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Gender and Gentility on the Lower Canadian Frontier: Lucy Peel's Journal, 1833-36

J.I. LITTLE

Lucy and Edmund Peel moved to a homestead near the small Lower Canadian town of Sherbrooke in the spring of 1833, and remained there with their infant children until the spring of 1837.¹ From the time their ship left England, Lucy kept a regular account of her thoughts and activities which, with rare additions by Edmund, she sent in monthly instalments to her mother, or occasionally to her sisters and in-laws. The Peel letters, a few of which overlap in time, have survived as transcriptions in three bound volumes titled "Letters from Canada." While Robert Fothergill defines a diary or journal as a "serial autobiography" written "of oneself, by oneself, for oneself," rather than as part of a reciprocal correspondence, similar documents by Elizabeth Simcoe, Anne Langton, Mary O'Brien, and Catherine Parr Trail have been published as journals/diaries and these are the terms that will be used in this essay.²

The transcription of the Peel journal was written in two different hands, quite possibly soon after reception, and recently discovered in a descendant's house in Norwich.³ As the wife of a naval officer on leave, Lucy Peel belonged

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- 1 The journal ends in late 1836, but the last entry announces that the Peels will be returning to England the following spring. It will be published by Wilfrid Laurier Press under the tentative title *Love "Strong as Death": Lucy Peel's Lower Canadian Journal, 1833-36*.
- 2 Robert A. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London, 1974), 7, 29; Mary Quayle Innis, ed., *Mrs Simcoe's Diary* (Toronto, 1965); H.H. Langton, ed., *A Gentlewoman in Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1950); Audrey Miller, ed., *The Journals of Mary O'Brien, 1828-1838* (Toronto, 1968); Catherine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (Toronto, 1971). According to Felicity A. Nussbaum, the diary "was largely a private document in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but by the nineteenth century it was both a private and a public document, no longer confined to secrecy." *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore, 1989), 24.
- 3 Even though the letters were sent to various people, they were probably meant to circulate from family to family, so they would not have been difficult to gather together at a later date. Photocopies of the letters were donated to the Eastern Townships Research Centre at Bishop's University (ETRC) by C.H. Kinder, great-grandson of the Peels' second-born child, Flora.

to the class of English women who have left us with the best accounts we have of life on the Canadian settlement frontier, though those published in the past have largely been from Upper Canada rather than Lower Canada's Eastern Townships where the English gentility also played a dominant social and political role in the early nineteenth century.⁴

British North America acted as a magnet to the families of half-pay officers after the Napoleonic Wars, largely because opportunities to establish themselves as landed gentry in the mother country were limited. Linda Colley has also pointed out that patrician confidence and authority in the England of this era were being challenged by "a calling into question of the very legitimacy of the power élite."⁵ Unlike the wealthy physician Dr William Wilson of Sherbrooke, the Peels did not leave England specifically because of the enactment of the Reform Bill,⁶ but, as a newly married couple, they clearly felt that the best opportunity for them to pursue the genteel rural way of life lay in one of the settlement colonies.

The Peel journal is of great interest for the window it provides onto the daily lives of the region's governing elite, a tightly knit social group that was deeply resented by the local American-born majority.⁷ But this document also has a wider appeal, for Lucy Peel recorded more than the external events in her life. Her journal may lack the candid tone of a strictly personal diary, but it does reflect "the dramatisation of the self" that became fashionable with the rise of sensibility in the late eighteenth century,⁸ and it does provide a more detailed picture of daily life and thoughts than standard letters or memoirs would. The journal is also a pleasure to read, for it was written with the deliberate "literariness" which Fothergill claims emerged in the early nineteenth century, but without the artifice of chronicles self-consciously produced for publication.⁹

4 A striking exception is the letters written by the Stacey family who were social outcasts to some extent because of George Stacey's scandalous behaviour in London, and their ongoing poverty on the Ascot Township farm. See Jane Vansittart, ed., *Lifelines: The Stacey Letters, 1836-1858* (London, 1976). See, as well, Françoise Noël, " 'My Dear Eliza': The Letters of Robert Hoyle (1831-1844)," *Histoire sociale - Social History*, 26 (1993): 115-30; and *Extracts from Letters Written During a First Year's Residence in the Eastern Townships of Lower Canada* (London: J.L. Cox and Sons, 1837). On the settlement of the Eastern Townships, see J.I. Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition and Regional Identity in the Eastern Townships of Quebec* (Ottawa, 1989).

5 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), 152.

6 ETRC, Lucy Peel Journals, to My Dearest Mamma, 24 July 1833 (first day's entry). Wilson's letter to England in January 1834 was printed in *Report of the Court of Directors of the British American Land Company to the Proprietors*, 19 June 1834 (London: W.J. Ruffy, 1834), 11-12.

7 See J.I. Little, *State and Society in Transition: The Politics of Institutional Reform in the Eastern Townships, 1838-1852* (Montreal and Kingston, 1997), 22-26.

8 Fothergill, *Private Chronicles*, 30-31.

9 Fothergill, *Private Chronicles*, 32-35.

According to Amanda Vickery, historians have tended to ignore the English gentry (which she defines broadly), simply assuming that its members shared the values of the nobility to whom they were distantly related. Based on an analysis of the journals, letters, and other writing of genteel women in northern England from the 1730s to the 1820s, Vickery argues that "it would be mistaken to see them as simply fawning members of a monolithic upper class. Their relation to the greater gentry and nobility was ambivalent: fascinated admiration, deferential respect, scandalized horror, amused condescension and lofty disregard can all be illustrated from the manuscripts of the genteel."¹⁰

The Peel journal provides an opportunity to examine the "mentalité" of this privileged sector of society in a radically different setting. As British imperial historians have found in other colonial contexts,¹¹ Peel's writing strongly suggests that the Sherbrooke elite reacted to the levelling threats of the frontier environment by reasserting its identity through genteel social rituals. Indeed, the imperative to do so in the Eastern Townships was probably stronger than it would become in India or Africa because the "natives," who were the local Americans in this case, were not so easily dominated politically, nor did they provide the cheap labour supply that would allow the genteel to avoid manual work themselves.¹²

Women such as Lucy Peel played an important role in this defensive strategy because they were the principal guardians and promoters of the civilised virtues.¹³ As Vickery has argued for genteel society in Georgian England, the separate-spheres paradigm of a largely private female world breaks down to a considerable extent when we realise that women's cultural role was anything but marginal.¹⁴ Nor, for that matter, was the male world close to being exclusively

10 Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven and London, 1998), 36-37.

11 See, for example, P.J. Marshall, "British Society in India under the East India Company," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 1 (1997): 89-108.

12 Ramsay Cook argues that for Canada "the frontier was not an escape from Europe, but an extension of Europe. In the United States, nature made man; in Canada, man civilized nature." "Imagining a North American Garden: Some Parallels and Differences in Canadian and American Culture," *Canadian Literature* 103 (Winter 1984): 12.

13 See Margaret MacMillan, *Women of the Raj* (New York, 1988); and Katherine M.J. McKenna, "The Role of Women in the Establishment of Social Status in Early Upper Canada," *Ontario History* 83, 3 (1990): 179-206.

14 For a historiographical survey of the separate-spheres interpretation, see Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History*, 75 (1988): 9-39. For applications of the separate-spheres model to the colonial Canadian context, see Katherine McKenna, "Options for Elite Women in Early Upper Canadian Society: The Case of the Powell Family," in *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives*, J.K. Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson, eds. (Ottawa, 1989), 401-24; and the more nuanced Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto, 1996).

public. The most distinguishing feature between the Peel household and those of the English gentry described by Vickery was the domestic role played by Edmund, though that “feminised” role does reflect the rise of sensibility in eighteenth-century England.¹⁵ Otherwise, while old-world society may have been “simplified” to some extent on the Eastern Townships frontier where there were few cultural institutions to reinforce class hierarchy,¹⁶ the local British gentry had made few accommodations to the New World environment by the time the Peels returned to England in 1837. Only with the outbreak and suppression of the Rebellion later the same year would a new social order begin to emerge in the region.

Social Setting

Born in 1801, naval Lieutenant Edmund Peel was too young to have been a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars,¹⁷ but he went on extended half-pay leave in the early 1830s in order to establish a home where he would not be forced into long absences from his wife and future offspring. The recently married couple was attracted to the New World by a romantic and utopian dream of creating their own genteel Eden in the wilderness, but they were pragmatic enough to regard a permanent return to England as a possibility.

The Peels had been a wealthy manufacturing family for several generations. Edmund’s great-grandfather, Robert “Parsley” Peel, was a partner in one of the largest textile companies in England. Edmund’s grandfather, William, operated a calico business at Church Bank, and his great uncle, Robert Peel, had become one of the country’s richest cotton manufacturers by the end of the eighteenth century. Robert Peel was knighted during William Pitt’s administration, and his son, Robert, would become prime minister in 1834.¹⁸ Lucy’s journal reveals that Edmund’s father carried on the manufacturing business at Church Bank until he sold it in 1835.¹⁹ This branch of the family appears to have no longer been wealthy, though when Edmund’s brother, Tom, arrived in New York, newspapers mistakenly referred to him as the Honorable Thomas G. Peel, and Sir Thomas Peel.²⁰ Even though Edmund had sufficient income to build a comfortable house and hire two or three servants, he and Lucy still had

15 G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, 1992).

16 On the cultural simplification thesis, see R.C. Harris, “The Simplification of Europe Overseas,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 67, 4 (1977): 469-83.

17 Genealogical information was kindly provided by C.H. Kinder of South Walsham, England.

18 Sir Robert Peel served as Conservative Prime Minister from late 1834 to April 1835 (and again in 1841-46).

19 To Mrs William Birch, 7 Jan. 1836 (27 Jan. entry).

20 To My dearest Mamma, 5 Oct. 1834 (7 Oct. entry).

to labour hard themselves, and their circumstances did not change greatly when Edmund's parents died.

As for Lucy's family, the Meeks, references in the journal suggest that they had business connections to Ceylon, and had suffered a reversal of fortune. In one letter Lucy thanks her brother-in-law for being "the guide and gentle counsellor of our family, when the temptations and dangers of riches smiled on every side and its steady friend and cheerful consoler when comparative poverty and sorrow surrounded it[.]"²¹ Subtle references to the health of Lucy's father suggest that he may have been an alcoholic.²²

Why the Peels chose to live in the Sherbrooke area is not clear, but their political and social conservatism precluded settlement in the United States, and the Eastern Townships had certain attractions for people of their social class. The southern part of the region, bordering on Vermont and New Hampshire, had been settled as early as the 1790s, and had therefore passed the frontier stage in some respects. Development had, nevertheless, been slow and there were still only 7,000 settlers in the vast county of Sherbrooke as late as 1831.²³ While the economically isolated region was not considered to be a good poor man's country, its picturesque scenery, inexpensive farms, and freedom from the malaria and cholera that plagued Upper Canada made it an attractive area for the British gentry. An absentee proprietor pointed to an added feature in 1834: "The fine hill and dale lay of the land, adapts them admirably for grazing farms, which properly managed, remunerates the farmer well; and with far less labour than any other kind of farming."²⁴

The British upper classes were specifically targeted by the British American Land Company when it published testimonials from settlers such as Shipton's W.G. Mack, who ensured his readers in 1836 that "you will no where see in this part of the country, gentlemen with their beards a week old, wearing shoes that despise Warren, or sitting down to dinner without their jackets. The reason is obvious, – we are surrounded by people who retain the ideas of propriety with which they have been brought up in the 'old country'."²⁵ Lucy Peel reinforced this image in 1834 when she wrote that "I think the Mr B__ are right to go to Upper Canada if they go out with the intention of making anything by farming, and can put up with eating at the same table with their helps ... at present this is only a country for a Gentleman who wishes to live quietly and cheaply, without an idea of accumulating money."²⁶

21 To Mr Mayne, 26 Oct. 1833.

22 See, for example, to My dearest Mamma, 29 July 1833 (21 Aug. entry).

23 Little, *State and Society*, 18.

24 Cited in Little, *Ethno-Cultural Transition*, 10.

25 Ibid.

26 To My dearest Mamma, 18 March 1834 (31 March entry).

Indeed, Edmund may have chosen his lot more for its romantic perspective than its agricultural promise, for Lucy frequently wrote of the great rock near their house from which the view “is indeed grand, we see Lake Magog very plainly...I think if Mr Clowes were to live in Canada he would fix upon Dunstall [the Peel’s home] for his situation, how lovely he might make it with all his money and he might have rockerys without end.”²⁷ If there is a garrison mentality expressed in Lucy Peel’s journals, it was not one based on the environment, as Northrop Frye (followed by many others) has claimed was typical of early writing in Canada,²⁸ but on social class and national origin, as we shall see.

The Peels probably learned about the Eastern Townships through the colonisation efforts of William Bowman Felton, the former naval officer who had acquired 25,000 acres of land in the district, and who was in a good position to recruit British settlers as the colony’s Commissioner of Crown Lands.²⁹ Edmund had visited the Townships in the fall of 1832 and paid Felton and an absentee proprietor the considerable sum of £112 for 150 largely uncleared acres near the small town of Sherbrooke. (Peel would purchase the lot’s remaining fifty acres for £37 10s. a year later.)³⁰ Because of Felton’s influence, Sherbrooke had become the site of the district court, and those positions not taken by his own brothers and brothers-in-law were filled by other British immigrants. While Edmund was not interested in a patronage position, it was only natural that he and Lucy would gravitate towards this local elite. Indeed, they stayed in the large and hospitable Felton home known as Belvedere for several months while their own more modest Dunstall Villa was being built.

Vickery claims that, as a group, the families headed by lesser landed gentlemen, attorneys, doctors, clerics, merchants, and manufacturers described themselves as “polite,” “civil,” “genteel,” “well-bred,” and “polished,” having

27 To My dearest Mamma, 24 July 1833 (13 July entry). On the emergence of the “picturesque” and the “sublime” as major aesthetic categories in the late eighteenth century, and their impact on interest in the New World, see Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto, 1995), 9-10.

28 For a critique of this interpretation, see Helen M. Buss, “Women and the Garrison Mentality: Pioneer Women Autobiographers and their Relation to the Land,” in *Re(Dis)Covering Our Foremothers* (Ottawa, 1990), 123-36.

29 See J.I. Little, “British Toryism amidst ‘a horde of disaffected and disloyal squatters’: The Rise and Fall of William Bowman Felton and Family in the Eastern Townships,” *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies* 1 (Fall 1992): 13-42. The Peels may have had a link with the Colclough family of Sherbrooke, for Lucy brought Captain Colclough’s wife a buckle and a note from England, though this may have been in return for kindness shown to Edmund the previous year. To My Dearest Mamma, 27 May 1833 (11 June entry).

30 Sherbrooke Registry Office, Register A, vol. 6, p. 32, no. 2023, 3 Sept. 1832, William B. Felton to Edmund Peel, sale of Ascot, S.E. 1/4 1.13, r.9; p. 37, no. 2028, 5 Sept. 1832, Mrs Eleanor Burns to Edmund Peel (as represented by William Henry via a power of attorney), sale of Ascot, W 1/2 1.13, r.9, vol. 8, p. 322, no. 348, 21 Oct. 1833, William B. Felton to Edmund Peel, sale of Ascot, N.E. 1/4 1.13, r.9.

no recourse to a vocabulary of "upper," "middle," and "lower" class.³¹ Lucy Peel certainly divided the world into the "genteel" and the "vulgar," but her social circle was even more exclusive than that described by Vickery, for the local merchants and manufacturers were still too close to the retail and artisanal level, too American, and too politically liberal to be considered entirely respectable by the British officers and professionals.

Befitting his political and economic power, William Felton's family was at the centre of this circle, though the principal role was played by his Minorcan-born wife, Maria, since William was often absent on official duty. Standing in Felton's shadow, but playing a more active social role locally, was his amiable brother, John. John Felton, who had also been a naval officer, was married to Maria's cousin and served as the local Crown lands agent. But even family ties did not ensure respectability for the second brother, Charles, who served as the district prothonotary (court clerk). He is rarely mentioned until his imprisonment for debts that, according to Lucy, were the fault of his extravagant wife.

Felton's brother-in-law, Sheriff Charles Whitcher, and his wife are also rather marginal figures in the Peel journal,³² presumably because the latter was an invalid, but the notoriously reactionary and arbitrary Judge John Fletcher and his wife appear frequently as an eccentric but sympathetic old couple.³³ Lucy also befriended Eliza Hale, wife of Edward Hale, who was scion of one of the colony's leading families, and who would replace William Felton as the most powerful figure in the region after the latter's political disgrace and death in 1837.³⁴ There was also a number of English doctors and lawyers in the Felton circle, but leading American-born entrepreneur-politicians such as Charles F.H. Goodhue and Samuel Brooks rarely warrant a word in Lucy Peel's journal.³⁵

As a description and analysis of cultural transfer, the remainder of this paper will explore what the Peel journal reveals about the impact of the British North American frontier on class and gender identity. The focus will be on the same six themes discussed in Amanda Vickery's monograph on the gentlewomen of Georgian England: love and duty, fortitude and resignation, prudent economy, elegance, civility and vulgarity, and propriety.

31 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 13.

32 On these three men, see Little, "British Toryism," 26-30.

33 See Christine Veilleux, "Fletcher, John," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7.

34 See Little, *State and Society*, 22-33; and Monique Choquette-Habel, "Edward Hale: Un des fondateurs de la première société organisée de Sherbrooke, 1801-1875," MA thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 1985.

35 The Goodhues are mentioned sympathetically on several occasions, including one social call to their house, but they were clearly not part of the Felton social circle. Brooks is never mentioned, despite his prominence in the town. See Charlotte Thibault, *Samuel Brooks, entrepreneur et homme politique de Sherbrooke, 1793-1849* (Sherbrooke, 1985).

Love and Duty

Alan Macfarlane has traced the companionate view of marriage back to the fourteenth century or earlier,³⁶ but the eighteenth century brought the rise of the romantic novel in England and strengthened the belief, in Vickery's words, that "the union of man and woman offered the greatest happiness this side of the grave, that mutual love would bear couples up through the trials of life."³⁷ The Peel journal creates the strong impression that Lucy and Edmund adhered to this belief without reservation, and that their union was, in every respect, a match made in heaven. More than two and a half years after their marriage, Lucy wrote:

the separation of husband and wife must be dreadful, for the love between them is, or ought to be, "Strong as Death" and the longer they live together the harder it would be to part, at least I feel it would be so, for much as I loved Edmund when I married him I have treble the affection for him now, I did not know half his good qualities, he has never spoken an angry word to me and manages my hasty temper so well that I almost fancy at times I have become a most amiable person.³⁸

Even after four years of married life, in closer daily contact and more challenging physical conditions than they would have experienced in England, there was no hint of friction or disagreement between them. Lucy continued to sing Edmund's praises in nearly every entry, stating at one point that "he has all the courage and firmness of a man united with the tenderness and thought of a woman."³⁹

While one might assume that Lucy would conceal the more discouraging aspects of her private life from her mother and other relatives, her unwavering enthusiasm at the very least illustrates the strength of the romantic genteel convention under what were often trying circumstances. Furthermore, the same image of companionate marriage emerges from Lucy's portrayal of the Felton, Fletcher, and Hale couples. Writing of her prolonged stay with the Feltons in 1833, Lucy claimed that "[a]ll the time we were there I never heard one disagreeable word pass between any of the members of this amiable and united

36 Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), 331-34.

37 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 39-41. Lawrence Stone states that romantic love did not become a respectable motive for marriage among the English propertied classes until the late eighteenth century. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1977), 7-8, 284-86. See also, Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1978).

38 To My dearest Mother, 24 July 1835 (18 Aug. entry).

39 To Mrs Mayne, 15 Feb. 1836 (26 Feb. entry).

family, and I think if there is a house without a blue chamber it is Belvedere."⁴⁰ Idealised as it may have been, this image of congenial genteel domesticity is also strongly supported by the voluminous correspondence that has survived between the Peel's neighbours, Edward and Eliza Hale.⁴¹

While rejecting many of the conclusions drawn from the separate-spheres paradigm, Vickery does not argue that married partners were equal, for she notes that "[g]enteel wives took it absolutely for granted that their husbands enjoyed formal ascendancy in marriage," and that "[l]ove was no enemy to hierarchy."⁴² This was clearly the case with the Peels, as with the other genteel families in the region, but Anthony Fletcher goes further, arguing that "the very essence of the companionate marriage ... was the subordination of women," and "romantic love proved to be patriarchy's strongest bulwark."⁴³ From this perspective, Lucy's consistent portrayal of herself as the beneficiary of Edmund's kindness and support might be interpreted as a form of feminine weakness, but the feeling appears to have been mutual, and Lucy does not emerge from her journals as a helpless or submissive partner in the relationship.⁴⁴

Fortitude and Resignation

The Peel marriage was certainly fertile, for the date of her first delivery suggests that Lucy had become pregnant on the trans-Atlantic voyage, and she would give birth twice more during the next three and a half years spent in Sherbrooke. Vickery notes that "[f]or fertile women, motherhood could absorb almost all reserves of physical and emotional energy for at least a decade,"⁴⁵ and the rather exhausted Lucy was not pleased with the rapid onset of her third pregnancy. But there was no hint that Edmund's sexual advances

40 To Miss Edith Bourne, 8 Nov. 1833 (8 Nov. entry).

41 McGill University Archives, Hale Family Papers, 1829-1913. Lucy had quite a different impression of American husbands, though this is contradicted by the letters between Stanstead's Marcus Child and his wife, Lydia. See J.I. Little, ed., *The Child Letters: Public and Private Life in a Canadian Merchant-Politician's Family, 1841-1845* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995). See also Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, Schoolmistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston, 1995), 36-37.

42 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 59-60.

43 Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven and London, 1995), 395, 400.

44 A similar image of family sentiments emerges from Lorraine Gadoury's study of the French-Canadian elite of the eighteenth century. *La Famille dans son intimité: Échanges épistolaires au sein de l'élite canadienne du XVIII^e siècle* (Montréal, 1998).

45 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 97. Contrast the assertion by M. Jeanne Peterson that "there was no mystique of motherhood in the nineteenth-century upper-middle-class home." *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989), 104.

were unwelcome, probably because, in Vickery's words, "[s]ubmission to one's natural lot was the keynote to genteel maternity."⁴⁶

While Lucy never complained about physical discomfort or social isolation during her pregnancies, giving birth clearly was "a forbidding prospect."⁴⁷ The doctor visited at least five times during the eleven days prior to Lucy's first delivery, and Edmund's description of the birth reveals how traumatic the experience was for both of them:

I was present all the time to support Lucy and I was much distressed to witness her agonies. I thought it the proper place for a husband at such a moment, considering it nothing more than false delicacy which would make a man absent himself at a time when his presence and support are most required, it is a fearful thing to see a woman in her pain, I could not have believed it possible they had suffered so much, at times I felt quite distracted, as soon as the child was born I staggered into an adjoining room and cried like a child until I saw Lucy smiling and free from pain, her face last seen was distorted with pain, the impression made on me will never be forgotten.⁴⁸

Edmund, then, clearly does not conform to Jane Errington's generalisation that Upper-Canadian men were rather indifferent to childbirth, and that husbands and fathers were "banished from the delivery room."⁴⁹

There was no question but that baby Celia, and those who followed, would be maternally breast-fed, for this had become an increasingly common practice for the English gentry.⁵⁰ Lucy and Edmund had clearly been influenced by the Romantic notion of childhood as linked to innocence and nature, which John Tosh sees as central to Victorian domesticity.⁵¹ Lucy certainly succumbed to the "smothering potential of maternity" noted by Vickery,⁵² but Edmund was seldom far from the nursery, and he too was totally engrossed with the development of their infant children. On February 2nd, 1834, Lucy wrote that Edmund "is an excellent nurse too, and Celia loves to be with him and hear him sing," and on June 2nd, 1835, she described how the second child, Flora, "generally wakes once in the night, her Papa gets up and lights a candle she sucks

46 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 122.

47 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 98.

48 Lucy to My Dearest Mamma, 6 Dec. 1833 (19 Dec. entry by Edmund).

49 Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 58-62. Errington, herself, provides some contradictory evidence about male attitudes on pp. 64-65, and her citation from Mary O'Brien's journal makes it clear that Mary's husband was present at the birth of their first child. Indeed, this was the norm among middle-class men in Victorian England. John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven and London, 1999), 81-82.

50 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 107.

51 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 39-41, 86-87.

52 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 117.

& then Edmund puts her in her Crib & puts out the light and she goes to sleep with a little rocking." Clearly, then, Edmund's paternal role runs contrary to Errington's assertions that Upper Canadians believed that "only women could effectively care for and ensure the physical well-being of their children," and that motherhood was "shared almost exclusively with other women."⁵³ Edmund may have been an exceptionally caring father, but his behaviour does conform to the "genteel" mode of child rearing identified by Philip Greven in early America.⁵⁴

Lucy's initial descriptions of motherhood actually reflect closely the "ecstatic embrace of maternal romance" that Vickery suggests was too "sugary a wrapping" to cover an experience so "cruel, unpredictable and unremittingly physical."⁵⁵ But Lucy and Edmund did experience that unpredictable cruelty themselves when their beloved Celia suddenly died shortly before her first birthday.⁵⁶ This devastating blow cast a pall on what had, to all appearances, been an idyllic adventure to that point. A week after the death Lucy wrote that Edmund "seldom cries except when alone with me; but he sits like a statue, talks of nothing but Celia, and, when any one but I, am present, never speaks from morning till night. He looks pale as death, and ten years older since Celia died."⁵⁷

Lucy and Edmund became less optimistic from this point on, turning to religion for solace. Eight months after Celia's death, and four months after the birth of Flora, Lucy wrote of Celia:

I dwell, when sitting alone, even with pleasure upon the bliss she is enjoying, and consider her in the light of a guardian Angel. And perhaps...she may have been taken away in mercy to myself, for I did love her too dearly, and constantly found myself saying, I could not do without her however I was to be taught otherwise. I hope dearest Mamma you will not pronounce me an enthusiast I am no such thing. I know I am more serious and less fond of gaiety than I used to be, and I hope I think before I act, but I keep my opinions to myself.⁵⁸

53 Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 53-54. These statements are contradicted somewhat on p. 66, and pp. 73-74.

54 Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1980), 265. On the later 1830s advice columns of an Anglican cleric in the Eastern Townships who stressed the joint nature of parental responsibility, see J.I. Little, " 'The Fireside Kingdom': A Mid-Nineteenth-Century Anglican Perspective on Marriage and Parenthood," forthcoming.

55 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 94.

56 On childhood illnesses and deaths in Upper Canada, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 69-71.

57 To My dearest Mamma, 3 Dec. 1834 (13 Dec. entry); See also Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 100.

58 To My dearest Mamma, 28 Aug. 1835 (3 Sept. entry).

Lucy and Edmund now avoided socialising on Sundays, and Edmund even went to the Anglican church services alone when Lucy was confined by pregnancy or the care of their infants, but their feelings for each other remained no less intense.⁵⁹

The couple's spirits were not raised by the fact that their second child, Flora, was rather sickly from birth.⁶⁰ Lucy did, however, begin to sing Flora's praises more unreservedly as her health slowly improved. When Flora was six months old, Lucy wrote that the doctor had said "he never saw such beautifully soft blue eyes & such a fine forehead, I wish you could all see her. Edmund thinks her quite as lovely as Celia was."⁶¹ Despite Lucy's initial reservations, the third child, Richard, was greeted with great joy a few months later, particularly as he would fulfil Edmund's wish for a male heir. Unfortunately, baby Richard suffered from the same debilitating stomach problems as his sister, Flora, keeping his parents in a state of anxiety until the journal ends when he is six and a half months old.

The Peel children might possibly have received better medical care in England, but there were also qualified English doctors in the Sherbrooke area, and Lucy's family sent her medicines. In the final analysis, the Peels' frontier location does not appear to have put Lucy at a particular disadvantage in this era of rudimentary medical science, for Vickery reveals how motherhood for the genteel in England also called for "gritty emotional endurance."⁶² Lucy certainly missed her mother and sisters in her time of sorrow, but she did have a very supportive husband, a good relationship with her doctor and minister, and a strong support network of caring adults who were clearly enamoured of children.

Prudent Economy

Frontier conditions did not preclude cleanliness from remaining a prerequisite to respectable status, but even in England genteel women who had servants did not lose caste by engaging in heavy-duty housework.⁶³ The recently arrived Dr Wilson, who was investing £450 in a farm near Lennoxville, wrote in 1834 that his wife was "indefatigable in her domestic labours. Activity such as hers is in every part of the world of great importance to such a family as ours, but in a situation where the wages of mechanics is enormously great it is wealth."⁶⁴

59 Peterson (*Family, Love, and Work*, 76) speculates that the Victorian "linkages of sexual and spiritual intensified the experience of the ecstatic in both areas of life."

60 While nearly six months elapsed between Celia's birth and her baptism, Flora was christened ten days after her birth, and Richard twenty-four days after his. *Protonotaire Sherbrooke, Registres d'état civil non-catholiques*, 1879, M 125/4, Sherbrooke section.

61 To My dearest Mamma, 19 Oct. 1835 (4 Nov. entry).

62 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 121.

63 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 146.

64 *Report of the Court*, 11-12.

More than physical labour was involved, for Vickery also observes that “[a]s the mistress of the household, the genteel bride tasted of administrative power and exuded quasi-professional pride.”⁶⁵ Ladies’ pocket-sized memorandum books, filled with notes and accounts, served as “both the means and the emblem of female mastery of information, without which the upper hand was lost and prudent economy obliterated.”⁶⁶

Lucy Peel did not have as elaborate a household to manage as her English peers, but she did employ at least one servant at all times, and finding maids or cooks who were trained was much more difficult in British North America than in the old country.⁶⁷ Lucy claimed that Ellen, the neighbour’s girl who remained in the Peel household for most of their sojourn in Canada, had to be taught virtually all the housekeeping skills.⁶⁸ In late 1833, Lucy described the special challenges presented by her frontier location:

You ladies in England who fancy you have a great [sic] to see after, do not know what it is to keep house in such a country as this where you must cut and contrive; where perhaps you can only get meat once in three weeks, and where all the workmen you have must be fed three times a day on meat, potatoes and milk, I have now in my house 118 lbs of beautiful Beef which I have salted in a large tub and it is astonishing how fast it disappears; besides this I have 4£ worth of Salt Pork for my winter stock, 40 lbs of suet enclosed [?] for candles and a tub of grease to make my soft soap. My woman servant though an excellent one for this country is not like an English cook, and I have to see her do most things, she fortunately makes good bread.⁶⁹

While Edmund helped with household chores, as well as making carpets and even knitting during the long winter evenings, Lucy was too busy in the house, and often too advanced in pregnancy, to work much outdoors. She did manage, however, to record the prices for produce, costs of labour, crop yields, killing frosts, and so on. In the spring of 1834, for example, Lucy described the economics of purchasing a yoke of oxen:

We shall work the oxen the spring and summer, fatten them in the fall, and kill them for our winter stock putting them in the snow. They will also provide me with a hundred pounds of candles, and their skins are worth ten dollars each,

65 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 129; See also Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 62-4.

66 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 133.

67 On living and working in “the big house” in Upper Canada, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chapter 6. For the English context, see Patricia Branca, “Image and Reality: The Myth of the Idle Victorian Woman,” in Mary Hartman and Lois B. Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women* (New York, 1974), 185-88.

68 On “the neighbour’s girl” as Canadian servant, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chapter 5.

69 To My dearest Mamma, 1833 (no other date), no. 7 (first entry). For an excellent description of colonial housekeeping, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chapter 4.

so I think dear Mamma we shall have more than the value of the 42 dollars, independant of their work, we cannot hire Oxen under two dollars a day in the summer.⁷⁰

It would seem, then, that farm management was shared to a considerable extent between Lucy and Edmund. If Edmund did not feel that his masculine identity was thereby threatened, perhaps it was because of the heavy outdoor labour he also engaged in. Nor would this labour have necessarily weakened his class identity, for Jeanne Peterson notes of the typical gentlemen of this era that his “primary sense of himself as a man and as a social being came from his birth, not from what he did.”⁷¹

Elegance

Vickery sees no contradiction between prudent economy and a taste for elegance, stating that “[g]litter found its richest expression in objects.”⁷² She suggests that gentlewomen were more attached than men to material consumption because they were denied access to the professions and to public office. Unable to “pass on the invisible mysteries of institutional power or professional expertise to their descendants,” the genteel woman “turned to personal and household artefacts to create a world of meanings and, ultimately, to transmit her history.”⁷³ The studies by Peterson and Colley reveal that many women were less isolated from the professional and public spheres at this time than Vickery appears to assume, but gentlewomen certainly did contribute to class distinction through goods and lifestyle.⁷⁴

Opportunities for the display of elegance, with the notable exception of fine houses, were obviously limited in the Eastern Townships of the 1830s. Even though immigrants brought as many of their prized possessions as possible, these sometimes failed to survive the vagaries of the transportation system or the chimney fires that destroyed wooden houses with alarming frequency. Lucy described how the Feltons had brought from Italy “beautiful furniture,

70 To My dearest Mamma, 18 March 1834 (1 April entry).

71 Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work*, 190.

72 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 161. Similarly, Tosh writes of the Victorian middle class that “a non-working wife, a complement of servants and a tastefully furnished house reserved for domestic pursuits might be a more convincing demonstration of class status than a man's business or profession.” Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 24.

73 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 194. Similarly, Barker-Benfield (*Culture of Sensibility*, xxvi, xxviii) refers to the culture of sensibility which emerged in the eighteenth century as “a culture of women” which aimed “to discipline women's consumer appetites in tasteful domesticity.” Barker-Benfield attributes the rise of the culture of sensibility to “the requirements and attractions of consumer capitalism.”

74 Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work*, chapter 5; Colley, *Britons*, chapter 6; Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 162-64.

loors, window frames, oil paint, figures and ornaments of Italian marble, and other things to the amount of four thousand pounds," only to have them all destroyed when the building where they were stored in Sherbrooke burned to the ground. William Felton took the loss philosophically, reasoning that the furniture would in any case "soon have been spoiled by the careless and wretched servants of the country."⁷⁵

Most of Lucy's own fancy dresses were water damaged in transit, fit only to be transformed into drapes and baby's clothing, or traded to local American women, and she mentioned that fine English furniture did not adapt well to the dry-heated Canadian interiors. None of this concerned her much, but her journal does record long anxious weeks waiting for boxes from England, not for necessities so much as small luxuries and items that had personal meaning, such as her father's portrait. Lucy also kept a flower garden, writing at one point that "every flower that springs up will remind me of a beloved parent."⁷⁶ But Lucy's most valued possession was her harp, the first in the district, and her playing and compositions won her widespread praise and admiration.

As for Edmund, he was too morally earnest to have been overly concerned with cutting a fashionable figure himself. He was, nevertheless, clearly a product of the culture of sensibility which G.J. Barker-Benfield claims aimed, through the influence of "[b]etter educated wives and more comfortable houses," to "draw men from the extravagant and cruel pleasures of tavern culture" and "the duelling warrior mentality of an earlier aristocracy."⁷⁷ Sherbrooke may have been a rough frontier town, but there was no chance that Edmund would be attracted either to the taverns or to duelling. Nor does he appear to have taken much interest in the hunting and fishing that appealed to so many young men of his class.⁷⁸ His most extravagant expenditure, apart from the construction of the house which he designed and painted pink, was the purchase of an elegant sleigh and carriage, though comfort and convenience for Lucy were probably more serious concerns than public display. In any case, material possessions were clearly considered to be less dependable than public demeanour in signifying genteel social status.

Civility and Vulgarity

As part of her critique of the separate-spheres paradigm, Vickery argues that the public and private worlds were integrated by sociability. She notes that "most

⁷⁵ To Miss Edith Bourne, 8 Nov. 1833 (8 Nov. entry).

⁷⁶ To My dearest Mamma, 27 May 1833 (5 June entry).

⁷⁷ Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility*, xxvi, 248. Duelling did survive among the Upper-Canadian gentry, but Morgan (*Public Men*, 170) states that in the public discourse it "was linked to excessive drinking, the temptations of luxury, and the dangers of uncurbed and vicious, rather than honourable, masculinity."

⁷⁸ On this theme, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 272-76.

studies of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gentry and nobility stress that open-handed hospitality was still crucial to the maintenance of social credit and political power.⁷⁹ One such study is Leonore Davidoff's *The Best Circles*, which demonstrates how ladies' calls and visits, as well as their social "cuts," contributed to boundary maintenance at a time when "new forms of wealth as well as newly wealthy groups produced a flood of applicants that threatened to overwhelm" the upper classes and their life-style.⁸⁰

While Lucy Peel was no social butterfly, she could expect callers at almost any time of day, if only because Dunstall Villa lay on the road between Sherbrooke and the Felton residence. And, whatever her inner thoughts may have been, Lucy never complained in her journal about the unannounced arrivals, even when they stayed to dinner. Nor did Lucy indulge in gossip, particularly about the genteel families, for, in Vickery's words, the lynchpin to the concept of good breeding "was the assumption that outer manners were the reflection of inner civility."⁸¹

Lucy's observations about the members of her circle also suggest that social codes of civility were far from being relaxed on the frontier. In the fall of 1833 she wrote: "last night I wished some of our friends in England who fancy we are I believe almost amongst savages could have entered the drawing room, we were fifteen of us, all the gentlemen sensible and well bred, and ladies, good-looking and pleasing, a large handsome room, music and dancing, diversified with intelligent and constructive conversation."⁸² That the frontier environment could actually reinforce hierarchical values was suggested by Anne Langton, writing from Fenelon Falls in Upper Canada in 1838: "The greatest danger, I think, we all run from our peculiar mode of life is that of becoming selfish and narrow-minded. We live so much to ourselves and mix so exclusively with one community. It is not only that the individuals are few, but the degrees and classes we come in contact with are still more limited."⁸³

Not only did the familiarity of the ill-educated farming neighbours have to be resisted, but the denial of patronage appointments to the better established and more economically successful American entrepreneurs had to be justified on social as well as political grounds. Almost invariably generous in her references to her English peers, Lucy was deeply prejudiced against the tobacco-chewing "Yankees" who, to her, were the embodiment of vulgarity. She wrote to a friend that "[t]he Yankees appear to be a cool calculating set, and the lower orders of Irish and English, when they have been a short time in this country

79 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 196. See also Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 23.

80 Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (London, 1973), 15, 41-46.

81 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 197.

82 To My dear Mrs Peel, 23 Aug. 1833 (1 Sept. entry).

83 Langton, ed., *A Gentlewoman*, 60.

are worse than the natives; the only way is to be as distant as possible, I dare say they will think us proud.”⁸⁴

A later incident illustrates how Lucy put her distancing strategy into practice: “I taught one Yankee manners this morning he came to the front door, and he was not attended until he went to the back, I think they shall not take any liberties here, and if every one would act as we do, they would soon know their place.” However, she added more charitably, if still more condescendingly: “I really believe all they do is from sheer ignorance, without any wish to offend, for they are kind hearted people and the lower orders all lodge and board travellers from the old country, without wishing for any thing in return.”⁸⁵ Lucy benefited personally from the many kindnesses of her Irish neighbours, the McReadys, as well as the American-born Reverend Doolittle, but she and Edmund left Sherbrooke before feeling any desire or need to break out of the narrow social circle to which they had been initially introduced. Opportunities for sociability may have been relatively limited on the settlement frontier, but the gentlewoman’s obligation to preserve class distinctions through selective sociability was at least as significant as in England.

Propriety

Vickery argues, in response to the assumption that capitalism eliminated the high public status once enjoyed by propertied women, that the female public world of the Georgian era “was both larger and much less menacing than historians have often allowed.”⁸⁶ There was no opportunity in the Eastern Townships for women to engage in public cultural interaction at the royal court, the opera, the theatre, the concert, or the pleasure garden – all institutions examined by Vickery⁸⁷ – but the round of dinners and parties in the private homes of the elite was more than enough to satisfy the young hard-working couple.

Not even the church appears to have served the social purpose for Lucy that it did for many English and colonial gentlewomen, and, if there were any female philanthropic or improving societies in Sherbrooke, Lucy never mentioned them.⁸⁸ But, even in England, most married gentry women of Lucy’s age were largely confined to the nursery during their childbearing years, re-emerging in the public sphere only after their parental responsibilities had

⁸⁴ To Miss Edith Bourne, 8 Nov. 1833 (8 Nov. entry).

⁸⁵ To My dearest Sarah Jane, n.d. [Nov. 1833].

⁸⁶ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 226, 228. On this theme in Upper Canada, see Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chapter 7.

⁸⁷ Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 227-28.

⁸⁸ On this theme, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 276-77; and Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, 168-82.

lightened.⁸⁹ As a male, Edmund may have been less socially constricted, but he also did less visiting than Lucy, and he even refused the invitation to become a justice of the peace, taking refuge behind his military commission to avoid a fine for shirking his duty.

As with the independent genteel women of England,⁹⁰ Lucy did not hesitate to walk or drive to town with one of the Felton daughters or by herself. Moralists would not have had to worry about the corrupting effect of commercialised leisure in the rather primitive town of Sherbrooke, but if Lucy found life dull in the Canadian countryside, she never complained of it. The romantic ruralism she shared with Edmund had been severely tested by the severe winter cold, summer mosquitoes, and chronic illnesses of their children, but when the Peels decided to return to England, it was largely because they had become discouraged with the deteriorating political situation and the small economic reward for all their hard labour.

Conclusion

Lucy Peel's journal sheds a revealing light on the expression of class and gender identity in the colonial environment, and undermines the easy generalisations many historians have made about the impermeability of the separate spheres, at least as far as the gentry in the pre-Victorian era are concerned. The prevailing ideology certainly took hierarchical marriage for granted, an assumption buttressed by religious, legal, educational, and other institutional structures, and gender roles would become more mutually exclusive as the century wore on, but the growing idealisation of the domestic sphere may actually have increased women's social influence.

Women's journals not only reflected that influence, but strengthened it as well, for Felicity Nussbaum argues that women's autobiographical writing in eighteenth-century England "helped to shape and resist the dominant cultural constructions of gender relations and to substitute alternatives." She adds that the very act of recording the "trivial" details of a woman's lived experience represented an insistence, however ambivalent, "on an inverted hierarchy of values in that private sphere."⁹¹ Certainly, Lucy's journal, though devoted largely to "personal" matters, was avidly read by male as well as female relatives. It also reveals that the domestic sphere was the truly important one for Edmund, and

89 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 253-57, 266, 270-71.

90 Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, 278-80.

91 Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, xiv, xxi. Nussbaum also states (p. 136) that the "insistence on a public/private split with the emphasis on a personal and emotional life elides the way that the production of a rich and complex inner life is itself a political practice."

perhaps even for leading local figures such as William B. Felton and Judge John Fletcher.⁹²

The half-pay officers and their wives may also, in Cole Harris's words, have been trying "to create a home in one place out of the values that came from another,"⁹³ but Vickery's study suggests that these women were well prepared for their role in the New World. In fact, it helps to explain why so many families of their social status would choose to settle in the backwoods to become what Richard Mackie has aptly referred to as "bush gentry" rather than purchase cleared farms or settle in town.⁹⁴ Put simply, the genteel wives appear to have been quite capable of making the sacrifices needed to settle in an environment as far removed as possible from the "obnoxious" Yankees and "degenerate" Irish. Not surprisingly, the temptation has been to stress the liberating impact of British North America's settlement frontier on the constrained gender role of the genteel female immigrant.⁹⁵ If the line between the separate spheres was weakened in the Peel household, however, it was due less to the extra demands made on Lucy than to Edmund's willingness to engage in the household duties generally associated with the role of women.

Edmund may have been rather unique in this respect, but not in his participation in the kind of outdoor labour that would be considered beneath the genteel status in the old country where farm servants were much more affordable. A certain degree of status anxiety was, nevertheless, reflected in Lucy's comment on October 26th, 1833 that "though some people may be of a different opinion I am sure you will agree with me in thinking that a man may dig in the fields without being a clown, be his wife's lady's maid without being effeminate and make his own coat without looking like a tailor." Edmund's manual labour would clearly protect his gender identity, but Lucy, like other frontier gentlewomen, would play a crucial role in guarding threatened class distinctions

92 Tosh (*A Man's Place*, 5) notes that "[b]y elevating the claims of wife and mother far above other ties, domesticity undermined the tradition of a vigorous associational life with other men, and imposed a new constraint on men's participation in the public sphere."

93 R. Cole Harris and Elizabeth Phillips, eds., *Letters From Windermere, 1912-1914* (Vancouver, 1984), 1.

94 Richard Mackie, "Cougars, Colonists, and the Rural Settlement of Vancouver Island," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, Ruth Sandwell, ed. (Vancouver, 1999) 120. Patrick Dunae states, on the other hand, that a number of contemporary commentators observed that many English gentlemen gave up their farms "and returned to the Old Country because their wives were so unhappy." Bachelorhood was therefore "the best state for a gentleman emigrant, at least during the emigrant's first few years in the colony." Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver, 1981), 28.

95 This is largely true of literary scholars. See, for example, Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, chapter 1; Marion Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada* (Toronto, 1982), 10; and D.M.R. Bentley, "Breaking the 'Cake of Custom': The Atlantic Crossing as Rubicon for Female Emigrants to Canada?" in *Re(Dis)Covering Our Foremothers*, 91-122.

through the management of social rituals associated with polite English society. Largely organised by women, formal dinners, music recitals, anniversary celebrations, and other “civilised” social activities sustained genteel class identity, thereby helping to justify resistance to democratisation and monopolisation of the spoils of office. Genteel men and women may have played mutually distinctive roles in defending their privileged social position, but the result of their common campaign was that their worlds were less circumscribed by gender than by class.⁹⁶ The distinctions between the male and female worlds described in Lucy’s journal are often blurred, but the “lower orders” of society emerge very clearly as the “other.”

Women such as Lucy Peel were quick to put those Yankees who dared to become overly familiar in their place. As with the contemporaneous downfall of the Family Compact in Upper Canada, however, this social snobbery only deepened the popular resentment that destroyed William Felton’s career in 1837, and ended the dominant political and social role of the British elite in the Eastern Townships. Fearing a political revolution, and predicting the recession that would follow the inflationary extravagance of the British American Land Company,⁹⁷ the Peels (and there is no hint that this was Edmund’s decision alone) decided to sacrifice a future in which they would live and work together on a daily basis in order to return to the comforts and certainties of England.

Lucy’s writing was obviously not entirely candid, since she clearly wished to sustain a favourable impression with her relatives in England, but her consistent enthusiasm would have been difficult to feign for such an extended period of time. And, the distinctive tone of the journal aside, it clearly reflects the basic values of Lucy’s class and gender, for Nussbaum reminds us that all types of autobiographical texts issued “from the culture as much as the individual author.”⁹⁸ Lucy and Edmund may have been an exceptional couple, but perhaps only in the intensity to which they adhered to the same romantic ideal that others of their social class and era aspired to. Certainly, the young couple viewed their experience on the Canadian frontier as a generally positive one, the loss of Celia aside, and child mortality was at least as common in England as in Canada.

Rather than having been defeated by the frontier, the Peels were spiritually strengthened by the challenges they had faced there, but they were also young enough and well-connected enough to return home when they judged that the

96 The same point is made in Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work*, 190.

97 See J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism, and Colonization in Nineteenth-Century Quebec: the Upper St Francis District* (Montreal and Kingston, 1989), chapter 2; and Jean-Pierre Kesteman, Peter Southam, and Diane Saint-Pierre, *Histoire des Cantons de l’Est* (Sainte-Foy, 1998), 123.

98 Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, 28.

future was more promising in England. Families such as the nearby Staceys, or the Moodies and Traills in Upper Canada, did not enjoy this option, though Dunbar Moodie was able to acquire a patronage position in town.⁹⁹ What the future held in store for the Peel family is impossible to say in any detail, but we do know that Edmund became a naval captain, that daughter Flora survived to give birth to twelve children, that baby Richard also lived to become a captain in the merchant service, and that three other sons were born in England.¹⁰⁰ We also know that this deeply conservative couple had chosen a good time to leave Sherbrooke, for the social, economic, and political transition of the 1840s would create a world in which they would not have felt at ease.

⁹⁹ For overviews of several genteel women writers' experiences in Upper Canada, see Elizabeth Hopkins, "A Prison-House for Prosperity: the Immigrant Experience of the Nineteenth-Century Upper-Class British Woman," in *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History*. Jean Burnet, ed. (Toronto, 1986), 7-20; and Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent*.

¹⁰⁰ ETRC, Peel Papers, C.H. Kinder to Monique Saumier, n.d.; C.H. Kinder to J.I. Little, South Walsham, England, 22 June 1999.