

Fashion: a Canadian perspective

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Defrocking Dad: Masculinity and Dress in Montreal, 1700–1867

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The Montreal lawyer Arthur Davidson wrote to his London tailor in 1791: 'I want, by one of the first ships ... cambrick, enough to ruffle seven shirts. Also a suit of black clothes such as are now worn by Gentlemen of the Bar. The Breeches, you know, I wish to be long and sit easy ... The bodies of both the coat and waistcoat ought to be rather wider.'¹ In a later letter Davidson asked the tailor to double-stitch all seams, anticipating Montreal tailors would be so offended at his ordering fashions from London they would refuse to make repairs. Not just the tailors despised the imported styles; so did Davidson's colleagues. Many were fined for resisting a 1779 bar society rule that members come to court in 'black coat, gown and bands.' They also broke the 1781 rule of 'black coat, waistcoat and breeches.' One handsome French-Canadian lawyer, declaring he 'objected to the garb of an undertaker's man,' appeared in a coloured coat and flesh-coloured nankeen breeches.²

Maybe they were silly to balk. Analysing the predominance of black in nineteenth-century male fashions, John Harvey in *Men in Black* associates the colour with increasing male authority and with the 'impersonality of expertise.' He notes that dark clothing coincided with constraints on playfulness and personal feeling. He considers black 'the agent of a serious power, and of a power claimed over women and the feminine.' Barbara Vinken also associates a sombre, asexual masculine appearance with increasing dominance. But it came at a price. Earlier, courtly males had revelled in snowy lace that set off their fine skin, frockcoats hugging their shapely torsos, tight breeches and embroidered stockings rounding their calves, and – least modest of all – their ornamental codpieces. 'All the ornaments of masculinity came to an end,' Vinken writes, with that item of 'masculine renunciation,' the drainpipe trousers. 'To the extent to which he renounces fashion and indulges in the ... simplistic rhetoric of anti-rhetoric, what man gains thereby is in no way insignificant: identity, authenticity, unquestioned masculinity, seriousness.'³

This chapter studies the masculinity displayed by a trio of gentlemen whose wealth or political prominence placed them at the summit of Montreal society between 1700 and 1860. Their increasingly restrained dress accompanied a rise of masculine hegemony on several fronts, including the legal, the administrative, and the economic. One man was an early eighteenth-century town governor, another a political hero of the 1830s, the third a mid-nineteenth-century industrialist. In contrast to governor Claude de Ramezay, the two nineteenth-century figures, nationalist Louis-Joseph Papineau and magnate John Redpath, were less splendid in appearance. However, their actions and their dress show an evolution towards male productivity and authority.

A second theme is that as successful men assumed heavier burdens of work and responsibility, their women assumed the splendid dress styles and lifestyles of the nobility. Increasingly, the sexes were assigned to separate spheres. Prints and portraits reveal that costumes were also diverging. As male rights advanced in the half-century following the French and American Revolutions, women received a consolation prize of sorts. Attributes of nobility such as wearing elaborate, *recherché* dress and 'living nobly' (avoiding money-making and manual toil) were wholly transferred to a relatively large segment of women. The new nineteenth-century 'lady' no longer need be of noble birth.

These trends had roots in earlier centuries. In 1666 Charles II's injunction to his court to replace their extravagant doublets with vests of English wool began a long association of simple dress with manly patriotism. Several Enlightenment thinkers decried the fashions of their day as elitist and effeminate. They 'posited the pure republic against so much triviality; against the corrupt, weak, effeminate monarchy rose up a masculine republic sworn to virtue.'⁴ Even before trousers set them apart, mid-eighteenth-century noblemen began wearing the heavier luxury fabrics such as velvet in contrast to their wives' satin and taffeta, although both sexes still used silk, embroidery, and lace. Parisian fashions came to be associated with the elaborate, 'feminine' presentation, London with the simpler, functional, more democratic 'masculine' style. The late eighteenth century 'macaroni' style featuring elaborate hairstyles, nosegays, multiple watches, floral decorations, and pastel colours was ridiculed and associated with lack of virility, with French aristocratic decadence, gambling excesses, and even monetary crisis.⁵ In the nineteenth century, the new, more muted male presentation hardened into the accepted convention in offices and parlours throughout the western world. Comparing the decades before and after the 1760 British conquest of Canada provides a clear example of the transfer of the aristocratic ideal from nobles of both sexes in the eighteenth century to bourgeois women in the nineteenth century. The corresponding fashion development saw the man at the top of society transfer his fancy 'frock' to women and learn to 'wear the pants.'

These findings are only preliminary; a full-scale synthesis of fashion and history would require systematic analysis of data such as inventories, tailoring accounts and newspaper ads, portraits and photographs, and costume collections. The history of masculinity is just beginning to take its place beside women's history. Men have, of course, been the traditional subject of history, but only recently have historians paid much attention to ways their concepts of masculinity affected their behaviour and changed over time. One Canadian historian who attempted to analyse male fashion lamented the dearth of studies that 'establish a rapport between clothing and socio-economic and political factors has left this field of study behind current developments in history.'⁶

There is one caveat. Montreal was a town whose elite came from two distinctive cultures, French-Canadian and Anglo-American. Clothing styles differed in France and England, and attitudes to dress were also different. Numerous articles in the great *Encyclopedie* on clothing's manufacture, consumption, and social meaning reveal Gallic appreciation of this aspect of human behaviour. French culture, Susan Sontag observed, 'allows a link between ideas of vanguard art and fashion. The French have never shared the Anglo-American conviction that makes the fashionable the opposite of the serious.'⁷ Perhaps this meant that French-Canadian gentlemen dressed with greater care or expense. Judging by nineteenth-century portraits, though, French colonials fell victim to London's male fashion dictates, just as their nineteenth-century Parisian cousins did.⁸ Fine distinctions between Montreal's two cultural groups await further study. Here we assume that their common masculinity drove them together more than their cultures drove them apart, both in concepts of manhood and in dress.

Nonetheless, it is not surprising that French Canadians initially objected to colourless masculine garb. Their mother country of France, according to John Harvey, had been

the country of colour ... its civility had taken the tonalities of Watteau, of Fragonard, of dancers in rose and azure satin ... [during the 18th century] the use of bright colours (red, yellow, blue) rises in the nobility from eight to thirty eight per cent of their clothing ... bright colour by those in waged labour also increased.⁹

French colonists were inheritors of a tradition of male splendour. Their own parents had gazed on local reflections of the court of Versailles. They might have watched Governor General Jonquière being inaugurated in Quebec in 1749, 'dressed in a suit of red, with an abundance of gold lace ... [h]is servants ... before him in green.'¹⁰ The patterned frockcoat and lavish trim were characteristic of a noble of the early reign of Louis XIV, a time when Claude de Ramezay was emigrating to New France. Perchance the colonists espied Governor de Ramezay



9 Seventeenth-century nobles dressed more to display their rank than their gender, with men as well as women sporting ruffles, feathers, ribbons, and high heels. It was the prerogative of nobles of both sexes to wear lace, brocades, and other luxury fabrics, which European sumptuary laws sometimes forbade commoners to use. There were also limitations on nobles earning money through trade or manual labour. Their task as members of the king's 'family' was to live (and dress) graciously, upholding society's hierarchical order by entertaining other elites, rendering the king social, political, and military services as needed. (National Archives of Canada, C-010688)

himself, punctilious in observance of rank and ritual, strutting in high heels in the vicinity of his riverfront chateau.

'A Real Gentleman'

Claude de Ramezay represents an ancien régime form of masculinity. We look not just at his dress but at what kind of man he was. His lifestyle was very different from that of the nineteenth-century gentlemen who came after him. De Ramezay began his career when he arrived as a lieutenant in the French colonial troops. A competent but unremarkable warrior, he turned his hand to administration. Purchasing the office of governor of the little town of Trois-Rivières, he made a name for himself by entertaining officials and visitors who stopped there on their way between the two bigger towns of Quebec City and Montreal. His superior, Governor Frontenac, rewarded his efforts by declaring him 'a real gentleman.'

As a nobleman, de Ramezay belonged to a caste dedicated to enhancing the king's honour. They were not to toil at growing crops, fabricating goods, or anything else that dirtied the hands literally or figuratively. Though prohibitions on noble commerce had been abolished by decree in both the colony and the mother country, such enterprise was to remain adjunct to military or administrative service and must not interfere with 'living nobly.' The tiny ruling caste of nobles comprised about 5 per cent of the population. These 'bluebloods' were considered so far above the common people as to have different blood from the ordinary vileins or 'vile persons.' They prided themselves on their (largely mythical) descent from ancient Frankish warriors: Governor Frontenac's wife posed for her portrait in a military helmet, and Governor de Ramezay chose to be portrayed in his armour. Another of their trademarks was physical grace, developed from childhood. Little nobles learned how to bow precisely the appropriate degree to persons of varying rank, to ride and fence – and above all, to dance, a particular Canadian passion. Gracefulness, later to be cultivated as a feminine trait, distinguished nobles of both sexes. Ceremonious slowness of movement also announced superiority over faster-moving subordinates. These attributes made the noble body itself a fashionable object. Both sexes obligingly showed it off, with flashy, form-fitting attire.

Proudly different from the common breed, nobles dressed not so much to display gender as to display rank. 'Aristocratic dress,' Philippe Perrot writes, 'openly performed a sociopolitical function – self-affirmation for some and subordination for others – freezing everyone in their places.'¹¹ Though only the men wore swords, nobles of both sexes exercised their prerogative to wear wigs, floral brocades, satins, velvets, and rich colours derived from expensive dyes or precious

metals. They also wore braid and feather trimmings, silk stockings and silver-buckled shoes with red high heels. Ever ready to demand full honours for himself, de Ramezay was infuriated when he felt the governor general addressed him with too little respect at a public gathering. Distinctive clothes helped satisfy the craving for unambiguous public recognition of status. As de Ramezay was rising to power around 1690, Louis XIV's sumptuary laws were in effect, minutely regulating 'even such details as gold braid and buttons ... according to estate, rank, season and circumstances.'¹² French noble styles of the 1690s included the wig or peruke dressed into towering twin peaks with profuse curls falling down breast and back and shoes with block-like heels and toes. 'These massively architectural, heavily built accessories,' Geoffrey Squire observes, 'would have assured an exaggeratedly strutting deportment fully expressive of the pompous grandeur which marked ... the court of the Sun King.'¹³ During the decades around 1700 Canadian noblemen's inventories included habits trimmed in silk and gold buttons, and silver vests with gold flowers. (Showy vests – which also served as corsets – were embroidered with big flowers or even battle scenes, and would continue to flash out beneath the darkening coats of the early nineteenth century.)

Governor de Ramezay's conduct matched his attire; for speech, like dress, was extravagant in those days. He boasted his home was 'unquestionably the most beautiful in Canada.' He quarrelled, bragged, and acted with little foresight about consequences. 'Brusque and ill-tempered,' he was accused of improper immersion in the fur trade, giving 'all the members of his numerous family the means of pursuing it in preference to all the other *habitants*.' He quarrelled with the Jesuits and directly attacked his superior, Governor General Vaudreuil. Vaudreuil charged that de Ramezay's violent temper made him unfit to govern; Ramezay conceded he had a quick temper but countercharged that Vaudreuil in a moment of anger had slapped a man in the face and kicked him in the stomach.¹⁴

Just as those governors did not dress or speak in a businesslike way, they did not go to the office; much of the business of governing took place at home. They conferred with other members of the ruling circle who frequented the chateau's guest beds, banquet table, ballroom, with up to forty at a time residing at the governor general's house. If an occasional document was needed, it was drawn up and signed on the writing desk at home. Nor was there clear distinction between domestic and government expenditures.

If the high-heeled, beruffled ancien regime noble did not appear a sober financial mainstay, indeed he was not. From the 1670s Canadian nobles increasingly sought crown support, claiming inability to support their large families. The French traveller La Potherie wrote that Canada was a poor country, heavily dependent on crown handouts, that 'the officers who are married have only their appointments to sustain their families; their wives are in distress when they die.'¹⁵

Dispatch after dispatch from the governor and intendant solicited the king's 'graces' for those left in the lurch.

In Claude de Ramezay's case, even as he took possession of his mansion he began imploring the crown for subsidies, the governorship requiring 'much expense to sustain ... with honour.' When de Ramezay died in 1724, Governor Vaudreuil commented that he had served 'with honour ... and lived very comfortably, having always spent more than his salary, which is the reason he has left only a very small estate to his widow and children.'¹⁶ Wrapped in his lace and satin, gold and silver, cocooned in his big house, Claude de Ramezay typified the gorgeous peacock male who would have been mortified by a missing shoe buckle but saw no disgrace in begging for subsidies and leaving his family in debt. Male honour required show, not solvency.

In the ancien régime, breadwinning was, after all, not a male responsibility, but a family one. Just as peasant couples worked the farm together, noble couples worked the banquet tables together. A family story recounts a tired Madame de Ramezay sighing for a peaceful life on their remote seigneurie, but telling her daughters it was their duty to entertain 'his Majesty's high-ranking citizens.'¹⁷ Even the children served, accompanying their parents to review the troops.

When her husband died, it came naturally for Madame de Ramezay to take over the task of writing the crown to secure pensions for herself and her daughters, and military promotion for her sons.¹⁸ The governor's widow and daughter also carried on the family timber and sawmilling operation located near their seigneurie, the daughter showing real talent in expanding the family holdings. Though the men alone fought, most other noble endeavours were family ones. Women tended to monopolize direction of the colony's health and social relief agencies, with mother superiors of noble background, including one de Ramezay daughter, administering the hospitals and asylums.¹⁹

Women dressed and posed to show their rank, not their motherliness. Indeed, the colony's painters left few portraits of mothers with children. An exception is a 1703 *ex voto* of Madame Riverin which shows mother and children at prayer. The children, as was typical of the period, were dressed as small adults, as was appropriate in a family economy. The son wore frockcoat and cravat, and his hair resembled a wig, while the oldest daughter's tiered lace headdress matched her mother's. Certainly noblewomen were not 'motherly' towards their young in the modern sense. They typically sent their newborns out to rural nursemaids until age two. Those who survived nursing (about half) were sent off again a few years later to boarding schools or regimental training.

Elite men continued to dazzle as the regime drew to a close. Sieur de Bouat in 1753 had a silk habit and a scarlet vest, and black velvet breeches.²⁰ A French lieutenant fighting with Montcalm's army left an impressive wardrobe that was

auctioned off to the sound of tambour at Fort Carillon in 1758:

... velvet breeches, linen gaiters, three linen nightcaps, scarlet vest trimmed in gold, two scarlet hats ... satin coat embroidered with gold, old gold buttons, white breeches with gold garters, three shirts with scalloped cuffs, six shirts with embroidered scalloped cuffs.²¹

Luxurious display filtered to lower levels of society as the eighteenth century progressed. In France 'barbers, printers, tailors, shop assistants, and shop clerks were powdered wigs and thick layers of pomade, and strutted about with swords even when this practice was waning at court.' In 1749 when Peter Kalm visited New France he reported people of rank were accustomed to wear lace-trimmed clothes and some of the gentlemen wore wigs.²² But he also noted other classes aping their betters, and this was captured in a Conquest-era illustration of a male habitant dressed for mass in a fancy vest and lacy coat. Travellers contrasted the comparatively wealthy but thrifty New Englanders to the French colonists who might eat sparingly and spend on dress to 'display that which they had not.'

Certainly merchants appropriated noble finery after the British conquest of 1760. A 1793 portrait shows Eustache-Ignace Trottier with embroidered vest, large decorative buttons, and profusions of lace on his chest and wrists. He evinced no shame in being portrayed gambling over a game of cards. Fur trade merchants who gathered at early nineteenth-century meetings of the Montreal's Beaver Club also arrived lavishly adorned with medals, ruffles, gold lace, gold-clasped garters and silver-buckled shoes.²³

A World Transformed

The advent of the plain dark suit, such as the one Arthur Davidson ordered in 1791, signalled a century of such heightened gender differentiation in clothing that males and females, according to one fashion historian, seemed to belong to different species.²⁴ Men became extremely uncomfortable with ornate costume. Fittingly enough, patriarchy was also on the rise. As historians of both the French and American Revolutions such as Lynn Hunt, Joan Landes, and Linda Kerber have shown, the Rights of Man became defined as those of males, not those of humans. By the end of the French Revolution women were banned from political clubs. Public women became associated with intriguing courtesans or risqué salons, so feminine virtue became defined narrowly as staying home and bringing up good citizens. By the time the 1837 Rebellion broke out, such attitudes had reached even the peasantry of remote Lower Canada.

Women were restricted on various fronts. Although a number of Lower Cana-

dian female property-owners had voted in the decades after 1791, this was banned temporarily in 1834 and permanently in 1849. The English system of primogeniture and male property rights gradually replaced the equal inheritance rights of both sexes and the well-protected wifely claims of the traditional *Coutume de Paris*. At the same time, the western world witnessed the gradual movement of economic production away from cottages, family farms, and other homesites. Now singled out as both the family's breadwinner and its political representative, the male assumed a new degree of public power. Although it was of course still possible for 'Lady Astor to oppress her footman,' authority based on male gender tended to supplant the old authority based on rank.

Fashion historians note a corresponding turn to gendered dress. Both French and Canadian writers have asserted that the French Revolution transformed men's clothing in the long run, establishing the lasting reign of dark trousers and matching jacket. Yet, even as men experienced the French Revolution's political and sartorial upheaval, the period was deeply reactionary for women. On 8 Brumaire, Year II (1793), France's National Convention decreed an end to the old vestimentary codes: 'No person of either sex can force any citizen, male or female, to dress in a particular way, under penalty ... everyone is free to wear the garment or garb *suitable to his or her sex* [my italics] that he or she pleases.'

Happy to strike down sumptuary notions of clothing based on rank and occupation, the revolutionaries were unblinkingly reactionary about gender distinctions. Some women apparently did not conform, since on 16 Brumaire, Year IX (1800), a police ordinance expressly forbade Parisian women to wear trousers without special dispensation. By that time women's political participation had already been banned.²⁵

Men, however, walked into a new world. Before Claude de Ramezay's century was out, the men at the top discarded their gorgeous frockcoats, pumps, and cascading wigs for the short natural hair and dark suits that began to appear on the streets of Montreal in the 1790s. Since many of the Canadian nobility had fled to France after the British conquest of 1760, those who filled the upper ranks were no longer necessarily bluebloods. Indeed, the two nineteenth-century gentlemen we next discuss were not.

The direction in which Montreal gentlemen marched was towards greater power and greater duty. Claude de Ramezay, after some youthful military campaigning, had become a government functionary with what his biographer calls 'a mediocre military mind' who 'did not leave a deep imprint on the history of New France.'²⁶ His success lay in impressing his contemporaries with an extravagant and hospitable lifestyle, playing the grand seigneur. By contrast, the two nineteenth-century leaders, Louis-Joseph Papineau and John Redpath, applied their energies to attacking establishment evils and challenging entrenched orders – moral, political, ecclesiastic, economic.

The Romantic, Transitional Male

Louis-Joseph Papineau, our second Montreal leader, was a transitional male. A middle-class professional, he stood halfway between the knightly nobleman and the civilian self-made man. While not a blueblood of de Ramezay's kind, he was not quite self-made either. Though Papineau's grandfather had been a cooper, his father had risen to become a notary and a member of Lower Canada's rather rustic Legislative Assembly. This was a career path the son would follow, albeit in a grander way. It was Papineau senior who acquired the family seigneurie of Petit Nation in the Ottawa valley. The son, Louis-Joseph, was a hobby gardener, and in retirement a gentleman farmer. His claim to fame was political, becoming the mouthpiece of a vibrant young nationalism. His fiery words did much to lead some seven thousand Lower Canadian habitants into rebellion in 1837. Papineau, who lacked the nobleman's martial training, left the scene just before the key battle of St Denis, and on this account lost face with followers who were still sufficiently old-fashioned to expect the men at the top to be warriors.

As a boy Louis-Joseph had been sent to the seminary by a pious mother who hoped he would become a priest. All too soon the precocious lad polished off the syllabus and proceeded to the impious tracts of the *philosophes*. Losing interest in the priesthood, he studied law instead; but his initial experiences persuaded him the legal profession was a 'den of chicanery.' Choosing politics, he was elected assemblyman in 1809, Speaker of the Assembly in 1815.

Papineau was a book-loving, emotional being who longed to escape the burdens of office. Weeping and depressed by the death of one of his children, he had trouble performing in the Assembly. He was exhorted to be more practical, since 'domestic sorrow should not work to the detriment of public affairs. Be firm at your post. Behind the draperies, we mourn for our beloved.' Papineau was also berated posthumously by his biographer Fernand Ouellet, who called him 'a divided soul,' 'weak-willed and intensely emotional ... so sensitive ... given to high enthusiasms but also ... hesitations and fits of melancholy.'²⁷ More sympathetic biographers concede he was more a thinker than a man of action. Papineau himself once complained that 'complete and stupid inaction ... is my wretched dominating inclination.' Throughout his career Papineau expressed a desire to retire from public life.²⁸

Papineau's biographer questioned who wore the pants in the family. 'By abandoning his post he would have run the risk of losing his wife's esteem; she would not have stood for such weakness in her husband.' 'Pushed by his wife and former supporters, he agreed to stand for election' although 'his wife obstinately resisted this constantly renewed project, for it ran contrary to her tastes and her need to dominate, as well as to her ambitions.'²⁹ But Julie Papineau seems altogether in the tradition of the de Ramezay women, and of more ordinary French-Canadian

women of the early nineteenth century whose extensive influence was noted by British observers, and sometimes attributed to their property rights. It is only by later standards that early nineteenth-century French-Canadian men – and Romantic men – seem henpecked or ‘weak willed.’

There was a tension in the Papineau marriage that related to the changing gender roles of the period. Papineau chastised his wife for her unladylike fascination with politics; she in turn chastised him for championing liberty for the nation but autocracy at home.³⁰ Indeed, he had much to say about the running of the house, proffering advice he had gleaned from Rousseau and other writers on breast-feeding, exercise, and nutrition. In the legislature he fostered political measures that diminished women’s rights. He advocated withdrawing the vote from women, saying public voting was an affront to their modesty. As for nuns, such as the de Ramezays’ daughter who had administered health and welfare institutions, Papineau challenged their ability to do so. He wanted Assembly control over convent expenditures. He was also laying the groundwork for politics and financial administration to emerge as purely masculine endeavours.

Papineau represents the romantic masculinity of the early nineteenth century. Romantics were among the first to adopt trousers, the traditional garb of sailors and *sans culottes*, as a way of expressing solidarity with the common man. By the 1830s Lower Canadian professionals were spending a greater proportion of their income (some 20 per cent) on attire than any other class, making them leaders in fashion as well as politics. They were, for example, early purchasers not only of trousers but also of the stylish Wellington and Brunswick boots advertised in Lower Canadian newspapers after 1815.³¹ When Papineau was young, these men went from wearing wigs or tying back their own long hair (as his father Joseph did) to short natural styles.³²

In Papineau’s day such styles were not dull but dashing. Wearing them, young lawyers, notaries, politicians, and physicians nurtured romantic sensibilities inspired by Goethe and the English poets, the barricades, and the star-spangled banner. When Papineau first entered the Assembly, he was a tall, elegant young man with a broad chest, handsome face, and eagle eyes. His ringing voice, grandiose gestures, and withering countenance ‘made Lower Canada’s English rulers tremble,’ especially since the masses lionized him:

When he went from village to village, hurling everywhere his words of fire, bolts of eloquence – what ovations! what processions! what joyful demonstrations! The flags came out; women waved their handkerchiefs; children threw bouquets; and with one voice they all cried: Vive Papineau!³³

By the 1830s elegance and eloquence were not enough; a man had to act. As

British and American historians have pointed out, nineteenth-century man came to be defined by his work. (Hall and Davidoff cite the Essex seed merchant whose self-esteem fluctuated with his ability to meet creditors: 'I may be a man one day, a mouse the next.'³⁴) Career difficulties began to have more than economic significance; they became a form of emasculation. Papineau's flight from battle, and his impractical radicalism won the scorn of former supporters after his 1845 return from exile in Paris. They ridiculed him as a loose cannon and, worse, a coward. He in turn criticized them as mere professionals, too absorbed in careers and compromises. But the compromisers and the careerists prevailed. Papineau, after a series of humiliations, retired to the solitude of his Ottawa valley seigneurie. During two decades of isolation he had little influence of public affairs, showing a penchant for hopeless causes.³⁵ In his final years, though, a new generation of nationalists made pilgrimages to sit at the feet of the founding father.

Though some found him wanting in masculine restraint, Papineau's successive portraits clearly show him becoming a man in black.³⁶ He looked aristocratically androgynous with flowing locks and wide collar in a pre-adolescent portrait. Midlife portraits from the 1830s reveal him in black professional garb, with minute concessions to lace and ruffling. In an 1858 portrait by Napoleon Bourassa he wore ebony tie, buttons, vest, and suit. His stiff figure stood against a romantic landscape that was expressive in a way no longer permitted to the subject himself, for Papineau was now a fully evolved 'Man in Black.'

An 1836 pair of portraits by Plamondon illustrate the way the aristocratic role was passing to women. Julie Papineau, a merchant's daughter, aped the aristocracy. Decked out in a lavish golden gown, lace stole, and gold and ruby jewelry, she was supervising her daughter Ezilda's piano training (see colour plate A). Julie's portrait underscored both the maternal role and the family's gentility. By contrast, her husband was portrayed at work, wearing his robes of office. The portraits illustrate the point originating with Thorstein Veblen and embraced by fashion historians, that well-dressed wives and children became men's status symbols. As Philippe Perrot observed, the bourgeois 'amassed wealth but did not exhibit it ... [which] condemned a woman to wear the livery of the man who kept her, and to serve him as a foil. As signs of wealth and ornamental objects, women replaced the lace and jewels banished from men's clothing by the Revolution.'³⁷

In dress, a man began to diverge not only from his wife, but also from his offspring. Quebec fashion historian Louise Gagnon noted that in the century after 1780, boys' clothes became quite distinct from those of men.³⁸ Girls differed only slightly from their mothers (Ezilda Papineau is an example), notably in their shorter sleeves and protruding pantaloons. Boys, once they shed the complete androgyny of dresses around age four, were decked out in a whole range of sailor, Highlander, and Lord Fauntleroy suits. This emphasized the difference between

man the provider and his still economically dependent sons. The bourgeois boy with feminine, sophisticated outfits, not to mention the footman decked out as ancien régime courtier, demonstrated the prosperity of the master of the house, the man in black.

Though he donned the drab garb of the professionals, Papineau kept the heart of a poet. He spent many hours in his library, a solitary square tower containing three thousand volumes. His end seems fittingly romantic: he caught pneumonia after going out in his dressing gown on a frosty fall morning to direct labourers improving the grounds. He was, one mourner reminisced, 'accustomed to imprudent exposure in all weather.'

Papineau straddled a great divide in the history of masculinity. He parted company with Governor Ramezay, the old-fashioned noble who was unabashedly spendthrift and hotheaded, who dressed for show and left the family to depend on his king's largesse and the business talents of his widow and daughter. Like de Ramezay, Papineau was emotionally extravagant; there were times when his activities cast his family into physical danger or debt. On the whole, however, he supported them, and his parliamentary salary allowed comfortable retirement at Montebello.

Papineau was a romantic soul born into a world where deep sensitivity and a life of seclusion were fast becoming female attributes. The biographer who hinted at his 'unmanliness' was oblivious to the context: during Papineau's lifetime the gender codes changed. Papineau was indeed a divided soul, uncomfortably crossing the great divide that would leave the soulful male behind. Another way to regard him is as an adolescent in the evolution towards a 'modern' conception of manhood that would harden into orthodoxy around 1840 and endure for more than a century. By the time Papineau returned from exile in 1845, the simple black suit and starched collar had firmly supplanted the ruffled sleeve and frothy cravat of his youth, in the same way as his bombastic politics had also gone out of style. In both dress and career, men headed to a more practical state, marching away from dramatics and off to work.

The Full-Blown Man in Black

In John Redpath we discern the classic 'Man in Black.' Even the fashion historian Christopher Breward, who cautioned against exaggerating the 'Great Masculine Renunciation,' conceded that the 1850s and 1860s were a period of 'stovepipe severity.'³⁹ Coming to prominence in those two decades, Redpath was a renouncer. Long past the point when he could afford ease and comfort, he stayed on duty. He combined hardheaded money-making with tireless Protestant zeal. An orphan who arrived from Scotland at the age of twenty, he is said to have walked

barefoot from Quebec City to Montreal to save his one pair of shoes. Redpath rose from stonemason to Rideau Canal contractor to Montreal's first big industrialist. His piety manifested itself in perfectionist religion, a movement emanating from American evangelical circles between 1815 and 1860. Convinced of the 'infinite worthiness' of all persons, they believed even the outcast dregs of humanity could attain near-perfection – and prepare for Christ's Second Coming. Believers were called to the strenuous work of rooting out baneful traditions and dissolute practices such as slavery, drunkenness, and debauchery. Redpath plied that straight, narrow path of driving capitalism and exacting Christianity.

Though not all Montreal's elite marched to this tune, the improving species of male was clearly on the rise in the early Victorian period. By the third decade of the nineteenth century, raucous men's groups such as the Beaver Club, whose members drank themselves under the table, were falling out of fashion. Redpath and other born-again merchants were replacing the fur trade elite at the city's social summit. Pious men filled the pews of Montreal's churches and presided over reforming societies and institutions. An 1839 Montreal guidebook claimed 'perhaps there is no place where in relation to the number and wealth of its inhabitants, more has been done to relieve the wretched and support the weak by means of real charity than in this city' – and this not with 'thoughtless profusion' but through 'cautious and painstaking administration' by businessmen such as Redpath.⁴⁰ Believing their mission extended to the whole colony, they banded together and sent Christian schoolteachers to rural areas. They dispatched temperance circuit riders to the far reaches of Gaspé and Lake Huron, a crusade so successful that the 1849 Parliamentary Committee on Intemperance declared drunkenness had ceased to be 'a gentlemanly vice.'

Male fashion, as we have seen in our discussion of Papineau, was also shedding all trace of riotous excess. Beaver Club lace and ruffles gave way to the black uniform seen in John Redpath's 1862 photograph (illustration 10). The garb, with antecedents among Puritans and Quakers, perfectly suited our self-made entrepreneur and teetotaler. 'The extinction of color,' Philippe Perrot observed, 'signalled the onset of a new ethic based on will, self-denial, thrift and merit.' The stiff black suit of the bourgeois, like that of a clergyman, 'disguised or effaced his body, allowing the wearer to distance himself from it, abandon it, and forget its embarrassing or inopportune presence.'⁴¹ Here was the man's man, bereft of frivolity. Redpath's portrait reveals not the tiniest playful wisp or ruffle. He is all angularity, all in black, with only a stiff white shirt to set it off. He seems ill at ease in the armchair. Is he anxious to return to work?

One must not carry gendered analysis of nineteenth-century costume to an extreme. Though gender distinctions now overshadowed those of rank, this was certainly no classless society. The bourgeois gave vent to his aristocratic yearnings



10 Self-made industrialist John Redpath, a Scottish orphan said to have arrived barefoot in Montreal, became one of its richest men. From his top hat to his boots, Redpath represents the classic mid-nineteenth-century Man in Black. A driving entrepreneur, Presbyterian philanthropist, and teetotaler, he embodies the self-control and efficiency associated with the gentleman of his day, who spend business hours 'in almost any sort of degrading occupation ... and be a gentleman still.' (John Redpath, Montreal, QC, 1866, 1-20963.1, Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal)

in the privacy of his own home in his coloured satin dressing-gown and velvet slippers. Even in public he could hint at wealth and pedigree with 'the immaculate whiteness of starched shirtfronts, collars, cravats, and shirt cuffs ... with prestige conferred ... by its brief existence (threatened by a thousand accidents), the gestural constraints implied, and especially the costs entailed in laundering and replacement.'⁴²

The new gent also claimed distinction with his black silk top hat, an item fashionable in England by 1815. Since this imported model supplanted earlier ones made of Canadian beaver, the item was doubly dysfunctional for Montrealers. Philippe Perrot wryly deconstructs the haberdashery that swept the western world:

It fulfilled no useful purpose; its narrow brim provided little protection from rain or sun, and its height exposed it to every wind ... This gleaming cylinder owed its long life to other virtues: notably, that of incorporating bourgeois propriety, through its stiffness and funereal sobriety, and aristocratic bearing, because it made any physical activity completely impossible.⁴³

In replacing noble wigs and feathers, the hat symbolized equality; but its shimmer, cleanliness, and distinctive details subverted that message. Redpath – self-made but very rich – posed for the camera with his democratic/undemocratic headwear at the ready.

Apart from that mixed message on his head, Redpath paraded not so much his person as his accomplishments. He was justly proud of the sugar refinery he opened in 1854. His belching factory was honoured at the 1855 Paris Exhibition, where he touted it with a panoramic print and a boastful booklet. It was a celebration of grubby productivity that would have shocked Claude de Ramezay. Redpath's actions of national significance included co-founding the stern but relatively democratic Canadian Free Kirk in 1843, and presiding over the Businessmen's Annexation Association in 1849. He served as Montreal alderman, helped design federal tariff policy, and contributed handsomely to philanthropies and reforms. In a single lifetime he heaved stone, made money, and shaped policy of church and state. In the Redpath Sugar Refinery and the Canadian Presbyterian Kirk he fathered two of his adopted country's enduring institutions.

Redpath shouldered the male role made famous in Samuel Smiles's account of self-made men. He typically worked three or four hours longer than his associates. He founded the sugar refinery to assure the financial future of his family, and his sons noted it caused him great anxiety. Serving on boards of banks and companies, he was a voice for caution and sound business practices. Like many a self-made industrialist he was a commanding presence, often to the discomfit of those around him. He made strong and seemingly somewhat arbitrary demands of his

sons, ultimately deciding only two of them were fit for the family business.⁴⁴ (In contrast to ancien régime practice, sons could no longer count on lineage or patronage to outweigh personal failings.) It was said Redpath remained humble and generous, never becoming 'vain, proud and heartless'; but he was clearly tough-minded.

This 'no-frills' gentleman was highly productive. In addition to his overtime at the office, Redpath also did 'women's work,' showing an engagement with the young, sick, and abandoned that is more often associated with the other sex. An 1819 town guidebook indicated nearly all the benevolent activity was performed by women, with lay or religious women running the hospitals, asylums, and benevolent societies. A few decades later Protestant laymen (and Catholic clergymen) had taken closer control of the purse strings and administration of social assistance. In 1831 Redpath and his male colleagues began administering an enlarged version of Montreal General Hospital that the Female Benevolent Society had founded. Redpath performed his work with devotion. At the hospital for example, for decades he 'took a deep interest and spent many hours there ... offering the consolation of the everlasting gospel to the sick and dying in its wards.' He supported the Magdalen Asylum to redeem 'unfortunate females, many of whom have been decoyed into the abodes of ... shame which abound in this city.' At home he lived 'a lovely private life ... [of] humble and unassuming deportment amid the enjoyment of much wealth.'⁴⁵ His letters indicate active involvement in the careful moral upbringing of his children, and a jocular affection for the young.⁴⁶

With the paterfamilias such an active figure at work, in civic affairs, and at home, how were the women occupying themselves? We know little about Redpath's two successive wives, other than that they bore him seventeen children between them. The temperance journal Redpath sponsored lamented in the 1840s that women were not doing more to aid that cause. Jane Redpath was evidently a dutiful Presbyterian churchwoman. Fortunately there is more information about Redpath's daughter Helen. She married refinery engineer George Drummond, a dynamic individual who eventually directed the company's operation. In their Sherbrooke Street mansion she

planned the rooms, the decorations, the arrangement of the priceless objects of *virtu* with which it was the delight of [Mr.Drummond] to surround himself ... when he could spare the leisure to enjoy his artistic leanings. This beautiful home ... housed many a notable guest. It echoed to soft laughter, to brilliant music ... all that is most select in Montreal society gathered in its drawing rooms.⁴⁷

Drummond family portraits are instructive. An 1876 portrait of Helen Redpath

Drummond depicts her as a showy aristocrat, in the costume of the Victorian lady. Probably she was wearing tightly laced stays to produce her small waist, an agony ladies suffered during much of the nineteenth century. The skirt grew to mammoth volume due to the evolving proliferation of undergarments: multiple petticoats before 1840, horsehair crinolines in the 1840s and 1850s, then artificial cage crinolines that allowed skirts to reach their fullest circumference. Helen's body carried all the weighty fabric and aggressive ornamentation of the old noblesse. A portrait of her sons from the 1860s showed how little boys still dressed in the knee breeches and ornamental clothing associated with eighteenth-century elites, acquiring their father's long pants as they grew older.

These styles reflected the very divergent lifestyles of Victorian men and women. Helen Redpath Drummond, unlike the de Ramezay women, took no part in the family business. Statecraft, bread-winning, and social welfare administration had moved out of the home to become male responsibilities. Life insurance, a nineteenth-century development, now made doubly sure that the widow need never drag her billowing sea of fabric across the factory floor. Loss of *Coutume de Paris* wifely property rights let the Man in Black exercise control even from the grave, now having discretion to write a will disinheriting his widow should she remarry.⁴⁸ The lavishly dressed but economically dependent person presiding over the gracious home was now female, but the estate was no longer the economic and political hub it had been in the de Ramezays' day. Vinken observes:

The more securely women are excluded from the sphere of power and authority that is divided up among men, the more generously the attributes of nobility are distributed among them: they are elevated to ... queen of hearts, tyrannical mistress, whose least whim is yielded to and at whose feet everything is laid – everything, on condition that they remain completely powerless.⁴⁹

Conclusion

John Redpath and Louis-Joseph Papineau, the two nineteenth-century 'Men in Black' in a Canadian city, strike us with their power and the complexity of their concerns. They seem to have borne a heavy set of responsibilities of both a public and private nature. Their stories indicate that taking more exclusive control of civic and bread-winning roles did not necessarily mean a man gave up his private life, somehow delegating it to the womenfolk. Some men retained a very active presence in family, neighbourhood, church, community. For the political reformer Papineau and the social reformer Redpath, conscience would scarcely let them rest.

Montreal was the leading city of the Province of Canada, which in the 1840s and 1850s experienced remarkable growth and economic changes. Our two

paragons were not the only tireless activists of that vigorous era; the black suit of early- and mid-Victorian Montreal clothed many a serious, accomplished individual. By contrast, the lavish attire that slowed the body's movement and the gracious life of the manor once expected of the nobleman were transferred to the bourgeois wife. While she did the honours at home, John Redpath and his fellow evangelicals changed the city's character, initiating an industrial revolution, and a moral revolution as well. For his part, Louis-Joseph Papineau was the first great spokesman of a nationalism so powerful it has kept a conquered people intact on an anglophone continent for more than two centuries – still French, still in fighting trim.

The Montreal cases we have studied affirm the dramatic impact of the Revolutionary Age on both male appearance and male authority. After black suits made their first, controversial appearance in town streets in 1791, a gentleman's costume increasingly took the nature of a uniform common across the western world. In contrast to the vain and showy Claude de Ramezay, our two black-clad nineteenth-century public men assume true moral gravitas. Louis-Joseph Papineau's transition to modern masculinity showed more growing pains than did John Redpath's. But both of these men bore their troubles, supported their families, rallied their communities, transformed their country. Without condoning the highly gendered division of power that called forth their energies, one can still admire the bravura performance. Might it be said they earned their pants?

NOTES

- 1 McCord Archives, Montreal, McCord Family Papers 144, Arthur Davidson to John Chalmers, 25 June 1791.
- 2 William Wood, *The Storied Province of Quebec: Past and Present* (Toronto, Dominion Publishing, 1931), 2: 1061.
- 3 Harvey, *Men in Black*, 9, 257; Vinken, 'Transvesty – Travesty: Fashion and Gender,' 35–6.
- 4 Vinken, 'Transvesty,' 35. On Charles II and the connections between dress and manly patriotism in England, see Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity*.
- 5 On the macaronies, see McNeil, 'Macaroni Masculinities.' On the change from Paris to London fashions, see Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 30.
- 6 Ruddel, 'Consumer Trends, Clothing, Textiles and Equipment in the Montreal Area, 1792–1835,' 46.
- 7 Cited in Ribeiro, *The Art of Dress*, 14.
- 8 Philippe Aubert de Gaspé noted that past glorious military heroism was downplayed

- by elites for fear of being labelled 'French and bad subjects.' The ambitious perhaps tried to blend in sartorially too, judging by a glance at portraits from the two cultures in Beland, ed., *La Peinture au Québec, 1820-1850*.
- 9 Harvey, *Men in Black*, 125. The figures on coloured clothing he attributes to Daniel Roche.
- 10 Peter Kalm, *The America of 1750: Peter Kalm's Travels in North America* (New York: Dover, 1964), 2: 465.
- 11 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 10.
- 12 See the essay by E.L.R. Williamson, 'Period Costume,' 154ff; Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 16.
- 13 Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970*, 94.
- 14 See 'Claude de Ramezay,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) 2: 545-8 for the governor's character and career.
- 15 Charles Le Roy Bacqueville de la Potherie, *Histoire de l'Amerique septentrionale* (Paris: Nyon, 1753), I: 367-68; see also Louis Franquet, *Voyages et mémoires sur le Canada* (Montreal: Editions Elysée, 1974), 56.
- 16 See 'Claude de Ramezay,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 2: 548.
- 17 Abbé A. Daniel, *Histoire des grandes familles francaises du Canada* (Montreal: E. Senecal, 1867), 438-40.
- 18 NA, C11A, vol. 50, 24 May 1728; *ibid.*, Madame de Ramezay to Maurepas, 8 October 1728; vol. 56, Mme. Ramezay to Maurepas, 25 August, 1731; vol. 58, Hocquart to Maurepas, 15 October 1732.
- 19 The forceful character and convent life of Mother St Claude de Ramezay is discussed in my 'Caste and Clientage in an Eighteenth Century Convent,' *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (2001): 465-90.
- 20 Robert-Lionel Séguin, *La Civilisation traditionnelle de l'habitant aux 17e et 18e siècles* (Montreal: Fides, 1973), 492.
- 21 Marius Barbeau, *Saintes Artisans, I: Les Brodeuses* (Montreal: Editions Fides, 1946), 67 (my translation).
- 22 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 18; Kalm, *The America of 1750*, II: 446-47.
- 23 Charles Bert Reed, *Masters of the Wilderness* (Chicago, 1914), 68. For an intriguing analysis, see Carolyn Podruchny, 'Festivities, Fortitude and Fraternalism: Fur Trade Masculinity and the Beaver Club, 1785-1827,' in *New Faces of the Fur Trade: Selected Papers of the Seventh North American Fur Trade Conference* (Halifax, 1995).
- 24 Laver, *The Concise History of Fashion and Costume*, 184.
- 25 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 20.
- 26 'Claude de Ramezay,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* 2: 547-8.
- 27 Fernand Ouellet, *Louis-Joseph Papineau: A Divided Soul* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1961), 3. This was the opinion of fellow rebels T.S. Brown and Robert

- Nelson. The latter referred to him as 'a man good for speaking but not for acting.' Cited in Fermand Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760–1850* (Ottawa: 1989), 420–47, 635–36.
- 28 L-J Papineau to John Neilson, cited in Mason Wade, *The French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 1: 135; see also the letter to his wife reprinted in R. Rumilly, *Papineau et son temps* (Montreal: Fides, 1977), 1: 374.
- 29 Ouellet, *Papineau*, 14, 17–18.
- 30 Letter of 24 November 1831, quoted in Rumilly, *Papineau*, 1: 245.
- 31 Ruddel, 'Consumer Trends,' 51, 52, 62 n.25.
- 32 Historian-archivist P-G Roy estimated that wigs were abandoned about fifty years after the Conquest, about 1810, and the *couette*, long hair tied behind, between 1800 and 1825. Roy, 'Nos coutumes et nos traditions francaises,' *Cahiers des Dix* 4 (1939).
- 33 Thomas Storrow Brown, *L'Hon. L-J Papineau* (Montreal, 1872), 11 (my translation).
- 34 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 229. See also E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 13–14.
- 35 Chiefly annexation to the United States (in the very year Confederation occurred) and retention of the seigneurial system, which was abolished to the approval of all parties in the legislature in 1854.
- 36 His friend and biographer said he was (falsely) accused of being a man of ungovernable passions. See E.B. O'Callaghan, *Biographical Sketch of Hon. Louis Joseph Papineau* (Saratoga, NY, 1838), 6–7.
- 37 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 34–45.
- 38 Louise Gagnon, *L'Apparition des modes enfantines au Québec* (Quebec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1992), 39, 61, 78, 120–63.
- 39 Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life, 1860–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 258.
- 40 F. Bosworth, *Hochelega Depicta* (1839), cited in W.H. Atherton, *Montreal, 1535–1914* (Montreal: S.J. Clarke, 1914), 493.
- 41 Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 30, 32.
- 42 Ibid., 33, 127.
- 43 Ibid., 122.
- 44 Rev. D.H. MacVicar, *In Memoriam: A Sermon Preached in the Presbyterian Church ... on the Death of John Redpath, Esq.* (Montreal: J. Lovell, 1869). On Redpath's factory and family business relationships, see Richard Feltoe, *Redpath: The History of a Sugar House* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History, 1991), 39–73.
- 45 MacVicar, *In Memoriam*. See also Gerald Tulchinsky, 'John Redpath,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 9: 654–55.

- 46 This is evident in the small collection of Redpath letters at the McCord Museum in Montreal.
- 47 From E.A.Collard, *Call Back Yesterday*, cited in Feltoe, *History of a Sugar House*, 147. Numerous Redpath and Drummond portraits are reprinted in Feltoe's book. An 1876 portrait of George Drummond is consonant with Christopher Heward's point that there was a slight relaxation of 'Man in Black' conventions after 1870. Drummond posed in the now permitted neutral shades and a coat of a more relaxed cut than that seen in the earlier portrait of his father-in-law, John Redpath. This function of the middle-class female in the United States is discussed in Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 179ff. See also Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986).
- 48 English-Canadian inheritance law is discussed in Lori Chambers, *Married Women and Property Law in Victorian Ontario* (Toronto: Osgoode Society, 1997), and in David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).
- 49 Vinken, 'Transvestry,' 35, 38.

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