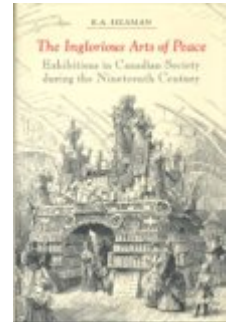


Elsbeth E. Heaman. *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society during the Nineteenth Century.* Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1999. viii + 412 pp. \$50.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-4272-9.



Reviewed by France Lord

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In an article published in 1997, Andre Desvallees, renowned French museologist, discussed the etymology of the words "exhibition" and "exposition." The English language decided for the latin root *exhibere*, the French, for *exponere*. He rightly outlined their similarities, notably in the fact of showing and presenting. Their differences could be found, for the former, in the making of a spectacle of oneself to the point of ostentation; for the latter, in explaining, recounting. [1] With *The Inglorious Arts of Peace*, Elsbeth Heaman unwinds for us the path of Canadian exhibitions in the nineteenth century from exposition to exhibition, from education to entertainment.

The journey Heaman conveys reaches the highest standards of scholarship. Her work is extremely well documented and strongly anchored in theory. Indeed, drawing from the fields of philosophy, literary criticism, and sociology, it is through the theory channel that the author introduces us to the exhibition as an "important historical event in its own right." Heaman's book is flawed in its qualities. At times, the reader will

drown in too many quotes, left to search for the author's arguments. And Heaman may come to a "theoretical excess" by wanting to create her own neologism, such as "spectacularesque": a merger of Bakhtine's carnivalesque and of Debord's spectacle. Its inelegance and its "ungrammaticality" alone, as Heaman claims, might prevent other historians from using it.

Heaman defines straight out the idea of exhibition: "Reduced to its distinctive abstract qualities, the exhibition was a competitive means of circulating knowledge and artifacts simultaneously. It resembled traditional mechanisms of economic circulation -- the market and the fair -- but was intentend to be more explicitly educational" (p. 10). The exhibition is seen as a project of the Enlightenment and of European relations with the works of economists and philosophers like Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill. The keywords, or key concepts, establishing the idea of exhibition at the beginning of the nineteenth century are competition as emulation, and education as the diffusion of practical knowledge.

The first part of the monography studies exhibitions in Central Canada. In Chapter Two, Heaman analyses the beginnings of the exhibition practice from 1789 to 1837. These first manifestations heralded the failure of a traditional (European) mode of communication through spectacle. Referring to Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, Heaman asserts that the decline of the "societe du spectacle" where the nation was a passive audience, made increasingly inadequate the use of exhibition to maintain social pretensions by the Canadian elite. Exhibitions, influenced by public opinion, were to become more and more spectacular and vulgar. Nevertheless, in the 1810s, in Lower Canada, exhibitions were organized by agricultural societies sponsored by the government to encourage improvement in agriculture. By the 1830s, political quarrels and bad crops got the better of Lower Canada's agricultural societies. In Upper Canada, though the beginnings were slower, the outcomes proved more successful: the agricultural societies were liberal organizations created in the interest of its own members.

Chapters Three and Four deal with the development of a system of agricultural and industrial exhibitions in Central Canada from the mid-nineteenth century on. First, Heaman studies the political role of exhibitions, then she ponders the weight of agricultural and industrial exhibitions in the balance of the Canadian economy. Exhibitions experienced a much more important and steady growth in Ontario than in Quebec. According to the author, the success of exhibitions, where the wealth of a few was concentrated, was sustained by a healthy economy. Exhibitions did not create prosperity but in Ontario, they were the reflection as well as the catalyst for the pre-existing march of progress. The situation in Quebec was impaired by a heavier intrusion of bureaucrats torned by ethnic and local dissension, the backlash of the 1830s depression, the decline of wheat production, the development of the dairy industry, as well as a lack of public support. Dairy

cows proved not as glamorous as their meat cousins at agricultural shows, revealing a troubling distinction between exhibition and agriculture criterias. Moreover, Quebec agronomists, distrustful of peasants, preferred inspections, schools, model farms and circles to educate the latter. From the late 1840s to the 1890s, exhibitions in Canada were subject to a switch in audience. The spectators were mostly farmers and potential exhibitors in the 1830s, by the end of the century the exhibition became a form of entertainment for the masses.

In the last chapter of the first section, Heaman presents -- often with humour -- the content of these exhibitions; the agricultural and industrial exhibits, the growing entertainment business, and the crowds. In fact, "The paying visitors determined the success or failure of these events.... Exhibitions tempered instruction with amusement because the elites realized that if they wished to popularize improving ideas, they would have to speak a popular language" (p. 106). Part Two examines the participation of Canada in international exhibitions. Chapter 6 presents the exhibition as a factor for the shaping of a Canadian national identity and its influence on the course of facts leading to Confederation. Heaman then looks at the Canadian exhibitions after Confederation, in Europe (Chapter 7) and in America (Chapter 8). Loyal to the principle of emulation, displays from the different British colonies of North America induced a "friendly rivalry". By the visible complementary nature of their exhibits, those displays "... helped to establish a discourse about Canada which praised its economic resources and its bustling, practical populace, and claimed a place for it in the 'confederacy of nations'" (p. 180). The high cost of transatlantic shipping made the government a decisive agent in the participation of Canadian exhibitors. The question of advertising the Canadian identity and territory was of too much importance, according to Heaman, to be left to private interests. Heaman offers us an enlightening analysis of exaggerated national advertise-

ment on the scene of international exhibitions (pp. 196–201). She concludes the chapter on European exhibitions by acknowledging the failure of Canadian propaganda. The expected commercial and emigrating effects never took off.

As for American exhibitions, they announced the "commodification of everything" and a shift in their own nature. People, as well as artifacts, were now being displayed and judged and the educational tenet was shaken. From the late 1870s on, science and education, to the detriment of material prosperity, became the hallmark of "civilization." Ontario and Quebec entered this new battleground with a "not so friendly rivalry" spirit. Where visual education had once been one of the foundation of the exhibition, education was now relegated to the educational court by trade and entertainment. The Canadian performance was puffed up by government hired press agents. Heaman asserts that, at Chicago, in 1893, "most Canadian were too caught up in their own problems and politics to subscribe to the fiction of a grand national display" (p. 253). According to the author, this "spirit of jealousy" kept Canada from having its own international exhibition.

Part Three, "Exhibition and Identities", is the shortest but the most invigorating section from my point of view. In two different chapters Heaman treats the question of women and Amerindians at the fair. It brings up, among others, issues in regard to the transition of women from the private to the public sphere through the exhibition, and of culture (any culture) as spectacle. I am not a specialist of the First Nations or history of women but as I look at the structure of Heaman's dissertation, I am wondering if this structuralist, dialectical approach -- men/women, white/aboriginal, Europe/America, politics/economics, etc. -- to a post-structuralist thesis is still or always necessary? I understand the theoretical challenge of Heaman: "As a theoretical system, exhibitions could not accomodate these 'excluded others'" (p. 8). But as for the participation of women (to exhi-

bitions), I am asking if a more integrating approach is desirable. By integration, I do not mean eclipse. Do women, in a monography about exhibition (or any other subject), have to be singularized in a different chapter as a mere social group? [2] Could their political and economical agendas, though "against the grain", not be studied in the chapters related to these issues?

Heaman's sources are drawn from government collections such as records of provincial secretaries before Confederation, and of agriculture and public works departments. She has gone over multiple reports of agricultural societies, monthly agricultural journals and the daily press. In addition, Heaman has relied on the records of the Canadian Exhibition Commission for her study of international events as well as the papers of the National Council of Women, the records of the Department of Indian Affairs and the Hayter Reed Papers, all at the National Archives of Canada. The author also consulted private collections of individuals connected with the different exhibitions.

Though they may grumble about the absence of a bibliography, readers will applaud Elsbeth Heaman's *The Inglorious Arts of Peace*. This many-faceted work will appeal to historians from different fields: political, economical, ideological, cultural, material culture, gender, and race. Heaman's detailed overview offers us a historical and theoretical background to former studies like Keith Walden's *Toronto Industrial Exhibition*, and Herve Gagnon's exhibitions and museums in Montreal. It will also provide a rich debate platform for future historians of the spectacle and of Canadian culture.

Notes

[1]. Andre Desvallees, "Exhiber ou demontrer? L'objet de l'exposition", *Musees*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1997, p. 29.

[2]. In a historiographical article about women in Quebec history, Andree Levesque was actually pleading for a more integrating approach.

Analysing survey course syllabi, she wished that the compartmentation of the history of women was a temporary phase. "Reflexions sur l'histoire des femmes dans l'histoire du Quebec", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amerique francaise*, vol. 51, no. 2, Fall 1997, p. 281--282.

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