill also references the exclusionary male membership within the Group as the "brotherhood," adding that they were "united by the mystical number seven."<sup>194</sup> Without dwelling on polysemic interpretations, it is worth noting that many of the works by the Group of Seven convey the female gendering of landscape as untouched nature serving as a storehouse to provide sustenance for a nation and the burgeoning male activities of logging and of being fire rangers. It was within this dominant cultural context that Prudence Heward produced *The Bather* (fig. 25).

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<sup>191</sup> Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven: Art for a Nation* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1995), p. 314.

<sup>192</sup> Maria Tippett, *By a Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women* (Toronto: Viking, 1992), p. 68.

<sup>193</sup> Arthur Lismer, "Works by 3 Canadian Women," *Montreal Star*, May 9, 1934.

<sup>194</sup> Hill 1995, p. 21



To further set out the milieu in which Prudence Heward honed her artistic skills, it is important to point out the position occupied by the Group of Seven within the national and international art scene during the 1930s. As a reflection of their stylistic and thematic images, Charles Hill calls the art they produced, Canada's "national school."<sup>195</sup> He furthermore points out that their dominance within the art scene created the impression internationally that this was the only worthwhile, modern type of art being produced within Canada. While the Group did not stand out by numbers in exhibitions, it was their work that caught the attention of critics and the public alike, and this has led both Charles Hill and Dennis Reid to write of their influence. Brian Foss writes that "the British Empire Exhibition (1925; Wembley, London, [which was] where the Group definitively established itself as a dominant force in Canadian art)" provides a date by which the Group was recognized for the influence they held in Canada.<sup>196</sup> Thus, the dominant style of painting within Canada at the time that Prudence Heward produced these artworks was rugged Canadian landscape, devoid of humans.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Charles C. Hill, *Canadian Painting in the Thirties* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), p. 21. See also Dennis Reid, *The Group of Seven* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970), p. 173.

<sup>196</sup> Brian Foss, "Living Landscape" in *Edwin Holgate, 1892-1977*, ed. Rosalind Peppall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), p. 53, note 21.

<sup>197</sup> Much of the recent criticism has argued that the Group of Seven's iconic pristine landscape scenes misrepresented the actuality of man's involvement in the North with the extensive logging of the white pine and the building of dams that had already taken place at the time the Group of Seven were working in the Canadian north. Andrew Hunter, presents a counter-argument pointing out the extent to which Thomson's works, in fact, capture these effects. Of course, Thomson was not a member of the Group of Seven, having died before the Group was formed, but his works bear the hallmarks of the type of iconic landscape the Group were to feature in their works. See Andrew Hunter, "Mapping Tom," in the exhibition catalogue *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid. (Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto, 2002), pp. 19-45.

Yet this fact is partly mitigated by Heward having grown up in Montreal. Although she was part of a well to do English family and moved mainly within English circles,<sup>198</sup> living in Montreal meant there was a certain counter influence to the dominant Canadian art milieu. Within Quebec there was a strong regionalist movement in which the emphasis was on the local inhabitants with the celebration of their customs and traditions, in works produced by artists such as André Biéler, for example, as demonstrated in Chapter One (fig. 24).

Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter One, Heward's formal art education at the AAM under William Brymner and Randolph Hewton meant that figure painting assumed a greater importance for her, as it did for a number of artists in Montreal, and Heward participated in an art milieu that encouraged the use of the human figure. By emphasizing this counter-influence exerted by her Montreal art milieu, I do not wish to create the impression that the Group of Seven did not dominate the art-scene that Heward was part of. I do, however, want to acknowledge that by being in Montreal, she was part of a cultural environment that was complex and subtly different than what she would have experienced had she been living outside of Quebec. Furthermore, her international exposure, away from the Canadian art scene, permitted her a wider view of trends in art, far removed from the dominant Group of Seven milieu in Canada. As was noted in Chapter One, Anne Savage, at Heward's 1948 memorial exhibition held in Montreal, drew attention to Heward's knowledge and interest in French painting and the modern techniques used by

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<sup>198</sup> John Heward when asked how much mixing there was with the French-Canadians in Prudence Heward's life answered: "Not very much back and forth in Montreal; two solitudes." Interview October 3, 2006.

Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso that reinforce her development away from the influences of the Group of Seven.<sup>199</sup> In this chapter it is argued that she invoked references to the Group of Seven as a means of subversion, which can be seen, for example, in the background in *The Bather* (fig. 25) that seems to reference Harris' Lake Superior images, such as *Morning, Lake Superior*, painted about 1921 -1928 (fig. 28).



Fig. 28  
Lawren Harris  
*Morning, Lake Superior*, 1921-1928  
Oil on canvas, 86.3 × 101.6 cm  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts



Fig. 25  
Prudence Heward  
*The Bather*, 1930  
Oil on canvas, 162.1 × 106.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Windsor

Harris' work presents pared down rocks ground smooth during the ice age in which all extraneous shapes were removed. The clear portrayal of the underlying structure creates a sense of timeless monumentality. The thin paint smoothly applied to the surface of the canvas does not disturb the timelessness

<sup>199</sup>NGC Archives, "Heward, Prudence (Efa) 1896-1947 Documentation 1927 – 1952. Book 1".

of the image by introducing the fixed time element of the hand of the artist into the art production. At this time, Harris was no longer dating his works, possibly wishing to universalize the particular. The dates have been assigned based on when he is known to have made trips to Lake Superior, hence the rather extensive period ascribed to the work. The rocks are earth-coloured to emphasize their connection to the Pre-Cambrian shield: rock formation dating from one to two billion years ago that covers most of Quebec, Ontario and parts of Saskatchewan, uniting a large part of the country geologically.<sup>200</sup> The rocks in the background in Prudence Heward's *The Bather* echo the smooth, simplified structure used in Harris' work, but the colours she used create a difference. This is in line with what Bhabha calls "mimicry."<sup>201</sup> The aspect that is "almost the same, *but not quite*" where "mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference..... is itself a process of disavowal."<sup>202</sup> In Harris' work, *Morning, Lake Superior*, the rocks are painted an earth-tone brown, but Heward has painted the rocks blue, a colour associated with the male gender, but on the edges, she has used pink, the colour associated with the female, which may be interpreted as a reflection on the gender bias that permeates the Group of Seven's work: what Lismer in 1934 called the bushwacking art that the Group produced.<sup>203</sup> Heward uses the colour of Harris'

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<sup>200</sup> "Precambrian Shield" in Government of Saskatchewan Online, October 3, 2007  
<http://www.ir.gov.sk.ca/Default.aspx?DN=3577,3569,3539,3538,3385,2936,Documents>.

<sup>201</sup> Bhabha, 1994, pp. 85 – 92.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>203</sup> Arthur Lismer, "Works by 3 Canadian Women," *Montreal Star*, May 9, 1934.

rocks as the dark opaque colour of the water in her work. This echo, but with a difference, considered in Bhabha's term may be seen as the "gaze of otherness... [that] liberates marginal elements and shatters the unity of man's being through which he extends his sovereignty."<sup>204</sup> Within the interpretation argued here, it seems likely that the colour of the rocks emphasizes the hybridity of male and female roles. What was more subtly conveyed in the background is now clearly articulated. The rocks, one of the signifiers of the virility of the Group of Seven landscape, here are brightly coloured in pink, the colour associated with the feminine, contrasting with the mauve surface and also with the more representative brown of other rock surfaces surrounding the woman in *The Bather*. Mauve is the mixture of blue and pink, which in my interpretation indicates the hybridity of male and female roles as the division of public/private along gender lines was being eroded. The interplay of these colours on the recognizable Group of Seven landscape thus displays both mimicry and hybridity.

In addition, the sitter's bathing suit is coloured in various shades of blue, a colour associated, as noted above, with males. The upper part of her bathing suit almost exactly follows the shape of the colour division in the rock to the viewer's left of the figure, which is painted in pink, further reinforcing the displacement of the stereotype by the interplay of hybridity. The rocks that surround the figure have both sharp pointed edges and curves. In these shapes are the mixture of both semi-phallic symbols and the curvaceous attributes of

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<sup>204</sup> Bhabha, 1994, p. 89.

femininity, which yet further express the interplay and ambivalence manifest in mimicry and hybridity.<sup>205</sup> This effect is heightened since the curves that bear traces of Harris' smoothed rocks are also the shapes here linked with feminine curvaceousness. At the centre of the dominant culture in Canada was the virile, independent man invoked by the rugged landscape and "bushwacking" images conveyed in the paintings by the Group of Seven. The "other" was the woman naturalized as the nurturer and care-giver, as described above.

Comparison of the *Fire Ranger*, 1926 (fig. 29), by Edwin Holgate (1892-1977) with Heward's *The Bather*, highlights the positioning of the figure in the landscape and semiotic implications.



Fig. 25  
Prudence Heward  
*The Bather*, 1930  
Oil on canvas, 162.1 x 106.3 cm  
Art Gallery of Windsor



Fig. 29  
Edwin Holgate  
*Fire Ranger*, 1926  
Oil on canvas, 55.9 x 45.7 cm  
Hart House, University of Toronto

<sup>205</sup> My thanks go to Brian Foss for drawing my attention to the gendered portrayal of the shapes in both the rocks and the bathing suit.

We see the virility explicitly expressed in Holgate's the *Fire Ranger* of 1926. Ironically, the fire ranger has a pipe in his mouth although his job is to protect the forest from fire, but of course, the image of the pipe is symbolic. Some "modern women" were smoking cigarettes, but never a pipe, since a pipe was a signifier of manliness. The angle at which the fire ranger is portrayed emphasizes his dominance. We, as the viewers, look up at him and he fills the canvas surface, heroic and dominating the background mountain and forest he is to protect. It is his head, not the mountain, which rises to the highest level. When contrasting this with the figure of the woman in *The Bather*, we see how differently these two figures are portrayed. The *Fire Ranger* is positioned close to the picture plane with the forest imaged behind him. Although the woman pictured in *The Bather* is front and centre it is a toss-up whether it could be stated that she is contained within the landscape or occupies a dominant position. The ambivalence of her position echoes the middle ground that hybridity manifests - neither one nor the other, but containing elements of both. But it gets even more interesting when we look more closely at the position of the viewer. The sitter's upper body indicates a position level with the viewer as the sitter makes eye contact at our height. By contrast, when we look at her lower body, we are situated up above her, placing us, the viewers, in the dominant position and echoing the ambivalence of her position in the landscape.

The subterfuge of Heward's mimicry is extended by the way in which she used the light on the water. To fully realize the significance of this

representation, it is key to point out the importance of Harris' role in the Group and his own philosophical leanings. He was a vocal spokesman for the group; he was wealthy and able to provide the financial support for the group's expeditions to northern Ontario, including Lake Superior, by renting the boxcars that afforded the members of the Group practical accommodation in the wilderness. But there is an additional resonance to Heward's use of Harris' works on Lake Superior. Harris was a theosophist, to whom light had a spiritual dimension. It was in these works of Lake Superior that his underlying philosophy was clearly articulated in his images.<sup>206</sup> Yet in Heward's work, this image and its spiritual light are partially obstructed by the figure of the woman in the foreground. The changing social condition of women in the 1920s and the 1930s pointed to changes within society in regard to identity and nationhood. Bhabha's mimicry and hybridity within the background representation are clearly articulated in the play of light in *The Bather*, which Heward used to reference Harris' painting and the male-biased stereotyping that confined women.

Geography and climate defined Canadian nationalism and as such immigrants from northern climes were considered ideally adapted to living in a cold climate. Southerners were considered to be less appropriate and people of colour were deemed unsuitable. Berger deals with the racial bias that formed an integral part of the construction of Canadian nationalism.<sup>207</sup> As early as 1911

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<sup>206</sup> See an unpublished essay titled "Lawren Harris: Paintings of Algoma and Lake Superior" 1999 by this writer.

<sup>207</sup> Berger 1972, pp. 4 – 24.



the Minister of the Interior had obtained permission to prevent the immigration of Blacks<sup>208</sup> into Canada, ostensibly, due to their inability to adapt to the climate.<sup>209</sup> From 1892 to 1912, during the time of the arrival of large numbers of immigrants to Canada, fewer than 1000 Blacks were listed as arriving in Canada, compared to 2.3 million non-Blacks.<sup>210</sup> According to the census, there were a total of 862 Blacks living in Montreal in 1921.<sup>211</sup> The total population of Montreal was listed as 618,506, making the Blacks a small percentage of the total population. This small number explains why histories of Canada and Quebec generally do not include Blacks except for brief sentences.<sup>212</sup> In spite of their small numbers Blacks suffered discrimination in their housing and as a result, a small black ghetto had formed around the area of St Antoine Street by 1921.<sup>213</sup> Immigration statistics indicate that of the Blacks who came to Canada, most of the men were listed as unskilled and working class and the women as domestic servants.<sup>214</sup> The employment of Blacks in Montreal was almost totally uniform. By 1928, 90% of all the working black men were employed by the

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<sup>208</sup> I use the term "Blacks" since this grouping is comprised of African-Americans, Caribbeans, Canadians and British and this term serves to include these separate groupings in one term. Furthermore, this term highlights their racial difference, which lies at the basis of the argument of this chapter.

<sup>209</sup> Dorothy W. Williams, *Les Noirs à Montréal 1628 -1986* trans. Pierre Desruisseaux. (Montreal: VLB Éditeur, 1998), p. 67

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 51

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 174

<sup>212</sup> Dorothy W. Williams *The Road to Now: A History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997), p. 13.

<sup>213</sup> Williams 1998, p. 174.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

railways. Black women, regardless of their skills, were almost all employed as domestics.<sup>215</sup> The years of the Depression were difficult for Blacks and by 1933 close to 80% of the Union United Church congregation was unemployed.<sup>216</sup> The picture that emerges is of a small community indelibly marked by both class and race.

In *Hester* (fig. 27) there is a similar approach at work as in *The Bather* with reference to the Group of Seven, but there are also discernible differences.



Fig. 27  
Prudence Heward  
*Hester*, 1937  
Oil on canvas, 121.9 x 88.9  
Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston.

There is a marked dissonance between the modelled figure and the flattened ground. In addition, the incongruity of the nude female so close to the picture plane, sitting out in the open, with her bare back against a tree in a landscape raises the question as to why Prudence Heward would portray such dissonant

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<sup>215</sup> Williams 1997, p. 39.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

images. Yet, as has already been stated in Chapter One, A.Y. Jackson wrote: "Miss Heward in her portraits never allows the setting to become just a background, but it is always an integral part of the picture. As a result her paintings are pervaded with a unity of form, feeling, colour and theme."<sup>217</sup> In this case the emphasis is on theme, that is, on the instantiation of an idea. The background to the figure is a composite of certain elements that the Group had included in their representations of the rugged north.

The portrayal of the lone tree has already been shown to be symbolic and iconic in works by the Group of Seven. Yet, once again, mimicry is at play in Heward's rendition. The tree is up front and close to the picture plane – so close that only the lower part of the trunk and branches are captured in the image. Prudence Heward's tree reaches beyond the picture frame in all directions, comprising by its position and size an insistence on attention and resulting in mimicry by excess.<sup>218</sup> The bark is shown as rough and textured, which emphasizes the discomfort and dissonance of the nude sitter's skin against its roughness while at the same time commenting on the dissonance of the iconic symbol of identity and nationhood embodied by the pine tree as portrayed by the Group and Heward's rendition of the black woman pictured leaning up against its trunk. The contrast between the trees – both the large one up front and the smaller ones in the middle ground – without their foliage, and the verdant green setting in which these trees as iconic symbols are

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<sup>217</sup> A.Y. Jackson, "Paintings by Prudence Heward Placed on Exhibition in Montreal," *Montreal Star*, April 27, 1932.

<sup>218</sup> Bhabha 1994, p. 86.

located, serves to emphasize the mimicry and the hybridity. There is a pictorial image of sterility at play within these references to the Group of Seven's trees. These trees are shown as devoid of life. Contrasted to the barren landscape elements referencing the Group of Seven within Prudence Heward's images, there is, nevertheless, life and regeneration in other elements. In *Hester* (fig. 27) it is evident in the dominance of the green foliage surrounding the bare trees. In *The Bather* (fig.25), out of the stony surface of the rocks in the foreground, springs a small plant, dominated by the surrounding rocks, but forming a contrast in colour and texture. The implication seems to be that for Prudence Heward, the pictorially, culturally and politically male-dominated landscape of identity and nationhood had become sterile and that growth and regeneration in the future lay with a different approach to women – both white and of colour.

There was little understanding of the work and even less of the plant in



Even "The Bather" made the artist hungry. He thought it was a cook watching a salad sprout with forks, spoons and all!

Fig. 30  
*Evening Telegram*, November 25, 1933

its foreground when *The Bather* was exhibited at the Canadian Group of Painters exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto in 1933. Kenneth Wells in the *Evening Telegram* commented: “a woman sitting in a bathing suit, surrounded by nothing and waiting for the salad to grow.”<sup>219</sup> A cartoon ridiculing Heward’s *The Bather* and a number of other works in the exhibition was published, though in the illustration (fig. 30) I have singled out Heward’s work.<sup>220</sup> For both the cartoonist and Kenneth Wells, the greenery pictured was taken literally and the symbolism that I have identified above was ignored or misunderstood.



Fig. 26  
Prudence Heward  
*Dark Girl*, 1935  
Oil on canvas 91.5x99cm  
Hart House, University of Toronto

In *Dark Girl* (fig.26), the background does not participate in Bhabha’s mimicry, vis-à-vis the Group of Seven, but it is of utmost significance in

<sup>219</sup> Kenneth Wells, “What You Don’t See Looking at Modern Art,” *Evening Telegram*, November 25, 1933; copy filed in NGC Archives and this source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 43.

<sup>220</sup> “An Artist Draws His Impression of Expressionist Art,” *Evening Telegram*, November 25, 1933. This source is also cited and is reproduced in full in Luckyj 1986, p. 43.

challenging the construction of Canadian identity. A study, in oil on board, and known to me only in black and white, is not titled nor dated (fig. 31). Luckyj's exhibition catalogue assigns a date of c.1935 and titles it as *Sumachs – Study for preparing the background separately before the figure itself is worked on*.<sup>221</sup>



Fig. 31  
Prudence Heward  
*Sumachs – Study for Background of Dark Girl*, c.1935  
Oil on panel, 30.5x35.5 cm  
Private Collection

What is interesting, when comparing the study to the final work side by side are the changes Heward made to the foliage. She maintained the two main branches with their leaves at the same angles, but she opened up the downward branches to form an inverted V and placed the figure within these branches. The effect is to create a protective envelope around the figure.

Pegi Nicol in 1936 at the second exhibition of the Canadian Art Society

<sup>221</sup> A number of backgrounds prepared as oil on plywood or panel indicate the work method Heward often used eg *Apple Tree*, 1935 at the NGC and the finished work titled *Ellen*, 1935, privately held; *Sunflowers*, 1936 at the NGC and *Negress with Sunflowers*, 1936, private collection. Another good example is the background for *Girl at the Window*, 1941 – both works are held at The Art Gallery of Windsor.

an exhibition in which *Dark Girl* was exhibited - wrote: "For jungle flora background, Canada provides the sumac."<sup>222</sup> Charmaine Nelson agrees with Pegi Nicol that the background is "jungle flora", but assigns an interpretation of the painting which is at variance with that proposed in this chapter. Nelson writes: "the deliberate evocation of a tropical and seemingly impenetrable setting recalls colonial perceptions of Africa as the 'dark continent', a mysterious and impenetrable place teeming with moral and sexual vice"<sup>223</sup> I agree with Nelson's interpretation that the reading of this background could be a visual allusion to a stereotypical reference to Africa, with its connotations of primitivism and tropical climate. However, I disagree with Nelson's conclusion that Heward was conforming to representations that portray black women as stereotypes in *Dark Girl*. Rather it seems reasonable to me to argue for another interpretation of this background: that it evokes the prejudice evinced by the Canadian authorities against the immigration of "unsuitable" immigrants from warm climates. The issue is thus precisely the realization that this "jungle flora" is sumac, which is part of Canada's flora that survives the cold climate and in fall adds to the variety of colours with its diversity. The evocation of "jungle flora" could be interpreted as a way of undercutting the prejudice evinced towards Blacks in Canada. An additional argument in support of this interpretation is that Heward travelled to Bermuda to visit her friend Isabel

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<sup>222</sup> Pegi Nicol, "The Passionate Snows of Yesteryear," *The Canadian Forum* Vol.16 no. 183 (1936), p. 21.

<sup>223</sup> Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Coloured Nude': Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy." (M. A. Thesis. Concordia University, 1995), p. 21.

McLaughlin at various times from 1936 to 1939.<sup>224</sup> During these years she painted a number of her black nudes - but after she had painted *Dark Girl* – so that if she had wanted to provide stereotypical tropical backgrounds for her later works of black nudes, she had the opportunity to do so. The image below (fig. 32) is an example of a landscape by Heward that bears all the hallmarks of a tropical setting with similarities to the one used by the Canadian painter Dorothy Stevens (1888-1966) titled *Coloured Nude*, 1933 (fig. 32). Yet no Heward black nudes with Bermuda landscapes as backgrounds are known: a fact which re-enforces this chapter's interpretation of *Dark Girl*.



Fig. 32  
Prudence Heward  
*In Bermuda*, 1939  
Oil on canvas, 63.6 x 56 cm  
National Gallery of Canada



Fig.33  
Dorothy Stevens  
*Coloured Nude*, 1933  
Oil on Canvas, 86.4 x 76.2 cm  
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Barbara Meadowcroft in *Painting Friends* writes: "[Prudence Heward was] a painter who selected backgrounds and accessory details for symbolic as well

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<sup>224</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 33.



as pictorial values" <sup>225</sup> The brightly coloured sumac, with its allusions to tropical vegetation, but clearly identifiable as Canadian, makes a strong statement against the prejudice towards Blacks during a time when jobs were scarce, resulting in a backlash against immigration and against those who were not considered part of the dominant culture. With reference to the "jungle flora" the plant is seemingly out of place, but at the same time is easily recognizable as a Canadian plant that sustains itself in the cold northern climate, echoing metaphorically the fact that Blacks were not unsuitable exotic temporary transplants, belonging to a foreign tropical country, but positioning them as citizens of Canada. This illustrates how the backgrounds used in Heward's works during this period play an integral role in the visual instantiation of her ideas. This was a time, when as Dorothy Williams states "economic insecurity led to intensified discrimination", <sup>226</sup> and Heward may thus be seen to be challenging prejudices that were intensified under difficult economic circumstances.

The backgrounds Heward used in *The Bather*, *Hester* and *Dark Girl* and their significance in challenging ideas of what being Canadian meant, have been discussed, and now the figures themselves will be more closely examined. <sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 106.

<sup>226</sup> Williams 1997, p. 78.

<sup>227</sup> See Emeny 1999, for a discussion on the portrayal of the body of *The Bather*, nudes and the experience of women in the "wild" zone. pp. 39-59.

When *The Bather* was first viewed in 1933, it became the target of some of the most hostile criticism displayed in the Canadian Group of Painters exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto. The body was described by Augustus Bridle as a "gloomy flesh figure."<sup>228</sup> Kenneth Wells in his article in the *Evening Telegram*, already referenced in regard to his comments ridiculing the plant describes his negative reaction to the body of *The Bather* as an example of the "larger Canadian rhythms".<sup>229</sup> At the exhibition of the Canadian Group of Painters at the AAM in 1934, both the sitter and the painting were described as follows: "A seated woman in bathing dress...which is uncomfortable in pose, disagreeable in colour and lacking in grace."<sup>230</sup> In this quote the critic correctly identified the dominant features of the work that challenged more conventional representations of women's bodies, but did not comprehend, what it is reasonable to believe was Heward's questioning of preconceived prejudices and stereotyping. Robert Ayre seems to have more fully understood and appreciated the challenge that *The Bather* represented by writing of "Prudence Heward's coarse, vital bather." Summing up a number of the works exhibited, he added: "The pretty, pretty school will not like...Prudence Heward's 'Bather', and so the fight against reaction goes forward."<sup>231</sup> All of these comments

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<sup>228</sup> Augustus Bridle, "New Democracy seen in Latest Paintings," *Toronto Star*, November 3, 1933; copy also filed in NGC Archives "Heward, Prudence (Efa) 1896-1947, Documentation 1927 – 1952, Book 1"; this source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 43.

<sup>229</sup> Kenneth Wells, "What you don't see looking at Modern Art," *Evening Telegram*, November 25, 1933; copy filed in NGC Archives; this source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 43.

<sup>230</sup> "Review," *Gazette* (Montreal), January 3, 1934.

<sup>231</sup> Robert Ayre, "Canadian Group of Painters," *The Canadian Forum* Vol. 14 no. 159 (1934), pp. 98-99.

indicate that Heward had pictured a woman who conformed to neither the expectations, nor the traditions of painting representing a female bather. Although Heward's figure is clothed, the comments indicate that the critics were drawing on some mental image of what a woman's body in a state of undress ought to look like. No mention is made in the articles to well-known French works such as Renoir's works of young, rounded, nude girls, or of Canadian works by contemporary artists such as Randolph Hewton or Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté.<sup>232</sup> Yet, it is evident that the writers had a clear image in their minds how a female bather should be portrayed.<sup>233</sup>

The same hybridity that we have seen in the use of the landscape we can see at work in the bather's posture and her body. It is clearly a woman's body, but the posture and physical strength are more in line with ideas of manliness.<sup>234</sup> The way she is sitting is anything but modest and feminine, with her legs spread wide open facing the viewer. In an advertisement run by the Depuis Frères store in 1939 (fig. 34) there is a depiction of what was considered a suitable bathing suit on a feminine body that is clearly at odds with Heward's solid portrayal. To the side, the smaller figure demonstrates the

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<sup>232</sup> Works such as Randolph Hewton's *Sleeping Woman*, 1929 and Suzor-Coté's *Symphonie Pathétique* and *Summer, Nude*: both of 1925.

<sup>233</sup> In mentioning Canadian artists I do not reference Edwin Holgate's nudes as they conform less to the ideal, softly rounded, feminine body, but it is noteworthy that these critics do not mention these works either.

<sup>234</sup> In reference to the effect of sport on women's bodies one critic is quoted as saying: "The men want the gals to stay beautiful, graceful and sightly." quoted in Veronica Strong - Boag 1988, p. 31.



Fig. 34  
Advertisement in *La Bonne Parole*  
June 1939

"correct" way a woman was to display herself in her bathing costume.<sup>235</sup>

The posture represented in *The Bather* is more in line with an acceptable masculine way of sitting. The figure's right hand is partly hidden but her left hand reveals the strength associated with manliness and without the feminine attribute of tapered fingers, thus reinforcing the lack of stereotypical femininity. The positioning of this hand raises questions of propriety,<sup>236</sup> yet the only published references to possible sexual allusions are Robert Ayres' epithets of "coarse" and "vital," with most of the comments by the critics being related to the sitter's solid body.

<sup>235</sup> *La Bonne Parole*, June 1939 ; source also cited in Andrée Lévesque 1994, p. 59. For the role played by *La Bonne Parole* and other media which targeted women as their audience within Quebec society see Michèle Martin, "Women and Media in Quebec," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, ed. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney ( Toronto: McClland and Stewart Inc, 1993), pp.177-211.

<sup>236</sup> Emeny 1999, pp. 56-58.

In *The Bather* the woman looks out at us, her eyes clearly meeting ours, rather than simply receiving the gaze. Her body language conveys self-assurance, but her facial expression conveys more ambivalence, both being reflective of the changes taking place within women's lives. Economically, women were increasingly taking positions in the workforce, though they were often relegated to inferior positions and paid less than men even when they held comparable positions. Without aggressive confrontation or submission, the bather's demeanour states that she is to be taken as an equal - a location in third space, not silenced and yet not stridently shrieking her "otherness." She is portrayed outside of the usual static temporality of hierarchy and of cultural fixity.<sup>237</sup>

In *Hester* (fig. 27) the woman becomes personalized by the title of the work bearing her name as well as by the clearly individualized features of her face. The stereotype stands outside temporality, but a personal name and clearly identifiable features place the person within a fixed time that serves to undercut stereotyping. The way in which the figure is posed, with the thighs jutting outwards to the viewer, emphasizes the stereotypical view of the large buttocks of black women. Yet every amateur photographer knows not to take pictures of a figure in which part of the body is so close to the picture plane, because of the distortion of size this creates. Thus the way in which Heward has posed her figure raises doubts in the viewer about whether the distortion was due to positioning or to stereotyping, bringing ambivalence to bear on the

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<sup>237</sup> Bhabha 1994, p. 36-37.

visual effect. When this work was exhibited at the Canadian Group of Painters exhibition in 1938, comments by critics focused on the “ugliness” of the sitter, with the appraisal in Ottawa being: “a hideous, fat, naked negress, with thighs like a prize fighter and a loose lipped leering face.. Obesity and ugliness in the nude...”<sup>238</sup> In Montreal at the AAM the critic in the *Montreal Star* found the work to be: “exceedingly ugly.”<sup>239</sup> It appears that, once again, as discussed with reference to *The Bather*, critics had a different stereotype in mind, more in line with (though diametrically opposed to) the sexually - provocative, primitive, black woman as represented in *Coloured Nude* (fig. 33) by Stevens. Heward clearly portrayed other racial features by painting Hester's large lips a bright red and drawing attention to the flattened shape of her nose by painting it a darker colour than her lighter cheeks. Her hands are placed in her lap, in what can be believed strategically positions them in a number of ways. Firstly, the viewer is led into the work by the thighs that jut out at the viewer in a vertical line, but the hands are placed horizontally, blocking the viewer's path to the pubic area. The nudity that is so blatantly offered to the viewer is blocked and instead a pair of delicately tapered fingers on slender hands is presented. The portrayal of these hands forms a significant contrast with the hands portrayed in *The Bather*. There the hands signify the manliness of the woman in contrast to her femininity, cutting across the stereotype ascribed to women. Here the hands would appear to question the stereotype of the black working-class woman.

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<sup>238</sup> R.B.F. “Canadian Group of Painters Exhibit at Gallery,” *Ottawa Journal*, February 15, 1938; the source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 45.

<sup>239</sup> “Canadian Group of Painters at the Art Association,” *Montreal Star*, January 13, 1938; the source is also cited in Luckyj 1986, p. 45.

The portrayal of her breasts and the folds in her skin cut across the western stereotype of the sexualized black woman of which *Coloured Nude* is a good example.<sup>240</sup> Unlike the figure in *The Bather*, Hester does not look out directly at the viewer. Her look is concentrated off to the side, with her head angled slightly downwards, in a submissive position. As viewers, we are positioned above her lower body, placing us in a dominant position, yet we are placed at the same level with her upper body, echoing the ambivalence of the relationship that we saw in *The Bather*. The line of the tree extends down past her left shoulder and continues past her left elbow, where she appears to be sitting on part of the roots. The intimate link of the pine tree and the figure is further reflected in a similar verticality of both the figure and the tree and physical closeness, with her skin, not her clothes, pressing against the bark. Against brightly coloured vegetation, the colour of her skin, although a lighter shade, echoes the brown of the pine tree. The figure is thus inextricably linked with the iconic image visually associated with nationhood and identity in Canada.

When *Dark Girl* (fig. 26) was first exhibited in 1936 at the second exhibition of the Canadian Group of Painters, opinion was divided. Augustus Bridle referred to the work as "a masterfully ugly figure, semi-nude,"<sup>241</sup> but there was praise from the reviewer of the *Toronto Telegram* who wrote: "a great line

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<sup>240</sup> The stereotype of the sexualized black woman is dealt with at length throughout the thesis by Nelson, 1995.

<sup>241</sup> Augustus Bridle, "Many Gaze Calmly at Picture Exhibit," *Toronto Star*, July 4, 1936.

of beauty and singularly luminous flesh-tones.”<sup>242</sup> Bridle’s comments are in line with what we have already seen written by the critics on *Hester*. The surprise lies in the comment that *Dark Girl* exhibits “a great line of beauty.”

Heward represented the face of the woman in *Dark Girl* as clearly visible and individualized, like *Hester*, but unlike Steven’s *Coloured Nude*, a work in which the figure’s left arm is raised to hide her eyes from the viewer, and in which her face is hidden in shadow, not only giving the viewer uninhibited access to the gaze, but also creating an anonymity which underscores the commodification of her body. Her contrapposto stance emphasizes her curvaceous sexuality. The symbolically phallic bananas growing in profusion close to her body top off the sexualized representation. The result of the clear portrayal of the face of the sitter in *Dark Girl* is a well-defined person who becomes much less easy to stereotype. Her eyes make contact with the viewer and call for an affective response through this shared gaze. Heward could have portrayed her looking downwards, averting the viewer’s gaze, but instead, by the sitter meeting the viewers’ gaze, the viewer is pulled into the recognition of a shared vulnerability and humanity. Anne Savage in her speech at the opening of Heward’s memorial exhibition in Montreal commented on Heward’s use of the setting and her skill in portrayals: “This compositional art of landscape afforded her such rich settings for her figures and portraits. Her portraits, especially. Those of the later period arrive so easily on a perfectly controlled technique – she was free to liberate the inner spirit of the sitter - the tragedy in

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<sup>242</sup> “Young Artists’ Paintings Feature in Art Gallery Show,” *Toronto Telegram*, July 3, 1936.



the *Dark Girl*... ."<sup>243</sup> The stereotypical tropes of nature and nudity usually used to signify sexual promiscuity and primitivism instead move the representation into what Bhabha calls third space. This is a space where human empathy establishes connection and communication outside of the cultural fixity of stereotyping. For Bhabha the production of meaning requires that both poles/places come together in a third space that is the home neither of the one, nor of the other. Using the signifiers of racial stereotyping of black women - nudity and nature - *Dark Girl* operates seemingly within the normative framework, the stereotype, but turns this framework on its head. Nudity is used to signify vulnerability, not eroticism, and the nature used is Canadian foliage that gently enfolds the figure within its leaves and branches, creating a sense of protection, not a backdrop to enhance the notion of primitivism and eroticism. The effect is that the work appeals affectively to the humanity of the viewer and calls upon the viewer to recognize the vulnerability we all share. Thus, I disagree with Charmaine Nelson, who states: "the deliberate evocation of a tropical and seemingly impenetrable setting recalls colonial perceptions of Africa as the 'dark continent', a mysterious and impenetrable place teeming with moral and sexual vice."<sup>244</sup> More to the point, I also contest the attribution to the sitter of "moral and sexual vice." While it is true that Heward could have portrayed her sitter clothed, it is the vulnerability seen in the expression on the

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<sup>243</sup> The opening address by Anne Savage at Heward's memorial exhibition in Montreal, May 13, 1948. NGC Archive, filed in "Heward, Prudence (Efa): Documentation 1927-1952 # 1".

<sup>244</sup> Nelson 1995, p. 21.

sitter's face in *Dark Girl* that is re-enforced by the nudity of the non-sexualized representation of the black woman's body.

Positioning women – both black and white – in this third space, outside of the dominant cultural norm with its discursive and material practices of which Heward was a part, requires the recognition that she not only had agency, but that she used it. Incorporating Althusser's theory of interpellation into her own theory of the effects of dominant cultural norms on the individual, Judith Butler develops the idea of the performativity of the individual in the iterative enactment of cultural norms. Butler nevertheless makes room for individual agency. This agency is effected when questioning norms and acting against the grain, a concept she calls "insurrectionary speech". This concept can be applied not only to speech, oral or written, but also to visual images, for images play a part in influencing viewers' attitudes, as is evidenced most ubiquitously in advertisements. For Heward to break the representation of the female stereotype in her own portrayals of women was to participate in "insurrectionary speech" that challenged the status quo of gender and racial stereotypes.

### Chapter 3: The Late Years: 1939 - 1947.

In this chapter, three of Heward's works are discussed: *Autumn* also known as *Girl with an Apple*, 1942 (fig. 35), *Mrs Zimmerman*, 1943 (fig. 41), and *Farmer's Daughter*, 1945 (fig. 43).

The context in which Heward's late works were painted is briefly discussed, as responses to certain aspects of the situation in which women found themselves can be seen in her paintings. The Second World War began in 1939 and once again, as in the First World War, women were called upon to take on work that had been performed by men.<sup>245</sup> The National Selective Service registration identified women as a large labour reserve to be called upon to aid in war-related industries, although it was made clear that this policy was due to wartime emergency with women expected to resume their traditional home-maker roles once the war was over.<sup>246</sup> Thus women were faced with an ambivalent attitude in which their labour and expertise outside the home were temporarily prized while their essentialized attributes as nurturers continued to be valued. In 1940 Quebec women were at last accorded the provincial vote, yet "women were still clearly the victims of discrimination.... From a legal point of view women – and especially married women – were still not considered equal to men."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Sandra Burt, "Legislators, Women and Public Policy," in *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada*, ed. Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code and Lindsay Dorney (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 134-135.

<sup>246</sup> Jane Errington, "Pioneers and Suffragists" in *ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>247</sup> Paul-André Linteau et al, *Quebec Since 1930*, trans. Robert Chodos and Ellen Garmaise (Toronto : James Lorimer & Co., Publishers, 1991), p. 148.

During this period, Heward was recognized and acclaimed as an artist and took a leading role in a number of artists' associations: she was a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters (CGP), as well as its vice-president from 1933 to 1939, and in 1939 a founding member of the Contemporary Arts Society (CAS). In her personal life, her health continued to absorb much of her energy and limited the time she had for painting. In 1940 she had a car accident in which she damaged her nose, which exacerbated the breathing problem she had suffered throughout her life in her battle with asthma.<sup>248</sup> In an undated letter in 1945 to Isabel McLaughlin she wrote, "I hope to get back to painting next week – I have some models coming to see me tomorrow,"<sup>249</sup> and in a letter dated July 20, 1945 she stated "I am afraid this letter is going to be very boring as it will be all about my health but as my plans hinge on that I will have to inflict it on you."<sup>250</sup>

A change can be discerned in the paintings of her late years. In the paintings discussed during her middle years (1929 – 1939), she used backgrounds in what has been argued were a pointed reference to the Group of Seven paintings, to challenge attitudes to women. In the paintings analysed in this chapter, there is no reference to the Group of Seven and it seems that her focus is more closely situated on the women sitters, although the background still plays an integral role in her observations, which seem to challenge the

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<sup>248</sup> Pepita Ferrari, "Prudence Heward: Painting at Home," in *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O'Rourke (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pp. 129-133.

<sup>249</sup> Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, file 2033.37, Box 9.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

status quo less, and comment more neutrally on the changes that women were experiencing in their daily lives.

Most of the newspaper articles on Heward's exhibited works painted during this time comment in a generalized way about her artworks, without singling out particular paintings, as was the case in the previous chapters. This means that judging critics' reactions to the particular works discussed in this chapter is generally not possible and thus conclusions as to the reception of these works can be made in only a generalized way.<sup>251</sup>



Fig. 35  
Prudence Heward  
*Girl with an Apple or Autumn*, 1942  
Private Collection

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<sup>251</sup> *Portrait of Mrs Zimmerman*, was exhibited at the AGT in the CGP Exhibition in 1944 under the title *Portrait*, in 1948 at the *Memorial Exhibition*, and in 1975 *From Women's Eyes: Women Painters in Canada*. *Farmer's Daughter* was exhibited in 1955 in Calcutta and in 1980 at the Klinkhoff Gallery. See Luckyj 1986, p. 83 for exhibition details for these two paintings. None of these three paintings was exhibited either at the AAM or at the RCA. See Evelyn de R. McMann, *Montreal Museum of Fine Arts formerly Art Association of Montreal: Spring Exhibitions 1880-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 173 and Evelyn de R. McMann, *Royal Canadian Academy of Arts: Exhibitions and Members, 1880-1976* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c.1981), p. 185.

*Girl with an Apple* (fig. 35) is privately held and to date there is very little scholarship available on it.<sup>252</sup> The woman pictured in *Girl with an Apple* is placed close to the picture plane and dominates the pictorial space. There is a strong emphasis on her body. She is portrayed barefoot and sitting on the ground, which emphasizes her earthiness, and cross-legged in order to portray her whole body while still placing her close to the picture plane. Heward also displayed the flexibility of her musculature with this sitting position and then reinforced the emphasis on her body with the prominent positioning of her bare legs. The strong modelling of her legs draws attention to the body's structure with the knees being shown and the sitter's legs revealing her well-developed muscles. The sitter's left arm is a lighter colour than her right one, and forms an almost exact parallel line with her left leg, helping to draw the viewer's attention into the image, but then blocking it with the dark brown colour of her dress and redirecting the view towards the sitter's left knee. Heward positioned the viewer above the sitter's lower body, looking down, thus affording a larger, wider view of her legs and reinforcing the emphasis on the bare flesh placed close to the picture plane. The bare parts of the sitter's body are contrasted to the dark brown dress she is wearing; similarly, the brown vegetation that surrounds her exposed legs and arms serves to highlight the rich flesh tones Heward used for the unclothed parts of her body. Thus, there is a strong focus on the sitter's body, but the way in which Heward represented the sitter with her cross-legged

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<sup>252</sup> Unfortunately, in spite of a formal request to the present owner via Eric Klinkhoff, the owner refused access to the work. The only scholarship I am aware of is a few comments by Barbara Meadowcroft in *Painting Friends: The Beaver Hall Women Painters* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1999), pp. 89 and 167. This book has this work as the cover-piece. The NGC Archives contain no newspaper articles with references to this work

stance is neither ladylike nor does it conform to conventional poses created to commodify the female body. Heward positioned the top of her sitter's head above the curving background hill, reinforcing the monumentality of her sitter. The latter's face is sandwiched between the dark brown of her dress and her brown hair emphasizes its ruddy complexion and echoing the reddish tones of the apple and of the background, thus linking them. Of note is the unusual placement of the sitter's arms – which then culminate in the apple held in what seems to be a rather awkward position.

Although the most obvious reference is to Eve, there are elements in the painting that this allusion does not explain, namely, the distinctive placement of the arms; the pose of the figure; and the way it is positioned within the landscape. Each feature on its own could be analyzed with a different explanation, but the combination of these three elements – and particularly the placement of the arms - points to what may be an unexpected allusion.



Fig.36  
Mary Cassatt  
A kiss for Baby Anne, 1897  
20 x 24cm<sup>253</sup>  
cm  
Location unknown



Fig.37  
Mary Cassatt  
Maternal Caress 1890-1891  
Dry point and soft ground etching, 36.8x26.8  
cm  
Location unknown

<sup>253</sup> Further details of this work are unknown.

.The unusual placement of the arms would be a more natural position if a baby were being held against the mother's body, as illustrated in figs 36 and 37, while *Madonna and Child* (fig.38) by Raffaello Sanzio, known as Raphael (1483-1520), illustrates the two other elements (pose and landscape) and the allusion that it is possible to see implied in Heward's *Girl with an Apple* (fig. 35).



Fig. 38  
Raffaello Sanzio (Raphael)  
*Madonna & Child (Madonna Conestabile)*, 1504  
Tempera on canvas (transferred from panel) 17.5x18cm  
Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

The pictorial structures of the works by Raphael and Heward are similar - the female figure close to the picture plane (albeit not the whole body portrayed) with a composition in which the triangular shape of the figure is used to convey stability and solidity. The figure is monumentalized by the viewer being placed at a lower level than Mary and therefore looking up at the figure. This allusion to a baby hints at the societal and cultural importance still attributed to motherhood within Canadian and especially Quebec society, and enrich the



interpretation of this work.<sup>254</sup> Thus, Heward placed the sitter with a rich harvest field directly behind her, holding an apple and it is plausible to think that a reference is made both to Nature and to nurturing and growth, all of which are qualities associated with motherhood: female characteristics highly valued in Quebec.

However, within Western imagery, a woman holding an apple is also closely associated with Eve, and this would appear to be at odds with this self-sacrificing allusion of motherhood. The biblical narrative includes a number of consequences of Eve's act of eating the apple from the tree of knowledge, but the most relevant to Heward's work is the sudden awareness by Adam and Eve of their nakedness and thus the awakening of their sexuality. Titian's (1485-1576) *The Fall of Man* (fig. 39) shows Adam's left hand placed ambivalently:



Fig. 39  
Tiziano Vicellio (Titian)  
*The Fall of Man*, c.1570  
Oil on Canvas, 240x186cm  
Prado Museum, Madrid

<sup>254</sup> Karine Hébert, "Une Organisation Maternaliste au Québec la Fédération National Saint-Jean-Baptiste et la Bataille pour le Vote des Femmes," *Revue d'Histoire Amerique Francaise* Vol. 52, no. 3 (Hiver, 1999), pp. 315-344. In this article Hébert argues that the FNSJB strongly promulgated the ideology of maternal feminism and all arguments for the vote were based on the position the mother held in the family, once again reinforcing the argument of the status that was accorded to motherhood within Quebec in the French-Canadian milieu.

an indication of his cautionary response to Eve as she leans over to pick the apple but also strategically positioned next to Eve's breast. Almost four centuries later, the painting *Adam and Eve* (fig. 40) by Tamara de Lempicka,



Fig. 40  
 Tamara de Lempicka,  
*Adam and Eve*, c.1932  
 Oil on Canvas  
 Barbara Streisand Private Collection

modernizes the depiction by adding a metropolis in the background. Unlike Heward's allusion to Eve, de Lempicka blatantly shows the nudity of both male and female figures pressed against the picture plane. The woman's body, in particular, resembles a plastic life-sized doll, rather than a human body, but the sensuality of Adam's touch and gaze is unmistakable. In this portrayal, as in *Girl with an Apple*, the apple has already been picked and is held, not bitten or placed close to the sitter's mouth. Yet unlike Heward's sitter, de Lempicka's female model eyes the apple intently. Even though Heward did not include a number of the iconic features referencing Eve's transgressive act, nor did she portray her figure nude, within Western art a woman holding an apple inevitably

alludes to Eve's yielding to temptation, with her and Adam's subsequent consciousness of their nakedness and sexuality. The earthiness in Heward's sitter, as well as the comfortable sense of her bodiliness, all point to the portrayal of a woman at ease with her sensuality.

The vegetation, with swirling highlights, particularly on the sitter's right, is indicative of an unsettledness and lack of order in what appear to be uncultivated and untamed grasses. Heward was certainly able to portray plant life accurately as seen in *Dark Girl* (fig. 26) and *Hester* (fig. 27) and in her many landscape and still life paintings. Within Western philosophy and thought, order is closely associated with reason and is the antithesis of emotion, sensuality and sexuality. The highlighted curving brushwork is extended immediately behind the sitter's right shoulder. Thus Heward used these swirling and curving brushstrokes in the vicinity of the sitter and it would appear that she was directly relating this lack of order to the sitter reinforcing the reference to Eve's realization of her nakedness after eating the forbidden apple from the tree of knowledge. The band of background red, suggestive of a rich harvest field adds visual and sensorial delight as well as symbolically representing passion. This band of colour follows the same contours as the band of blue representing distant hills and creates the effect of a sensual, rhythmic undulation.

It is reasonable to believe that Heward created a visual "objective correlative" with the various elements she used, to create the sensation of sensuality in the viewer. "Objective Correlative" was a term used by the poet and writer T. S. Eliot in 1919 as follows:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding the 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in a sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.<sup>255</sup>

This is a different aesthetic strategy than we have seen so far. In the paintings discussed in Chapter One, Heward situated her figures in public space and for those in Chapter Two she used visual correspondences to the works of the Group of Seven. In *Girl with an Apple* (fig. 35), it seems probable that Heward was changing her approach away from directly commenting and challenging, to evoking an emotional response in the viewer. In *Dark Girl* (fig. 26) it was pointed out how Heward created an affective response in the viewer,<sup>256</sup> but dominant within that painting was the instantiation of an idea – namely, the inclusion of a black woman within the Canadian nation. In using the various elements described in *Girl with an Apple*, Heward created a work that evokes sensuality and sexuality and at the same time expands yet also bounds these emotions with references to nurturing and growth. It seems likely that in *Girl with an Apple*, Heward strove to achieve a difficult balance: one which evokes sensuality but without using the conventional pictorial language which encouraged an objectifying gaze.

Barbara Meadowcroft expresses her reaction to *Girl with an Apple* as follows: “*Autumn* ...unsettles the viewer because of the heroic scale of the

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<sup>255</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Hamlet and his Problems,” in *Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1921), p. 100.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.* See pp. 97-99.

female figure and the sexual tension suggested by the unconventional pose.”<sup>257</sup>

Meadowcroft disagrees with A. Y. Jackson’s comments that nothing about Heward’s work was “very revolutionary or controversial.”<sup>258</sup> For Meadowcroft, this comment misses “the originality...which challenge[s] conventional images of women.”<sup>259</sup> Meadowcroft has assessed this work by pointing to the monumentality and stance of the sitter, but the more detailed analysis undertaken above further reveals how Heward also skilfully used allusion, composition, brushwork and colour to create her desired effects.

1943 – the year when Heward painted *Girl with an Apple* - was a difficult year personally for Heward. On December 29<sup>th</sup> she wrote to Isabel McLaughlin:

Honor’s [Heward’s sister] death has been a cruel blow to us all, to her husband and her children, to poor mother, who has had so much trouble in her life, it would seem she could have been spared such a blow. To me, my personal loss is so great it staggers me. Honor & I have done everything all our lives together, we were always very close & more so of late years – she was always most understanding & loving & the loyalist of sisters, so bright & gay & amusing - always a great admirer of my paintings, she loved me & I loved her. She clung to me all through her dreadful illness & I tried so hard to help her, it has been a dreadful year it is hard to pull myself together & carry on. It is so strange not to be able to share my sorrows with Honor & ones problems, she was always ready to help me. I miss her witty, naughty remarks, however life is a hard school & we just have to stand up to its blows.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 89.

<sup>258</sup> A. Y. Jackson, “Introduction” in *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward 1896-1947* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1948), p. 7.

<sup>259</sup> Meadowcroft 1999, p. 167.

<sup>260</sup> Queen’s University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, file 2033.37, Box 9.



Fig. 41  
Prudence Heward  
*Mrs Zimmerman*, 1943  
Oil on canvas 107.3 x 99.7 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

That same year Heward painted *Mrs Zimmerman* (fig. 41), which is signed and dated 1943 on the verso.<sup>261</sup> This is one of the few works that Heward painted of women without a landscape background. It differs from the early works discussed in Chapter One - *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Miss Lockerby* (fig.6) – where the background was indistinct and provided no more than a backdrop of colour. In *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) and *At the Cafe* (fig.13), in contrast to *Mrs Zimmerman*, the interior setting provided an opportunity for Heward to comment on the public locations that women, unaccompanied by male escorts, were beginning to occupy in Canada.

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<sup>261</sup> In spite of numerous attempts to discover who Mrs Zimmerman was (including a search through the NGC curatorial file on the painting), no details have been found. In the directory *Annuaire Montréalais, 1943* (Montreal: Lovell and Sons, 1943), p. 2400, there are 26 Zimmermans listed, including two widows, Mrs E. and Mrs Mary living on Hutchan, but this does not bring any further clarity to her identity.

In *Mrs Zimmerman* (fig. 41), as in *Girl with an Apple* (fig. 35), the focus is largely on the figure, but the setting plays an important complementary role. Mrs Zimmerman is pressed against the picture plane and she is dressed tastefully as a modern, urban woman. Her modernity is shown in the length of her skirt, her lipstick, her painted nails as well as the way she sits with her legs crossed. Luckyj considers that Mrs Zimmerman epitomizes “the contemporary urban woman....casually dressed and informally posed, she is pictured in a moment of quiet reflection.”<sup>262</sup> Her direct gaze is alert, yet she stares out, looking past the viewer without making direct contact, but also not inviting a gaze that commodifies her. Her body-language in the way she sits is one of alertness and creates the impression of a strong individual; but her vacant, facial expression is at odds with her body-language. Why is the overall impression for the viewer to feel off-balance? Heward created this sense with the way in which she configured the space and the objects placed around the figure.

Mrs Zimmerman is not really sitting on the chair. Certainly she is positioned in a sitting position and there is a chair, but the way in which her body is placed in relation to the part of the chair where she should be seated, when examined closely, reveals that, at best, only a small part of her weight could be supported. Thus, although she appears at first to be comfortably and solidly seated, the viewer perceives that something is not quite right. This pictorially conveyed sense of being off-balance is reinforced by the multiple perspectives presented to the viewer and the resulting unease caused by this

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<sup>262</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 69.

disorientation. The seat of the chair on which Mrs Zimmerman is sitting is viewed from above, but the floor boards are viewed from a different angle, so that they appear tilted at a divergent angle to the seat of the chair, so that Mrs Zimmerman should, by rights, be slipping off the chair, not imaged as being firmly planted on it. The angle of the back leg of the pink chair in the background creates a wobbly effect reinforced by the straight lines of the floor boards. It is difficult to fix the viewer's perspective onto the pink chair because of the ambiguous way in which the chair is painted - is it the armrest we see or is it the seat? In addition, the pink chair is turned away from the chair on which Mrs Zimmerman is sitting and therefore faces the empty wall. This excludes any kind of social interaction that someone sitting on this chair could participate in. What appears as though it could be a door is only partly pictured, making it difficult to see if it is partly open or entirely closed, but the angle at which it is positioned in relation to Mrs Zimmerman's chair, as well as its angle to the floorboards, seems unbalanced and creates a disorienting effect. No door hinges are visible as the door merges with the wall. It is distinguished only by its colour and the patterning, which echo the curves of the chair. The strong diagonal where the skirt meets the sweater is also a destabilizing factor, at odds with the solidity, weight and balance seen in Heward's other paintings, indicating an intention to create disorientation.<sup>263</sup> The lighting, too, does not hang together and adds to this sense that something is not quite right. The figure's left cheek, left bodice and left arm are highlighted and there is a shadow on her knee just below her skirt, indicating that the light source appears

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<sup>263</sup> My thanks to Kristina Huneault for drawing my attention to these points.



to emanate from the sitter's left. Yet the shadow on the wall of the outline of her shoulders and head, just faintly perceptible, indicates a light source from the sitter's right. Heward used subtle shading, but like Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), she employed confusing relations of the light source(s) to disorient and unsettle viewers.

The repetition of the colour of the frame around Mrs Zimmerman's chair with the door serves to emphasize the shallow space between the two and reinforces the confining space of the background, in which the sitter is portrayed. The lack of information on Mrs Zimmerman own life and possible disappointments opens interpretive possibilities. For Luckyj "there is no sense of an organized and structured environment around the figure. The result is a sense of dislocation, even emptiness, which adds emotional poignancy to the serious, reflective mood of the sitter."<sup>264</sup> It may also be that Heward was pointing to the social environment that still confined women in spite of the political and legal advances that they had achieved.<sup>265</sup>

Unlike her dramatic use of colour in *Girl with an Apple* (fig. 35), Heward utilized a limited, toned-down palette. What is similar is that her colours are carefully repeated within each painting. In *Mrs Zimmerman* green is repeated in the sitter's tartan skirt, her eyes, the wall, and the chair, and is used to outline the sitter's silhouette, serving to clearly delineate her against the background. Shades of beige are repeated in the sweater, the door and the frame of the

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<sup>264</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 69.

<sup>265</sup> See Burt 1988.

green chair. Only the pink of the second chair is not used elsewhere, but its symbolic relation with the female gender may be interpreted in relation to Mrs Zimmerman and to the ideas of gender isolation and disorientation.



Fig. 42  
Lilius Torrance Newton  
*Portrait of Ethel Southam*, c.1938  
Oil on canvas, 76.3 x 61.3 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

An interesting contrast is provided by comparing a similar work of a woman sitting on a chair by Lilius Torrance Newton. In Newton's work titled *Portrait of Ethel Southam*, 1938 (fig. 42), her figure is sitting sideways on a chair in an interior setting, but unlike Heward's work the background is no more than a cleverly orchestrated colour backdrop that matches the tones and colours in the figure's clothing and where the darker stripe in the background acts as a contrast to offset the figure. Although the figure is positioned sideways on the chair, there is a strong sense of balance even though she is about to get up from her chair. Her focused gaze reinforces her purposefulness. In *Mrs Zimmerman*, by contrast, the setting Heward painted around the figure creates a disturbing sense of being off-balance which negates the body-language, if not the facial expression, of the figure.

In an exhibition at the Willistead Gallery<sup>266</sup> in 1949, an art critic had this comment: "In her later portrait studies...[such as] Mrs Zimmerman – the design is still there but more softly. The colors and the ways in which they are applied are mellower and the stress is placed on the individual rather than the picture as a whole."<sup>267</sup> I agree with the comment on the colours and the emphasis on the sitter, but I think the painting presents, at least in part, the ambivalence, felt at the time, of change and restructuring of women's roles in Canada and Quebec. Women were aiding the war effort by participating in what had been male- dominated activities, and had eventually won the right to vote in provincial elections in Quebec; urbanization had taken hold and educational institutions were open to women and yet, in spite of these considerable changes, attitudes still reflected a more traditional, supportive role for women. As Anna Johanssen has said about Heward: "[She was] brought up in a difficult time. Mid -Victorian women knew exactly where they stood....we have a great deal of freedom – they were just in between ...they had a difficult time."<sup>268</sup> It seems reasonable to believe that *Mrs Zimmerman* is a work that, in part, pictures the ambivalence of this situation by imaging a woman whose body-language is one of a self-possessed woman prominently positioned within the picture space, yet whose facial expression and setting undermines this.

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<sup>266</sup> Between 1943 and 1975 this manor home served as the original home of the Art Gallery of Windsor. For more information see [http://www.willistead.com/willistead\\_history.html](http://www.willistead.com/willistead_history.html), November 19, 2008.

<sup>267</sup> "Prudence Heward Exhibition," *Windsor Daily Star*, July 2 1949; a copy is also filed in "Heward, Prudence (Efa) Documentation 1927 – 1952, Book 1" NGC Archives.

<sup>268</sup> Anna Johanssen in *By Woman's Hand* [film] by Pepita Ferrari & Erna Buffie; producers Merit Jensen Carr, Pepita Ferrari, Kent Martin; co-produced by Animations Piché Ferrari and the National Film Board of Canada, (Montreal : National Film Board of Canada, 1994).



Fig. 43  
Prudence Heward,  
*Farmer's Daughter*, 1945.  
Oil on canvas, 61.2 x 51.2 cm  
National Gallery of Canada

*The Farmer's Daughter*, 1945 (fig. 43), among the last works that Heward painted as her health worsened, is a strong work for a woman suffering intense breathing problems and who wrote to Jackson that she was “completely worn out” and that “most of the time I just long for a rest and to be able to breathe properly.”<sup>269</sup> Dennis Reid describes the work as presenting a woman with “vigorous individuality...bold, exciting, it is almost shocking in its sugar-acid colours and defiant anonymity.”<sup>270</sup> Gone are the toned-down colours of *Mrs Zimmerman*. Instead the viewer is faced with the bright colours of the sitter's two bodices which enhance the boldness of the portrayal of the woman. Her figure is outlined and emphasized by the dark shadow placed around her figure

<sup>269</sup> Quoted in Luckyj 1986, p. 35 where Luckyj surmises that this letter was probably written in 1946. Heward stopped painting in 1945 and in this letter she wrote that she “misses her painting terribly” indicating that deteriorating health prevented her from exercising her passion of painting.

<sup>270</sup> Dennis Reid, *A Concise History of Painting*. Second Edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 194.

including her hair. This outline serves to make the figure even more prominent and separate her from the background. She is portrayed from the bust up and is placed right up against the picture plane dominating the space of the canvas. Even her arms are partly cut off by the edge of the canvas, emphasizing how close to the picture plane she has been portrayed. Heward prominently displayed her painted nails in concert with her bright red lipstick to highlight her as modern and as probably being urban. The painting is titled *Farmer's Daughter*.



Fig. 44  
Prudence Heward  
*Farmer's Daughter*, 1938  
Oil on canvas, 66.6 x 66.5cm  
Winnipeg Art Gallery

An earlier work also titled *Farmer's Daughter*, painted in 1938 (fig. 44), images a girl and provides an interesting comparison with the later work. In the earlier work (fig. 44), the figure is also close to the picture plane but Heward gives prominent space to the background in which farmhouses and cultivated fields are visible and clearly delineated. Farm buildings on both sides of the girl's head convey that her life is firmly rooted in the rural setting. The later work

(fig. 43) puts the visual emphasis on the sitter, and the cultivation of the fields is no more than sketchily conveyed. The figurative vagueness of the cultivated fields reinforces that this is no longer the life the sitter experiences on a daily basis and is therefore not of the same importance as it is to the girl in the work of 1938 (fig.44). It therefore seems plausible that the National Gallery work is a comment on the urbanization of the population that had taken place in Canada.

The drift to the cities in Canada had already started in 1891 but greatly increased during the period of rapid industrialization in the 1920s. The 1930s, with the Depression and dampening demand for manufactured goods, led to a slowing of the urbanization rate, but the Second World War saw another wave of movement from the rural to urban areas.<sup>271</sup> By 1941 Quebec's non-rural population was 61.2%.<sup>272</sup>

A useful reference can also be made to *Rollande*, 1929 (fig. 45).<sup>273</sup> In this painting the fence is prominently displayed, as are the farm buildings, which are strategically placed directly behind Rollande's head, situating her firmly within the rural landscape. This is in sharp contrast to the 1945 *Farmer's Daughter* (fig. 43), where no buildings are featured, as if commenting that the farm is no longer the sitter's home. Furthermore, in *Farmer's Daughter* the fence is at the furthest point in the background and appears to serve no purpose in its even being pictured. Yet as has amply been demonstrated,

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<sup>271</sup> For a detailed account see Leroy. O Stone, *Urban Development in Canada: An Introduction to the Demographic Aspects* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967).

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. These figures include populations in villages numbering 1000 and more.

<sup>273</sup> For a detailed description of the Ile d'Orléans setting Heward used for this painting see Emeny 1999, pp. 26-27.



Fig. 45  
Prudence Heward  
*Rollande*, 1929  
Oil on canvas, 139.9 x 101.7  
National Gallery of Canada

Heward's backgrounds always play an amplification role in her paintings and in this reference to the fence (and thus to *Rollande*), it seems likely that Heward was alluding to the change from a rural to urban environment that many women had experienced in their lives. Luckyj references this fence but does not draw the same conclusion.<sup>274</sup> Luckyj draws attention to the "generalized and sketchy treatment of the background" and "lack of obvious and readable symbols"<sup>275</sup> and, although I agree with this comment in a general way, I think that there are a number of specific references that tie the figure and background intimately together. The fact that the figure blocks out most of the background in which no buildings are to be seen, is itself a comment that seems to indicate that this is an urbanized woman who has left her past rural life behind her. Luckyj

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<sup>274</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 71.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

describes *Farmer's Daughter* as a "modern, contemporary woman whose roots might lie within a rural setting but who, either by circumstance or choice, appeared to be far from those rural beginnings."<sup>276</sup> The dominance that Heward gave the sitter within the picture frame and the way in which the figure holds her head – not making contact with the viewer – adds to her self-confident air and satisfaction that she has been able to establish herself successfully, leaving the restricting fences behind her and no farm house to tie her to the land.<sup>277</sup> Yet, the field to the sitter's right follows the contour of her hair, outlining the two, and her skin colour is repeated in the field to her right and establishes her link to the land by both pattern and colour. Although the fields are sketchily drawn, they are shown to be cultivated, farmed land. Heward has clearly repeated the vertical lines of the fields within the patterning of her clothes - not on only one of her bodices, but on both of them, the inner and the outer - establishing the traces of her rural past that are a part of who she is - a self-reliant, self-contained woman who faces her future with self-confidence.

In all three works discussed in this chapter using different artistic means, Heward incorporated ambiguities into her portrayals of Canadian women. It seems likely that Heward was reflecting the social ambiguities women were experiencing in their own lives during this period of flux - during an "in between [time when women] had a difficult time."<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Luckyj 1986, p. 71.

<sup>277</sup> Loren Lerner describes the figure as "decidedly self-assured and determined" in "From Victorian Girl Reader to Modern Woman Artist: Reading and Seeing in the Paintings of the Canadian Girl by William Brymner, Emily Coonan, and Prudence Heward," *CCL/LCJ* Vol. 33 no. 2 (2007), p. 50.

<sup>278</sup> Anna Johanssen interview *By Woman's Hand*, 1994.



The last letter from Heward to Isabel McLaughlin is dated February 1947 and is addressed from Los Angeles, where she had gone for treatment of her asthma. The letter shows her optimism. "I want to get back to my painting but fear it will be a long time before I have enough strength."<sup>279</sup> She died at the Good Samaritan hospital in Los Angeles on March 19, 1947.

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<sup>279</sup> Queen's University Archives, Kingston, Isabel McLaughlin Fonds, file 2033.37, Box 9.

**Conclusion.**

Heward's early works *Eleanor* (fig. 5) and *Mrs Lockerby* (fig. 6) are conventional portraits of women in which the backgrounds are simple and monochromatic, and thus do not situate women within their social environments. She subsequently changed her way of painting by referencing the Group of Seven paintings in the backgrounds. She commented on and challenged gender and racial bias by including and subverting iconic backgrounds, in this way directly amplifying her questioning and her challenging of women's position within the Canadian nation: examples include *The Bather* (fig. 25), *Dark Girl* (fig. 26) and *Hester* (fig. 27). Heward's paintings *At the Theatre* (fig. 8) and *At the Café* (fig. 13) can be seen as transitional works in which she began to comment on the public space which women were beginning to occupy within Canadian society. In *Girl on a Hill* (fig. 23) she further developed the tight integration of the setting with the figure so that the setting became an important contributor to the meaning of her painting. In her late works *Girl with Apple* (fig. 35), *Mrs Zimmerman* (fig. 41), and *Farmer's Daughter* (fig. 43), the setting continued to play an essential role in the meaning of her paintings in which Heward seemed to challenge less and to comment more on women's lives within Canadian society. In these works she vividly portrayed the ambiguities inherent in women's lives with the changes that had taken place. In all the works discussed Heward prominently positioned Canadian women as the focus of

her paintings to create arresting portrayals of females within Canadian society.

H.O. McCurry, director of the National Gallery, at the time of Heward's memorial exhibition in 1948, wrote: "Prudence Heward was a figure painter of unusual distinction at a time when the emphasis among Canadian artists was almost exclusively on landscape."<sup>280</sup> My thesis demonstrates the view that she also made an invaluable contribution in her portrayals of Canadian women by challenging and commenting on many different aspects of the status quo within Canadian society.

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<sup>280</sup> H.O. McCurry, "Foreword" in *Memorial Exhibition: Prudence Heward 1896-1947* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1948)

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