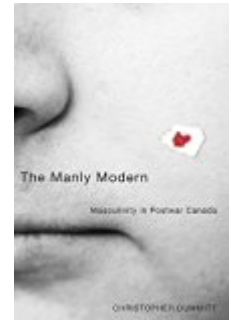




Christopher Dummitt. *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada.*

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007. 232 pp. \$36.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7748-1275-7.



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Published on H-Canada (May, 2008)

The period immediately following the Second World War has been characterized as a time of placid conformity when a contented population appeared eager to settle into the comforts of suburban and consumer culture after fifteen years of depression and war. The period has also been presented as a time when men wallowed in the bureaucratic, corporate, and ultimately emasculating world of consumer gratification that was most famously described in William Whyte's best-selling book, *The Organization Man* (1956). This man, who spent his days performing desultory work at the office, was supposedly sapped of the manhood that was thought to thrive in a more primitive, or pre-modern, era. This effeminate and bureaucratized man, moreover, was sometimes unfavorably compared to the blue-collar worker, who was celebrated for using his hands and common sense to earn an honest living. Until recently, these two worlds, the effeminate, bureaucratic, and rational world of the office worker and the noble, brawny, working-class world of the laborer, have been viewed separately, the one the antithesis of the other. In this very interesting new book, Christopher Dummitt provides a com-

elling narrative that rethinks this dichotomy by suggesting that the very modernity that was supposedly emasculating those men who spent their days working in those offices was in fact a potent expression of a particular understanding of manhood that was defined by order, rationality, progress, and control. By exploring the very manner in which modernity promoted these supposedly masculine virtues, Dummitt illustrates how particular attitudes about masculinity provided the principles around which postwar Canadian culture was organized. In this way, Dummitt reveals the manner in which the postwar world was one in which modernity was deployed to defend the patriarchal order of society.

The notion that men were somehow being emasculated by their suburban and bureaucratic existence is a somewhat curious one if one considers that the very modernity that was supposedly draining men of their manhood was defined by such traditionally masculine virtues as order, rationality, and control. To be modern, after all, was to embrace progress and to be in control of one's environment. To be modern, in other words, was

to be a man. In his attempt to resolve the tension between a modernity that was at once defined by these masculine attributes and said to be emasculating men, Dummitt presents a series of case studies aimed at showing how men understood modernity. The book has much more coherence than one might expect from the case-study approach as each case builds upon the last to illustrate the manner in which postwar manhood was defined. In the first of these studies, Dummitt examines returning veterans who were seeking entitlement benefits on the basis of their military service and sacrifice, that is to say based on their masculine contributions to their country, only to confront impersonal and rational bureaucrats' intent upon upholding seemingly arbitrary rules. Both sides, Dummitt shows, approached the issue of entitlements holding different views of manhood, with the one side intent upon imposing order on an unwieldy process of distributing benefits and the other intent upon receiving benefits because they had fulfilled their traditionally masculine roles as soldiers. What the veterans encountered was a new postwar order that replaced an older version of manhood based on sacrifice and heroism with one marked by expertise and bureaucratic control over one's surroundings.

The tensions between the older type of manhood exhibited by the veterans and the new one defined by bureaucratic order was also on display in the aftermath of the collapse of Vancouver's Second Narrows Bridge in 1958, which killed eighteen people. The disaster revealed a growing tension between a working-class masculine culture that celebrated physical exertion and skill, and modern demands that these men follow strict safety regulations to manage the risks associated with bridge building. These two versions of manhood came into conflict following the bridge collapse when engineers pushing for greater risk management—an important element of modern manhood—confronted the workers who tended to view such regulations as interfering with their ability to determine and manage risk on their

own and who tended to dismiss such regulations as a form of workplace discipline.

This postwar desire to manage risk extended to the body. Men who called for order and discipline in public life, it turned out, were expected to apply the same standards to their bodies. The Ironworkers Union's engineering representative before the commission investigating Vancouver's bridge collapse was also a member of the British Columbia Mountaineering Club, which Dummitt sees less as an indication of this man's attempt to escape the constraints of the modern world and more as an effort to extend the values of that world into nature. While mountaineers who joined this club were ostensibly seeking a more authentic experience by climbing mountains, they approached their tasks much as they would any other task in the modern world. That is to say, these men sought to conquer nature by attempting to impose order on their surroundings. By mapping their trails, and carefully documenting their climbs as well as attempting to control who had access to nature, such men were managing the risk associated with such activities, and promoting the self-discipline and bodily strength that is at the heart of the manly modern. These mountaineers, in other words, were exhibiting modernity in their attempts to triumph over nature and to effectively manage risk much as they would in the workplace. The question of individual discipline was also important when it came to that most modern of activities—driving. Critics of increased regulation on Vancouver's highways pointed out that good drivers were those individuals who were responsible, disciplined, rational, and in control behind the wheel. In other words, good drivers were thought to be men.

This celebration of the rationality, control, and management of risk that defined modernity came under attack beginning in the 1960s. By then, the realization that the rationality and order promoted by the postwar expert was leading to heavy-handed measures like slum clearance and

highway building that failed to take into account local concerns, prompted more and more people, led by the likes of Jane Jacobs and Ralph Nader, to question the very assumptions of modernity that lay at the heart of such projects. By challenging the values of order, discipline, rationality, and control, of course, these critics, which included second-wave feminists, environmentalists, consumer advocates, and urban planners, were in fact attacking a form of manhood that had become intertwined with postwar modernity.

What Dummitt has done here, and this is what makes this book so valuable, is conflate the modernity of the postwar years with manhood. By showing how the modernist project was in fact a masculine effort to impose order and discipline on the world, Dummitt challenges those people who might be tempted to claim that modernity somehow served to emasculate men by removing them from a more primitive or authentic state that was imagined to be closer to a masculine ideal. Moreover, by pointing to the ways in which modernity served to reinforce male privilege he reveals the full promise of masculinity studies by moving beyond the narrative of crisis that has too often served as an organizing principle for the field. It should be added that the modernity that Dummitt describes is necessarily hostile to women. For if modern men were so intent upon controlling their environment then they were most certainly intent upon exerting greater control over women so as to manage the risk that was presented by women's growing presence in the workforce and later by second-wave feminism. This book demonstrates that the bureaucratic, rational, and ordered world that men were consolidating during the postwar years was far from emasculating for men. That world provided, instead, yet another means for men to justify their control over women. Dummitt reminds us, then, that patriarchal assumptions not only survived into the modern era, but were at the heart of the modernist project. One might add that these as-

sumptions have persisted into the postmodern world.

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Citation: Jeffery Vacante. Review of Dummitt, Christopher. *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. May, 2008.

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