

“HE THOUGHT HE WAS THE BOSS OF EVERYTHING”:

Masculinity and Power in a Vancouver Family¹

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HENRY BELL-IRVING, a Vancouver industrialist, was not pleased with his sons, especially the eldest. Enrolled at Loretto, a prestigious public school in Scotland, the boys were following in the footsteps of their father. The boys seemed not to be taking their education seriously, and Henry had had enough. In a November 1907 letter he told them that if they wanted “to become real men,” then they should read and study his letter carefully: “keep it by you and act on it, and the sooner the better. I can only give the course, it is for you to steer it and go full steam ahead.” One part of the message emphasized hard work and individual achievement and is a classic statement of the Victorian liberal values that were widely shared across the middle class of the time: “A man is the maker of his own fortune ... He is either self made or never made. By industry, application, and good use of leisure time, he may become almost anything he pleases ... Idleness and not work is a curse.” The other part of the letter reflected the Bell-Irvings’s status as a Scottish borderlands family of wealth, history, and education, and it was more upper- than middle-class in tone. A man must not only work hard but have character, Henry asserted: a measure of modesty allows you to “avoid contentiousness and contradictions and carping fault

¹ In January 2001 this article was presented as the Seagram Lecture to the McGill Institute for Canadian Studies, and I would like first to thank Desmond Morton, the institute’s director, for his invitation to work and study as the Seagram Chair at McGill. Several members of the Bell-Irving family have contributed to this study. Special appreciation is owed to the late Elizabeth O’Kiely, without whose generous support in providing access to family papers, photographs, and stories the essay could not have been written. Four other family members generously provided interviews: the Honourable H.P. Bell-Irving, Ian Bell-Irving, Verité Purdy, and Darg Bell-Irving. I also appreciate the various forms of research assistance provided by Jean Barman, Tina Loo, Carla Paterson, Annemarie Adams, and Brian Lewis.

finding.” Do all you can “to cultivate good manners,” for manners “make the man and want of them the fellow.” Improve yourself “by studying the lives of men who have become great – learn how they succeeded, and *why* others have failed.” In conclusion, “be a gentleman always – you were born gentlemen – educated and brought up as such ... it now rests with you to remain so.”²

The author of this paternal advice, Henry Ogle (H.O.) Bell-Irving (see Figure 1), was one of the most influential businessmen to emerge in Vancouver, British Columbia, in its early years as a city. Bell-Irving arrived on the west coast in 1885 and died in the city at the age of seventy-four in 1931. Trained in Karlsruhe, Germany, as a civil engineer, H.O. had gained employment as a surveyor-engineer on the Rocky and Selkirk Mountain sections of the Canadian Pacific Railway line in 1882. Three years later, he quit the company and headed west to Granville, the Burrard Inlet lumber village that became the City of Vancouver in 1886. A restless young entrepreneur hoping to regain clear title to his father’s estate at Milkbank in Dumfriesshire, near Lockerbie in the Scottish Lowlands, he correctly discerned that British Columbia’s infant salmon-canning industry offered tremendous potential for making money. In the fall of 1890 he found among family and friends in Scotland the capital to consolidate nine west coast canneries, seven of which were on the Fraser River, into one corporation – the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company Ltd. At the outset Anglo-BC Packers, which Bell-Irving managed through his agency company in Vancouver, was “the world’s No. 1 producer of sockeye salmon.” Through solid management the canning enterprise prospered, and Henry Bell-Irving’s fortune grew. At his death he left an estate of \$339,000 (net), placing it sixteenth among the top fifty Vancouver fortunes of the period. In addition, he had already given away a considerable, though undetermined, amount to help Britain and Canada fight the First World War, and to support the families of his ten children.³

² Paragraph from letter written by Henry Bell-Irving to his sons at Loretto School, Scotland, (14-25 November 1907?), City of Vancouver Archives (hereafter CVA), Bell-Irving Family Papers (hereafter BIFP), Add. MSS 1, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward.

³ For H.O. Bell-Irving’s history, see *Vancouver Daily Province* (hereafter *Province*), 19 February 1931, 1-2; *Daily Colonist*, 21 February 1931, 4; G.S. Andrews, “The Bell-Irving Land Surveyors in British Columbia,” *British Columbia Historical News* 12, 4 (Summer 1979): 11-16; and C.W. Parker, ed., *Who’s Who in Western Canada*, vol. 1 (Vancouver: Canadian Press Association, 1911), 106. For the formation of the Anglo-British Columbia Packing Company Limited, see *Pacific Fisherman* (50th Anniversary Number) 50 (August 1952):15; *Daily News-Advertiser* (hereafter *News-Advertiser*) 5 May 1891, 8; Henry Doyle, “Rise and Decline of the Pacific Salmon Fisheries,” Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia



Figure 1: Henry Ogle Bell-Irving, 1903. Musée McCord Museum, II-147348.

Library, MS, vol. 1, pp. 191-92; and Dianne Newell, ed. and intro., *The Development of the Pacific Salmon-Canning Industry: A Grown Man's Game* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 205-06. For Henry Bell-Irving's probated estate, see British Columbia Attorney-General, Estate Records, British Columbia Archives and Records Service (BCARS), BC Supreme Court, Vancouver Probates, GRI415, file 1931/16,148. Gifts to his children are documented in CVA, BIPP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 48, diary, 18 November 1916, and vol. 49, diary, 7 November 1917; H. Bell-Irving to Aeneus, 12 February 1925, CVA, BIPP, Add. MSS 1, Correspondence Outward; and CVA, BIPP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 65, diary, (?) October 1927, and vol. 70, diary, 15 November 1929.

H.O. came from an old, and landed, Scottish borderland family that also participated actively in commerce. His father had spent the early years of his business life as a merchant in Georgetown, British Guiana, and later was engaged in the West Indies trade from Glasgow. Another branch of the family had married into the Jardines of Jardine, Matheson, and Company, traders into China; and a member of that branch, H.O.'s cousin John Bell-Irving, was the London-based tea merchant and financier who headed Anglo-BC Packers.

Henry quickly established a family in the city, bringing from England a young bride named Marie Ysabel del Carmen Beattie (see Figure 2), whom he had met in Switzerland a number of years earlier.⁴ Bella, as she was known, arrived shortly before the new city burned



Figure 2: Marie Ysabel del Carmen Bell-Irving, n.d. Private, Darg Bell-Irving.

to the ground on 13 June 1886, leaving her, one suspects, rather unimpressed with this raw and undeveloped place on the outer edge of empire. While raised at her family's country estate at St. Michael's near Torquay in Devon, England, Bella was born in Santiago, Cuba, where her wealthy family owned a sugar plantation. Bella's father was, like the Bell-Irvings, from the Scottish Lowlands, while her mother, born Marie Isabel Brooks, was partly of French ancestry but had been born in the West Indies, suggesting that the Brooks and Beattie

⁴ Marie Isabel del Carmen Beattie (Bella) was born in 1862 in Santiago, Cuba, and died in 1936 in Vancouver. Her mother was Marie Isabel Brooks and her maternal grandmother was Rosa Despaigne of Bordeaux. Rosa Despaigne's family had interests in Saint Domingue in the West Indies. Richard Hudson Beattie, Bella's father, was also, like the Bell-Irvings, from the Scottish Lowlands but appears to have moved to Torquay, Devon, in 1883 (information from the "Brooks Family Tree," Elizabeth O'Kiely's private records, and P.J. Bottrill, Area Librarian, South Devon area, Torquay, to Robert McDonald, 19 August 1996).

families had a long-time connection with investment in the Americas. The union of Henry and Bella, then, was a marriage of two imperial business families that had participated actively in the expansion of capital and influence from Britain to far-off parts of the globe.⁵ One of those far-off places was British Columbia.

The privileged background of the Bell-Irvings translated easily, and predictably, into a high-status lifestyle. Henry and Bella lived in large houses; had many servants; hired governesses and tutors to educate their children (and then sent them to elite schools); participated in status-defining rituals such as the round of afternoon visits known as “at homes”; belonged to the best clubs and the most prestigious charities; purchased Cadillacs; travelled frequently to Europe; and owned an island (Pasley Island, located near Vancouver at the entrance to Howe Sound), which H.O. had purchased in 1909 for the exclusive recreational use of his family.⁶ For the Bell-Irvings, status and class blended into a coherent, and reinforcing, whole.

Being British in a city where 85 per cent of the population shared a British cultural background also legitimized the Bell-Irving family’s social power. The family members were British by birth and metropolitan (rather than provincial) by outlook and lifestyle. Their reference points were London, Milkbank, and Torquay rather than Vancouver, at least until after the First World War. Britain remained their second home, and, for more than four years (starting in 1903), their first. They bought tweed suits, deerstalker caps, carpets, fabric, and furniture in London, even having the chintz covering on chairs reglazed in the Old Country.⁷ At the outset of the Boer War the Bell-Irving children stood on the railway platform in Vancouver and

⁵ Andrews, “The Bell-Irving Land Surveyors in British Columbia,” 11-14; *The Bell-Irvings of BC* (Burnaby: Burnaby Art Gallery, 1980), in Special Collections Division, University of British Columbia Library, pamphlet collection, SPAM 9664; “Diamond Wedding Rejoicing at Whitehall,” newspaper clipping, n.p., 14 November 1903, in CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 77, scrapbook; and CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 65, diary, 29 October 1927.

⁶ Information in this paragraph taken from a variety of newspaper and other sources. The upper stratum of Vancouver society, of which the Bell-Irvings were a part, is discussed in Robert A.J. McDonald, *Making Vancouver: Class, Status, and Social Boundaries, 1863-1913* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), chap. 7. For Pasley Island, see CVA, Add. MSS 54, Matthews Collection, Streets and Place Names File, “Pasley Island”; and H. Bell-Irving to Mr Sprott, 19 July 1910, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 87, Correspondence Outward.

⁷ Notes from Elizabeth O’Kiely’s interview with Isabel Sweeny, circa early 1970s, Elizabeth O’Kiely, private collection (hereafter Isabel Sweeny Interview, notes), 16 and 22; H. Bell-Irving to Messrs. Goodel and Graham, Clothiers, London, 13 December 1888, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 82, Correspondence Outward; H. Bell-Irving to Peter Robinson Ltd., London, 5 January 1898, Add. MSS 1, vol. 83, Correspondence Outward; and CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 53, diary, 3 February 1920.

sang “Soldiers of the Queen” to the first contingent of Boer War troops to leave from the west coast for South Africa (to the great amusement of the soldiers themselves).⁸ As the eldest Bell-Irving daughter pointed out many years later, “in our generation we were not unhappy to be a colony of Britain.”⁹

The family’s British-centric view of the world is most evident in Henry Bell-Irving’s unlimited enthusiasm for imperial federation. He moved back to England in October 1903 to be closer to his boys, who were in British schools, and to join Joseph Chamberlain’s campaign for the creation of an imperial tariff and an end to British free trade. He fought to have the Dominion government support the imperial navy rather than create a Canadian one, and, in 1910, he organized a large public meeting in Vancouver to urge that Canada help Britain build Dreadnoughts. According to his obituary, Henry Bell-Irving was a “strong imperialist” and the “Father of Imperial Preference.”¹⁰ Yet H.O.’s enthusiasm for empire co-existed with an equally strong Scottish identity. For ceremonial occasions the Bell-Irving men wore tweed kilts and listened to the music of a Scottish pipe band, and the boys learned Scottish dancing and were sent to a Scottish public school.¹¹ Henry Bell-Irving was both a Briton and a Scot but not, in any discernible way, a Canadian.

Given his ethnocentrism and strong support for imperialism, Henry Ogle Bell-Irving’s views on British Columbia’s Asian population are hardly surprising. Imperialist ideology wed the values of Social Darwinism with those of British nationalism to create a sense of imperial duty, a belief in the need to carry British culture to the peoples of the world. H.O. shared that vision and its assumptions. As an employer of labour he played a major role in breaking the strikes of Fraser River sockeye salmon fishermen in 1893 and 1900. Typical of his class, he also espoused an open labour market in which wages

⁸ Isabel Sweeny Interview, notes, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ Quotations from *Colonist*, 21 February 1931, 4. See also *News-Advertiser*, 13 October 1903, 5; H. Bell-Irving to Mr. Congden, 15 July 1904, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward; H. Bell-Irving to Editor, *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, 13 January 1906, *ibid.*, vol. 85, Correspondence Outward; H. Bell-Irving to Sir Charles [H. Tupper], 15 April 1909, *ibid.*, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward; and H. Bell-Irving to Mr. [George?] Cowan, 12 February 1910, *ibid.*, vol. 87, Correspondence Outward.

¹¹ Isabel Sweeny Interview, notes, 21; H. Bell-Irving to W.L. McLennan, 5 January 1897, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 83, Correspondence Outward; and H. Bell-Irving to Piper James Begg, 10 April 1909, *ibid.*, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward. For his view that Loretto provided “a sound practical English education,” see H. Bell-Irving to Mr. [H.B.] Tristram, 8 January 1904, *ibid.*, vol. 84, Correspondence Outward.



Figure 3: Mah Sing and Sam at Bell-Irving home on Seaton Street, circa 1902. Mah Sing is on the left, Sam is looking at the camera. The picture was taken to send to relatives in China – the books were intended to impress. Private, Elizabeth O’Kiely.

could be regulated through immigration, including the immigration of Chinese and Japanese labourers.¹² As a capitalist he viewed labour as an economic factor of production, asserting publicly in 1891 that the Chinese “are less trouble and less expense than whites. They are content with rough accommodation at the canneries ... I look upon them as steam engines or any other machine.”¹³ His rhetoric was class-based but betrayed a level of racism that cannot be explained by class interest alone. In a newspaper story (published in England) about the BC salmon-canning industry he argued that “no Britisher would prefer [the] employment of Chinamen if satisfactory white labour were obtainable.”¹⁴ Yet at home he and Bella developed a close, though paternalistic, relationship with their Chinese servants. Mah Sing, shown in Figure 3 with Sam, served the Bell-Irvings for many years.

The class position of the Bell-Irvings is complicated by the family’s history, economic role, and geographic location. The Bell-Irvings claimed roots in the Scottish countryside that, by one account, reached

¹² H.O. Bell-Irving, Chairman, Special Committee, Vancouver Board of Trade, to Secretary, V.B. of T., 1 October 1907, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward.

¹³ Geoff Meggs, *Salmon: The Decline of the British Columbia Fishery* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1991), 25.

back to the twelfth century, and the family's history as members of Scotland's landed gentry remained into the early 1900s an important component of H.O.'s identity.¹⁵ Yet, while family history suggests that Henry Bell-Irving belonged to the lower reaches of Britain's aristocratic class, both Henry and Bella also came from families that were actively engaged in business and embraced capitalist values. Indeed, while H.O.'s "youthful ambition had been to make enough money to regain clear title to his father's estate in Scotland," he found the entrepreneurial climate of the New World more suited to his temperament and, in 1895, sold his equity in the family home at Milkbank to his cousin John Bell-Irving.¹⁶ In British terms, then, Henry Bell-Irving is best viewed as a member of the middle class, though admittedly its upper portion. One British study also refers to the upper middle class as the bourgeoisie, and the two terms will be used interchangeably in this essay with regard to references to Britain.¹⁷ But the Bell-Irvings also lived in Vancouver, where high status was based on achievement rather than ascription, and where, in lieu of a titled aristocracy or a landed gentry, wealthy business and professional families constituted an upper class. Thus, the language that best describes the class position of the Bell-Irving family (upper middle class or bourgeoisie on the one hand, upper class on the other) will depend, in part, on whether the perspective is from the Old World or the New World.¹⁸

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So far I have defined the Bell-Irving family through the categories of class, race, and ethnicity, and I have emphasized what we know about the family as public figures. But the 1907 letter from H.O. to

¹⁴ "Colonial Onlooker" [H. B-I] to Editor, *The Western Morning News* (Plymouth, England), 6 January 1906, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 85, Correspondence Outward.

¹⁵ Reference to the family's twelfth-century roots is from the *Japan Mail*, 30 July 1904, in CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 28, diary, May-December 1904. The Scottish history of the Beattie family (i.e., the family of Bella's father) is unknown.

¹⁶ Andrews, "The Bell-Irving Land Surveyors of British Columbia," 14 and "Unionist Campaign in Mid-Oxon," *Oxford Times*, 8 February [1904?], in O'Kiely, private collection.

¹⁷ Brian Lewis, *The Middlemost and the Milltowns: Bourgeois Culture and Politics in Early Industrial England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1-2 and 432, n. 2.

¹⁸ This discussion of the class position of the Bell-Irvings within British society and Canadian society is informed by John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11-13 and 19-20; Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989), 62-100; and Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 3-49.

his sons hints at another perspective, one that takes us through the front door of the family home and into the private realm of domestic life. It is a world in which assumptions about the gender roles of men and women also played a crucial part in shaping family life. The concept of gender is simple enough: it states that how a man or a woman functions is not only a matter of biology, or sex, but also a product of history. A male is born a man, but his masculinity “is a human convention,” something that is historical and must be viewed as fluid, variable, and contested.¹⁹ An examination of gender forces us to look beyond the public realm as a site where men exercised influence and to explore the links between public role and private power. For, as British historians Michael Roper and John Tosh point out, we need to recognize that “men’s power in history has resided in their masculinity, as well as in their material privilege and their manipulation of law and custom.”²⁰ With this understanding of gender in mind, I would like to explore some of the ways in which masculinity was defined, and contested, within the Bell-Irving family. Making H.O. visible as a father and as a husband both complicates and enriches our understanding of his success as a businessman in early Vancouver.

Let us start by looking at H.O.’s relationship with the men in his family. Henry and Bella had ten children, six of them boys. Conventional wisdom prescribed that, in Victorian middle-class families, the men should participate in public affairs outside of the home while the women, less rational than their husbands but with a special capacity to nurture and educate, should prevail in the home. This separate-spheres ideology was followed closely in the Bell-Irving household – H.O. as the breadwinner and uncontested head of the family, Bella as mother and house manager – but only to a point, for, to begin with, Henry Ogle Bell-Irving actively managed the upbringing of his boys and was guided in doing so by his understanding of what it meant to be a man. On more than one occasion he expressed frustration that his two oldest sons, Henry

¹⁹ Quotation from E. Anthony Troper, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic, 1993), 1. Alice Kessler-Harris has defined gender as “the socially shaped cluster of attributes, expectations, and behaviors assigned to different sexes” (“Treating the Male as ‘Other’: Redefining the Parameters of Labor History,” *Labor History* 34, 2-3 [Spring-Summer 1993]: 191). See also Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 1.

²⁰ Quotations from Michael Roper and John Tosh, “Historians and the Politics of Masculinity,” in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 4 and 1.

Beattie and Richard, were not measuring up to this ideal. The 1907 letter is interesting in part because it defined, in somewhat contradictory terms, what he believed a “real man” to be. H.O. himself had succeeded both as a businessman and a gentleman, but the tension between the two ideals was less easily bridged by his family. None of his boys distinguished himself in business, as he had done, and, with the possible exception of Richard (the second son, who took over the family business), the gentlemanly ideal seems to have had greater force than the business ideal. The eldest son (Henry Beattie) was a superb cannery man but was constantly in debt and seems not to have had a good sense of how to manage money. As his financial resources diminished in the late 1920s he was unable to retreat from a lifestyle – complete with servants, parties, and private schools for his children – that he felt was appropriate to his own family’s identity as “the Henry Bell-Irving Juniors.”²¹

Part of the difficulty that the sons encountered as businessmen, I am suggesting, may have come from the mixed signals that their father left about what it meant to be “real men”: self-made and hard-working businessmen on the one hand, and gentlemen on the other.²² For, in sending all six sons, and his eldest grandson, to the prestigious British public school of Loretto, located near Edinburgh, H.O. chose for them an education that equated masculinity with the values of British society’s upper strata. Through education at a “public” (i.e., a fee-based) school, young men were to develop “character,” a concept that British historian J.R. Mangan has described as “a common synonym

²¹ From a letter of Henry Beattie Bell-Irving to Henry Ogle Bell-Irving, n.d., 1929, read to Robert McDonald by Ian Bell-Irving, 7 August 1997.

²² The problem of how to resolve the tension between aristocratic and bourgeois influences in families with ties to both the landed gentry and the upper middle class was not unique to the Bell-Irvings. Over the past twenty years British historians have debated the influence of industrialization on the structure of British society. One perspective, strongly expressed by Martin Wiener, emphasizes the “gentrification” of the bourgeoisie, another the “bourgeoisification” of the aristocracy, and a third some variety of plutocratic blending. Examples of this literature include, for the “gentrification” argument, Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and, for the “bourgeoisification” thesis, Robert Gray, “Bourgeois Hegemony in Victorian Britain,” in Jonathan Bloomfield, ed., *Papers on Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), 73-93. See also F.M.L. Thompson, “Aristocracy, Gentry, and the Middle Class in Britain, 1750-1850” in Adolf M. Birke and Lothar Kettenacker, eds., *Middle Classes, Aristocracy and Monarchy* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1989), 15-34; and Patricia Thane, “Aristocracy and the Middle Class in Victorian England: The Problem of ‘Gentrification,’” in *ibid.*, 15-34 and 93-109. For a general comment on this debate, see Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c.1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

for manliness in the language of the period.”²³ The concept of “character” incorporated antithetical values: on the one hand “the virtues of a young Christian gentleman (honesty, modesty, honour and a foundation of true religion”), on the other a “manly code” that was more explicitly masculine (success, aggression, and ruthlessness), though always marked by “victory within the rules, courtesy in triumph, compassion for the defeated.”²⁴ Among the first-rank public schools in Britain in the last half of the nineteenth century, Loretto was famous for emphasizing the physical side of this equation and for stressing the role that athleticism played in the development of character: fresh air, cold baths, team sports, and rugged self-sufficiency.²⁵ Like Bell-Irving, Loretto’s famous headmaster, H.H. Almond, also believed that athleticism forged character more powerfully than did “book learning.”²⁶

While taking on a specific class character at Loretto, this infatuation with athleticism was broadly shared by middle-class men in the United States and Canada, as well as in Britain, at the end of the century. As E. Anthony Rotundo says with regard to the United States, “the body itself became a vital component of manhood: strength, appearance, and athletic skill mattered more than in previous centuries.”²⁷ Reflecting this association of physical athleticism with manhood, H.O. kept himself in excellent shape and was a noted hunter and skater. He also climbed mountains and, each morning, lifted weighted dumbbells. Indeed, he was climbing Vancouver’s North Shore mountains at the beginning of his seventy-fourth year and took a skating trip to Europe – during which he skated with the young skating sensation Sonja Henie – just months before his death. Loretto translated into class terms a commitment to athleticism and sports that was popular at the time and that was a key element of Henry Bell-Irving’s definition of manhood.

²³ J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Education Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

²⁵ The philosophy of H.H. Almond, the headmaster at Loretto school from 1862 to 1903, is discussed in *ibid.*, 48–58, 162–63, and 190–91; and in J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the Diffusion of an Ideal* (New York: Viking, 1985), 24–28. Jean Barman has studied the dissemination of the public school ethos to British Columbia in *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private Schools* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

²⁶ Mangan, *Athleticism*, 49; and H. Bell-Irving to Mr. [H.B.] Tristram, 8 January 1904, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 84, Correspondence Outward. H.H. Almond was Loretto’s headmaster from 1862 to 1903.

²⁷ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 6. See also p. 222.

The turn-of-the-century period was also one in which athleticism had become equated with war, which “was thought to breed a new, forceful manhood.”²⁸ The link between athleticism and militarism reached its fullest expression in enthusiasm for empire, and H.O. was a most enthusiastic imperialist. It is not surprising, then, that he would choose to educate his sons in schools that saw as their mandate the training of imperial leaders. Military service was especially emphasized, with public school boys being “continually reminded of their patriotic duty, of their roles as military leaders,” and of the close relationship between games like football and war.²⁹ H.O. would have agreed with another ardent imperialist in Canada, Montreal’s David Ross McCord, that “war served a noble function in that it strengthened both individual manliness and national character.”³⁰ Little wonder, then, that Henry Bell-Irving and his sons expressed their notions of masculinity in military terms.

They did so especially during the First World War. The Bell-Irvings greeted the outbreak of war with patriotic enthusiasm. By November 1914 five of the six boys had enlisted, and the sixth, a student at Loretto, did so in the middle of the war. All six gained commissions spread across the army, navy, and air force. They won numerous citations for bravery, were constantly being injured, and tragically lost one of their members within weeks of the war’s end. H.O. contributed to the war effort in more material ways as well, especially in financially supporting the purchase of machine guns for the war effort.³¹ The media loved the symbolism of the Bell-Irving family’s war record, which it portrayed in highly gendered terms. An American journal spoke of H.O.’s sons as “splendid specimens of manhood,” while the *London Daily Express* described them as “all red-blooded, red-haired and red-fibred, with grit marked all over them.”³² From London to Vancouver, H.O. Bell-Irving became known as “the father of a famous fighting family.”³³

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 240-41.

²⁹ Quotations in this paragraph from Mangan, *Athleticism*, 56 and 191; see also Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, 21-43.

³⁰ Donald A Wright, “Remembering War in Imperial Canada: David Ross McCord and the McCord National Museum,” *Fontanus* 9 (1996): 97.

³¹ Bell-Irving also joined with a group of leading Vancouver businessmen to form the Aero Club of British Columbia, an instrument for training RFC pilots, and he served as “the unofficial recruiting officer for the Royal Flying Corps in British Columbia.” See Elizabeth O’Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace: The Duncan Bell-Irving Story* (Madiera Park: Harbour, 1922), 34, 60-61, and 168.

³² Newspaper clipping, unnamed, 13 September 1916, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 79, scrapbook and *London Daily Express*, n.d. [November 1917-June 1918], *ibid.*, vol. 50, diary.

H.O.'s pride as a father who had done his duty to God and country animated a family photograph taken in London in January 1918, the father surrounded by his sons, all in uniform. H.O. had used his considerable influence to have all six sons pulled from their military positions for the sake of the family reunion in London. The family's eldest daughter, Isabel, also worked in London at Lady Ridley's, a private hospital where the boys would go when injured, but it was the sons who most obviously spelled success for Bell-Irving as a father.³⁴

The potential contradiction in Bell-Irving's understanding of manliness – emphasizing, as it did, a man's role as both the economic and social head of the family – became a very real contradiction in the mid-1920s when he had to choose which of his two eldest sons would succeed him as head of H. Bell-Irving and Company. Roper and Tosh have argued that “one of the most precarious moments in the reproduction of masculinity is the transfer of power to the succeeding generation, whether it be within the family from father to son, via apprenticeship in the case of skilled workers, or by ‘palace revolutions’ in business. The key question is whether the ‘sons’ take on the older generation's gender identity without question, or whether they mount a challenge, and if so, how.”³⁵ In the Bell-Irving family, conflict pitted Henry Ogle against his eldest son, Henry Beattie, and came to a head over the issue of succession in the family business. When, in 1925, H.O. made the decision to pass on the presidency of H. Bell-Irving and Company to his second son rather than to his first, tensions that had been developing for years exploded. Particularly distressing to H.O. was the fact that others in the family sided with their brother, arguing that, as the eldest male, and following family tradition, Henry Jr. had the right to succeed his father. Yet the differences between father and son were not exclusively about control of the business, for Henry Beattie had been challenging his father's

³³ So great was H.O.'s zeal that in August 1917 he brought down upon himself considerable criticism for labelling as “traitors” and “friends of the Kaiser” western Canadian Liberals who backed Sir Wilfrid Laurier in opposing conscription. See the *Vancouver Sun*, 13 August 1917; *Province*, 13 August 1917; and *News-Advertiser*, 14 August 1917, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 79, scrapbook. The quotation, cited in the *Province*, was from the speech used to introduce Bell-Irving to the pro-conscription rally.

³⁴ See O'Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace*. H.O. Bell-Irving had participated actively in the creation of a Scottish militia regiment in Vancouver in 1909 and 1910. See H. Bell-Irving to Lord Strathcona, 7 May 1909, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 86, Correspondence Outward; and Bernard McEvoy and Capt. A.H. Finlay, *History of the 72nd Canadian Infantry Battalion Seaforth Highlanders of Canada* (Vancouver: Cowan and Brookhouse, 1920), 1-2 and 6.

³⁵ Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions*, 17.

authority for years. “As a boy, a youth and a grown man Henry has continually countered me – personally and in business,” H.O. wrote to Alan Duncan, his fifth son. “Time and again I have felt myself at the end of my tether ... twice he has done his utmost to turn me out of the house I have taken a lifetime to build up – all the while receiving payment for which I was directly responsible.”³⁶ The decision to hand over the business to Richard rather than to Henry Jr. was not sudden, he wrote on another occasion, “but the result of cumulative decisions stretching back twenty years.”³⁷ Amid much acrimony, Henry Jr. finally resigned from the family firm in 1928 to join a rival company, Canadian Fish.³⁸

At the core of the father’s unease with his eldest son was the deep suspicion, evident as early as 1907 but confirmed by the latter’s work record after the war, that Henry Jr. lacked “character” and, thus, did not live up to the standards of a gentleman. When H.O. had spoken of avoiding “contentiousness and contradictions and carping fault finding,” he was talking especially to the eldest. He used similar language about his eldest son in the mid-twenties, describing him as conceited and arrogant, a man whose “dominating character” and “extreme self-assurance” made him unfit for the mantle of leadership. Richard, the second son, had learned how to obey, and “therefore can command,” but not Henry, who had to be “‘Boss’ or Nothing.”³⁹ H.O. was especially upset when Henry Jr. tried to undermine his father’s authority among other members of the family. In doing so, Bell-Irving wrote in his diary, his words betraying the influence of the public school ethos, “Henry [the son] was not playing the game.”⁴⁰ In response to the accusation that it was he, Henry Ogle Bell-Irving, who was being disloyal to the family by denying the eldest son his rightful inheritance, H.O. shot back that loyalty was also due to family and friends in Britain “who were good enough 35 years ago to entrust me with their money.”⁴¹ It was the legacy of that initial investment

³⁶ H. Bell-Irving to Duncan Bell-Irving, 3 May 1928, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 89, Correspondence Outward.

³⁷ H. Bell-Irving to John [Bell-Irving], 9 April 1928, *ibid.*, vol. 89, Correspondence Outward.

³⁸ CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 66, diary, 3 May 1928, 7 May 1928, and 20 May 1928.

³⁹ Quotations from Henry Bell-Irving to John [Bell-Irving], 9 April 1928, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 89, Correspondence Outward; H. Bell-Irving to Mr. Corbett, 24 January 1925, *ibid.*, vol. 88, Correspondence Outward; and H. Bell-Irving to John [Bell-Irving], 13 August 1925, *ibid.*, vol. 88, Correspondence Outward. See also CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 62, diary, 6 July 1925, and 9 July 1925.

⁴⁰ CVA, *ibid.*, vol. 62, diary, 8 July 1925.

⁴¹ H. Bell-Irving to Duncan [Bell-Irving], 14 August 1925, CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 88, Correspondence Outward.

that was now threatened. In a letter to the London directors of Anglo-BC Packers explaining his decision, H.O. wrote, "One of the Company's main sources of strength here [in Vancouver] is the splendid support given by our bankers based on the confidence they have in the character of the personnel of the firm";⁴² his son's impulsive and unauthorized actions, and, by implication, his lack of character, threatened that confidence. After patiently observing his son for years Henry Ogle Bell-Irving felt that he had no choice: "I must do my duty."⁴³

Bell-Irving's decision reveals much about his understanding of a man's role. Without question Henry Beattie, while very different from his father in his ability to manage money, and perhaps in his business judgement, shared with his father a strong personality. H.O. was notorious for his desire to control everyone and everything around him – according to one of his grandsons, "he was always directing things," "he thought that he was the boss of everything," "he was pretty hard on his children"⁴⁴ – and Henry Beattie similarly liked control. Yet the clash between father and son that profoundly divided the family was also, in important ways, the product of conflicting notions of masculinity, pitting the father in his role as custodian of family wealth, on the one hand, against the father as defender of family tradition, on the other.

* * *

This focus on relationships between the men in the Bell-Irving family, a male-centred perspective that is common in studies of masculinity, obscures the fact that looking at men's relationships with women is one of the most telling ways of exploring masculine power. In the words of Roper and Tosh, "masculinity (like femininity) is a relational construct, incomprehensible apart from the totality of gender relations."⁴⁵ Yet, uncovering the voice of women in such a male-

⁴² H. Bell-Irving to Mr. Corbett, 24 January 1925, *ibid.*, vol. 88, Correspondence Outward.

⁴³ CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 62, diary, 9 July 1925.

⁴⁴ Henry Pybus Bell-Irving, interview with Robert McDonald, 18 June 1997.

⁴⁵ Roper and Tosh, "Historians and the Politics of Masculinity," 2 (quotation) and 13. Several working-class historians are leading the way in exploring the place of women in the construction of masculinity. For the United States, see Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male as 'Other'"; Elizabeth Faue, "Gender and the Reconstruction of Labor History: An Introduction," *Labor History* 34, 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1993): 169-77; and Ava Baron, "Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future," in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1-47. For Canada, see Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic*

dominated social world as that of the Bell-Irving family is not easy. The family has left a rich collection of company letters, cannery records, and business diaries but little evidence generated by women. My information about Bella and her eldest daughter, Isabel, comes almost entirely from interviews, in sharp contrast to the written records left by the men. We know virtually nothing about H.O.'s relationship with his three youngest daughters.

In many ways the Bell-Irvings were a typical business family of the late nineteenth century, a time when men and women were viewed as creatures with opposing qualities – the men “active, independent, rational, dominant,” the women “pious, pure, submissive, domestic.” In such families, boys mattered more than girls.⁴⁶ They certainly did among the Bell-Irvings. When listing family members in his diary, H.O. identified all the boys first, and then the girls, regardless of birth order. The priority given to the boys had special meaning for Isabel, the family's third child (born in 1889) and eldest daughter. Isabel was very close to her father, riding with him daily in Stanley Park and making the rose for his boutonnière every morning. Throughout the 1920s, when she lived with her husband Ben Sweeny in a house (owned by H.O.) next door to her parents, she served regularly as hostess (in place of her bed-ridden mother) at social functions in the family home. But the relationship between father and daughter was taxing for Isabel, a point conveyed emphatically by a story told by Isabel's daughter, Verité Purdy. On one occasion, Purdy recounts, H.O. berated Isabel for wearing lipstick, which he forbade his daughters to use. But the red on her lips was blood, not lip-stick, from the lip that she had bitten, while tense, trying to please him. Purdy suggests that Isabel Sweeny was a very sad person during the interwar years, married to a man (Ben Sweeny, from an upper-class Vancouver family) who was incapable of making money and was looked down upon by H.O. for being unsuccessful, and lacking the appreciation of her demanding father. When Henry Bell-Irving learned that he was dying of cancer, he called together his five remaining sons (a sixth had been killed in the war) to tell them of his fate, leaving his eldest daughter – who was in house at the time but

Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), esp., 108–56.

⁴⁶ For instance, Henry James Sr., the clergyman and father of noted American writer Henry James Jr., was interested only in the education of his boys because he “firmly believed that girls were moral by nature, whereas boys had to learn to be good.” See Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), xiii and 45.

was not invited to hear the news – to learn of his illness by chance. Dealing with the death of their father was the business of the men in the family, not the women. Nor did H.O. make any special provision in his will for Isabel, who received much less from the estate than did her brothers.⁴⁷

But it is H.O.'s marriage that best illustrates the link between public role and private power in the Bell-Irving household. Henry and Bella came from similar backgrounds, though Bella's family was undoubtedly wealthier than Henry's. Henry and Bella were probably very much in love when the marriage began, but we know almost nothing about how they viewed each other in the years that followed. More certain is the fact that, during the first decade of the marriage, H.O. sired children at a rate of one every fifteen months and that they had three more thereafter at longer intervals, for a total of ten. She appears to have lost at least one additional child through a miscarriage. We also know that Bella's health began to deteriorate before she had finished having children. A letter in H.O.'s business correspondence dated December 1898 reveals that Bella had been "very ill for the past six weeks" from bronchitis, pneumonia, "and other troubles" and hoped to travel to California for a long period of recuperation.⁴⁸ She had given birth to her ninth child earlier in the year. Six years later, when Bella was forty-two, she gave birth to Beatrice, her last. By then she was already suffering from rheumatoid arthritis and could barely walk. The condition continued to worsen. A photo taken in 1914 shows Bella walking with a cane, and, by the end of the war, when she was in her late fifties, she had become a permanent invalid.⁴⁹ She spent much of her remaining life, about twenty-five years, upstairs, attended by three nurses per day working in shifts.

In "an era that viewed illness as a female weakness,"⁵⁰ and in a family where bourgeois values and upper-class social pretensions combined to emphasize the physical qualities of masculinity, Bella's disability evoked little sympathy from her husband. "Mother had a very strenuous life in many ways," her eldest daughter Isabel stated in an interview recorded in the 1970s; "I think she just wasn't strong

⁴⁷ Interviews by Jean Barman and Robert McDonald with Elizabeth O'Kiely, 30 May 1997; and by McDonald with Verité Purdy at Courtney, British Columbia, 17 February 1998.

⁴⁸ H. Bell-Irving to Mr. Smith, 21 December 1898, CVA, BIFP, Add. MSS 1, vol. 83, Correspondence Outward.

⁴⁹ O'Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace*, 18 (photograph) and 208.

enough for it, quite apart from having so many of us.” At the same time, H.O.’s emphasis on athleticism and strong bodies left little room for illness or physical weakness. H.O.’s grandson, Henry Pybus Bell-Irving, states that “grandfather had an intense abhorrence of illness,” a view shared by the family’s oldest daughter, Isabel, who observed: “Daddy was never understanding of illness.”⁵¹

Yet, within this very patriarchal family, Bella did have influence. Well educated, with a solid command of the French and Spanish languages, and an accomplished pianist, Bella was “used to being the belle of the ball, and it never occurred to her not to be.”⁵² From her bedroom she managed the home, designed the garden, commanded servants, arranged parties, and received visitors. Indeed, she is said to have known where every piece of linen in the house was to be found. Her style, like that of H.O., could be described as “starchy,” and she was, in her later years, very much the “Grand Dame.” Her imperious manner may have been influenced by the Beattie family’s history as plantation owners in Cuba, where slavery persisted until 1880 and where Bella is said to have been “brought up not to raise a little finger; the servants did everything.” When, as a child, Elizabeth O’Kiely visited her grandmother, Bella would be seated in a chair, nurses at her side. The young girl would approach, kiss Bella’s arthritic hands, which were folded on her lap, and then back away and remain silent until spoken to by “Granny B-I.” Polite conversation and caraway seed cake followed.

How Bella viewed her husband is unclear, but we do have enough evidence to speculate. At one level Bella was very supportive of H.O., for she shared with him a set of values and expectations that flowed from their overlapping class and ethnic backgrounds. For example, when her eldest son started working for the family as the manager of a northern cannery, Bella wrote him a letter that was similar in tone to the one H.O. wrote his sons in 1907. In it she praised her husband for “building up a great future for his sons” and urged Henry Jr. not to rest content until he had attained great things and become an important man.⁵³ At some point, however, the marriage of Henry and Bella seems to have evolved from a relationship based on love and respect to an arrangement held together by convention and duty.

⁵¹ Quotations from Henry Pybus Bell-Irving, interview with Robert McDonald, 18 June 1997; and Isabel Sweeny interview, notes, 27. See also O’Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace*, 170-71.

⁵² Elizabeth O’Kiely, interview with Jean Barman and Robert McDonald, 30 May 1997.

⁵³ Raymond Eagle, *In the Service of the Crown: The Story of Budge and Nancy Bell-Irving* (Ottawa: Golden Dog, 1998), 8.

They became, to borrow a line, “yokemates without intimacy.”⁵⁴ By the 1920s, H.O. “kept busy not staying at home.”⁵⁵ He spent weekends at his retreat on Pasley Island, where Bella refused to go; skating at the Connought Skating Club, which he had founded before the First World War; and, in the words of one grandson, “pissing off to Europe all the time,” often with either Isabel or Beatrice, the eldest and youngest of his daughters, or with Sophia Merritt, one of several widows with whom he spent considerable time after the First World War. Bell-Irving was also fond of buying the widow Merritt very expensive hats.⁵⁶

As for Bella, she got angry. She desperately wanted to outlive H.O., and even though he had always been the picture of athletic vigour and good health, while she was frail, may have had Parkinson’s Disease as well as arthritis, and moved around in a wheel chair, she survived him by five years. Indeed, Bella is said to have stated at H.O.’s wake, with a twinkle in her eye: “I made it!” She especially resented having so many children, a point noted by several members of the family. When her youngest son, Aeneus, announced to her in 1934 that he and his wife had just had a baby girl, and that Bella was, once again, a grandmother, Bella showed little interest. “Tell me about the Quintuplets,” she beseeched him, referring to the famous Dionne Quintuplets who had been born that same week; “I was silly,” she continued, “I should have had you all in two litters [of five],” just like the Quintuplets.⁵⁷

One of Bella’s grandsons wondered if her physical incapacity might have been a silent protest against the masculine power that dominated her adult life. It is an intriguing thought. There can be no question that Bella suffered terribly from arthritis. The affliction was very real, crippling her hands and legs and, in later life, affecting the muscles in her face. Bella was no Isabella Bird, the famous English traveller and travel writer who, unwilling to tolerate the limited role Victorian society accorded to middle-class women, plunged into the “male world of adventure and daring” in such far-off places as Japan, China, Morocco, and Korea before retreating, at the end of each trip, back into “her conventional female self of soft voice and ‘natural ill-

⁵⁴ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, p.141.

⁵⁵ Ian Bell-Irving, interview with Robert McDonald, 7 August 1997.

⁵⁶ Sophia Merritt was the daughter of Sir Charles Hibbert and Lady Tupper, who had moved to Vancouver in 1898, and the granddaughter of Sir Charles Tupper, a father of Confederation and, for a period in 1896, prime minister.

⁵⁷ Darg Bell-Irving, interview with Robert McDonald, 17 August 2000.

health.”⁵⁸ Yet, if Bella did not construct her illness as a protest against the forces of patriarchal power that so shaped her life, it is reasonable to suggest that she used it as a tactic to redefine her place within the Bell-Irving family. Much of the literature on this question of health as a weapon focuses on the marked increase in the later half of the nineteenth century of incidents of hysteria among middle-class women, a form of passive aggression, suggests Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, that allowed women to express dissatisfaction with one or several aspects of their lives, including their powerlessness within the patriarchal family. As Smith-Rosenberg notes, through her illness the bedridden woman could “dominate her family to an extent that would have been considered inappropriate ... in a healthy woman.”⁵⁹ For our purposes the insight is not that Bella constructed an illness to gain power but, rather, that she used her illness to assert some autonomy within the Bell-Irving family. As an invalid Bella created a social world centred on the upper floor of the Bell-Irving home – a world that she controlled and from which her domineering husband, who recoiled from illness and nurses and human imperfection, stayed away.

* * *

Social space is never neutral, and an exploration of the gendered nature of domestic space provides a final opportunity to examine the relationship between masculinity and domesticity within the Bell-Irving family.⁶⁰ In particular, anyone who visited the Bell-Irving homes on Seaton Street (now West Pender Street), which they rented from 1897 to 1903, or on Harwood Street (called The Strands) in the fashionable West End, which they built in 1908 and resided in for more than twenty years, would have confronted incontrovertible evidence that H.O. Bell-Irving liked to hunt. How else can we interpret the turn-of-the-century photograph, located in a family album, and reproduced in Figure 4, of the drawing room at Seaton

⁵⁸ Olive Checkland, *Isabella Bird and "A Woman's Right to Do What She Can Do Well"* (Aberdeen: Scottish Cultural Press, 1996), xiii and 177.

⁵⁹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 199–200, 208, and 210. See also Ray Porter and Dorothy Porter, *In Sickness and in Health: The British Experience, 1650–1850* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), chap. 12.

⁶⁰ The idea that all space is socially constructed, and that its use reflects structures of power within the community, is suggested in Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 13–14.



Figure 4: Bella in the drawing room at Seaton Street home, circa 1900. Private, Elizabeth O’Kiely.

Street? H.O. organized major hunting expeditions up the coast and into the interior of British Columbia in search of trophy animals such as big-horned sheep, moose, caribou, elk, and grizzly bear. The trips would last from ten to forty days and cost between \$750 and \$3,000.⁶¹ H.O. appears to have gone hunting alone, except for a guide and cook in his employ. Hunting was “closely bound up with the symbolism of imperialism” and, by the late nineteenth century, was believed to differentiate unambiguously “the virile from the ‘effeminate’ imperialist.” Characterized by an elaborate code of behaviour, it also served as “the mark of the Imperial gentleman, distinguishing the sportsman from the butcher.”⁶² Henry Bell-Irving

⁶¹ Several of Henry Bell-Irving’s hunting trips are documented in his business records. See correspondence from 1 May 1897 to 29 June 1897 in CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 83, Correspondence Outward; CVA, BIFF, Add. MSS 1, vol. 49, diary, 10 July 1917 to 8 October 1917; and *ibid.*, vol. 64, diary, 12 August 1926 and 16 August 1926.

⁶² John M. MacKenzie, “The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, eds. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 176-98 (quotations on pp. 180, 179, and 183). On masculinity and hunting, see also Morton, *Ideal Surroundings*, 127-28.

saw himself as both an imperial gentleman and a sportsman. He would not have viewed kindly any suggestion that he was a “butcher.”

What gives particular significance to H.O.’s hunting prowess is the location of his trophies within the Bell-Irving homes. Animal trophies are “symbols of male potency,”⁶³ and their use as decoration asserts an unmistakable masculine presence in a room. For instance, British imperial historian John MacKenzie notes that billiard rooms, which are quintessential male preserves, asserted their “masculinity through the dark browns and green baize of its decoration and, above all, [through] the animal skins on the floor and the horns around its walls.”⁶⁴ Known to the eldest daughter Isabel as “daddy’s heads,” the trophies in the drawing room of their Seaton Street home seem to overwhelm Bella (see Figure 4). This association of the drawing room with masculinity ran counter to the fashion of the time, when the drawing room and dining room were, symbolically, differentiated by gender, with richly textured fabrics and colours defining the drawing room as unmistakably feminine, and dark woods and formal furnishings making the dining room unambiguously masculine.⁶⁵ Through the symbolism of the hunt H.O. defined the interior of the family’s Seaton Street home as masculine space.

We know more about The Strands, which H.O. designed and constructed after the family returned from England. The Strands featured a large hall at the front of the house, with a dining room and a drawing room off the hall. Characterized by a very high ceiling and a second-floor balcony that looked down onto the hall, and from which bedrooms were connected, the hall featured a massive fireplace and a sprung floor for dancing. Unlike the drawing room at Seaton Street, the one at The Strands was more typically feminine. As such it contrasted sharply with the hall, which was more “rough-and-tumble” than pretty and provided a site for displaying H.O.’s animal heads. As O’Kiely notes, “Just inside the front door [of The Strands] stood a small, upright stuffed bear with a silver tray in hand for receiving visitors’ calling cards. H.O.’s hunting trophies – moose, elk, caribou and mountain goat – gazed down from the walls

⁶³ Tina Loo, “Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in the Far West, 1880-1939,” unpublished paper, 21.

⁶⁴ MacKenzie, “The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter,” 180-81.

⁶⁵ For the differentiation of the dining room and the drawing room by gender, see Ian Gow, “The Dining Room,” and Juliet Kinchin, “The Drawing Room,” in Annette Carruthers, ed., *The Scottish Home* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 1996), 125-80; and Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 205, 233, and 292.

overhead.”⁶⁶ A photograph of the hall shows a large bearskin on the floor in front of the fireplace.⁶⁷

At one level the hall at The Strands, the most important social space in the house, was a gender-neutral room where the sexes mixed easily, especially at dances that could attract as many as 150 family friends and acquaintances. Yet, while more gender-neutral than the dining and drawing rooms of The Strands, the hall also reflected the paternalistic heritage of masculine baronial halls in Scotland.⁶⁸ Indeed, the hall at The Strands was explicitly modelled after the large central hall at Milkbank, the Bell-Irving’s ancestral home in the Scottish Lowlands. It too featured a huge fireplace, a twenty-foot ceiling with a balcony halfway up leading to the bedrooms, and “the spoils of animals” on the walls and floor. In this sense the Vancouver house bore the unmistakable imprint of Henry Bell-Irving, who drew upon the deeply rooted class and ethnic influences of the Scottish countryside to make it his own. His wife’s influence appears to have been limited to what their granddaughter called “Bella’s drawing room,” which, “with its soft silks, glazed chintz, and delicate French furniture, was the only part of the house with any pretensions to elegance.”⁶⁹

* * *

What, then, are we to make of this story of the domestic life of Henry Bell-Irving? At one level the conclusion is obvious: Bell-Irving acted as we might expect the head of a bourgeois family to have done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He exercised the powers that were accorded to men by the prevailing gender assumptions of the time. He successfully fulfilled the masculine role of provider, making a great deal of money that allowed the Bell-Irving family to maintain its position atop Vancouver’s social hierarchy. H.O.’s role within his family also corresponds to some of the generalizations now emerging in American and British literature about fatherhood in middle-class families before the First World War. The older notion that husbands and wives had influence only

⁶⁶ O’Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace*, 18-19.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁸ Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 288-92; and Annette Carruthers, “Studying the Scottish Home,” and David Jones, “The Hall and the Lobby,” in Carruthers, *The Scottish Home*, 8, 28-33, and 116-20.

⁶⁹ O’Kiely, *Gentleman Air Ace*, 19.

within their gender-specific separate spheres, and that fathers remained uninvolved in family matters such as the education of their children, has, according to one expert, been “laid to rest forever,”⁷⁰ and the fact that our journey into the Bell-Irving home revealed a father who cared deeply about the future of his sons should not surprise us. In addition, a recent study of parenthood and masculinity in the American north offers useful insights into the tension that existed between fathers and sons. The emphasis middle-class men placed on breadwinning meant that fathers felt increased pressure to steer their sons into jobs where they could succeed as men and, of course, bring credit to their fathers.⁷¹ The result, says Stephen Frank in *Life with Father*, is that relations between fathers and sons were often less emotional and more conflict-laden than were those between fathers and daughters.⁷² The foregoing study suggests that this may have been the case within the Bell-Irving family, where H.O.’s high expectations for the success of his sons led to a relationship that appears to have been more respectful than loving. Should we view Henry Bell-Irving, then, as a typical middle-class father of the Victorian and Edwardian eras in Canadian history?

In addition, should we see Henry Bell-Irving as exemplifying a trend within the middle class towards more equal partnerships between husbands and wives, each remaining within their separate spheres but increasingly sharing power and moral leadership within the family? Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English have noted that the patriarch was traditionally an elder male who had absolute authority over his family.⁷³ Such “father rule” characterized the pre-industrial family, writes John Tosh, because production took place within the household where family, servants, and apprentices lived and worked together under a single roof and where a pyramidal structure of authority, with the father at the top, made economic sense.⁷⁴ With industrialization and the separation (for men) of work from home, some measure of the patriarch’s influence, especially in domestic affairs, was diminished. Indeed, there is now a considerable

⁷⁰ Robert L. Griswold, “Introduction to the Special Issue on Fatherhood,” *Journal of Family History* 3, 24 (July 1999): 252; and Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, 77, 103, and 115.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4 and 115.

⁷² Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 2-5 and 152-60.

⁷³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (London: Pluto, 1979), 6 and 10.

⁷⁴ Tosh, *A Man’s Place*, 3, 25, and 60-62.

literature that explores both the erosion of men's power within the family in the industrial era and the feelings of insecurity that this erosion engendered for middle-class men.⁷⁵ A generally accepted view holds that the creation of specifically masculine spaces, such as the den or billiard room, within the middle-class home, and the emergence of big-game hunting as a fashionable sport,⁷⁶ can be seen as efforts by bourgeois men to shore up their increasingly threatened masculine identity.

However, I do not believe that Henry Bell-Irving felt his masculinity to be threatened or that he accepted the principle of sharing power with his family. Instead, he appears to have been a patriarch of the older, early nineteenth-century type identified by Ehrenreich and English as a husband, a father, and a head-of-family who was in control and who expected to be obeyed. The reason why Henry Bell-Irving embraced an increasingly threatened form of patriarchal power may be found at the intersection of his position within the Victorian bourgeoisie and his heritage as a member of the Lowland Scottish gentry. Thus, he did not just want his sons to be successful businessmen, he also wanted them to be gentlemen, and the tension created between these contrasting ideals divided H.O. from his family. In Henry Bell-Irving's case, then, class and ethnicity constructed a gender role that overlapped to some extent with middle-class trends but that remained distinctive. In that sense the Bell-Irving story underlines the now commonly accepted conclusion that gender is socially constructed and, being neither fixed nor singular, can display a remarkable diversity.⁷⁷

The story of Henry Bell-Irving's relationship with his family suggests two other observations about the study of gender in Canada. First, Canadian studies of masculinity have focused upon the bottom and middle levels of the social hierarchy but almost never on the top.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ For instance, see Cynthia Comacchio, "Bringing up Father: Defining a Modern Canadian Fatherhood, 1900-1940," in Lori Chambers and Edgar-André Montigny, eds., *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998).

⁷⁶ Loo, "Of Moose and Men"; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), chap. 5; and MacKenzie, "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter." The language of "class" employed in this paragraph is somewhat ambiguous because the literature does not differentiate clearly between middle-rank and upper-rank (or bourgeois) members of the middle class. The financial resources required to hunt "big-game" would have placed most big-game hunters at the upper end of the middle class.

⁷⁷ Roper and Tosh, "Historians and the Politics of Masculinity," 1.

⁷⁸ For example, see the contributions on the subject of masculinity in two excellent collections on Canadian gender history: Parr and Rosenfeld, *Gender and History in Canada*; and Kathryn

Yet issues that were important to the Bell-Irvings, such as education, succession in the family business, and notions of manliness were very much a product of particular social circumstances in the upper echelons of Canada's, and Vancouver's, social hierarchy. The illumination of the complexities of gender construction in Canada's past will require studies from across the social spectrum, including the top. In addition, Bella's story offers interesting suggestions about how class both retarded and facilitated resistance to patriarchy. She shared her husband's goals for their sons, and one suspects that she similarly embraced the class and gender values that shaped their lives. Furthermore, Bella does not appear to have challenged the roles assigned to women by the domestic-spheres ideology. Yet the self-assurance that comes with social privilege also empowered her, later in life, to resist her husband's influence within the confines of the family home and to gain some independence from him. Such agency could take place, however, only within the limits imposed by H.O.'s continued role as family patriarch.

McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, eds., *Gendered Past: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford, 1999). The middle class that Andrew Holman, in *A Sense of Their Duty*, studies in the towns of Galt and Goderich would, in a larger city such as Toronto or Vancouver, have fit mostly into the middle ranks of society (and, hence, the middle class) rather than in the upper class (as did the Bell-Irvings in Vancouver).