

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

**The Original Roots Man:
Landscape, Nationalism and Dress**

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
PART ONE:.....	11
THEORIZING CANADA, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY.....	11
NATIONALISM AND SPACE	11
MEMORY AND COMMEMORATION	15
NOSTALGIA	20
ANTIMODERNISM AND THE CITY.....	22
HEROIC AND RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM.....	27
ART AND THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS.....	30
TOM THOMSON.....	32
PART TWO:	38
ANALYZING THE ROOTS COLLECTION.....	38
MATERIAL CULTURE AND THE T-SHIRT	38
NOSTALGIC AND HERITAGE BRANDING	49
CONCLUSION	55
IMAGES.....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

ABSTRACT

The landscape paintings of Canadian artist Tom Thomson have long been a part of the Canadian canon of art. The Group of Seven, Emily Carr and Tom Thomson have produced images of the Canadian wilderness that continue to capture the imagination of Canadians to this day. After nearly a hundred years since the passing of Tom Thomson in 1917, the mythology surrounding the artist continues to develop as he plays an important role within Canadian cultural memory and consciousness as a quintessential Canadian icon. Some scholars have argued that the Thomson myth has less to do with the art that he produced, and have more to do with the prevalent ideas and values that were projected onto his life after his mysterious death at Canoe Lake. In the summer of 2014, Canadian lifestyle brand Roots Canada Ltd. released the Tom Thomson collection, which sought to recognize the artist's life and works, as the "Original Roots Man". The narrative revolving around Tom Thomson, national identity and the wilderness may appear to truly represent Canadian life and reality given its repetition within discourses of mass culture and in the recent Roots collection. However, as this Major Research Paper (MRP) proposes, the Thomson myth speaks of larger themes having to do with how Canadians think about identity, gender, space and history and their place in it. This MRP explores the convergence of nationalism, antimodernism, the differentiation of space, and the commodification of heritage through Roots' 2014 Tom Thomson Collection. Ultimately, this MRP argues that the Roots Tom Thomson Collection serves as an example of the commodification of heritage that provides a limited vision of Canada.

INTRODUCTION

It was after a “twelve-hour trip by train, bus, and boat into the heart of Canada’s wilderness that [...] everything [changed]”¹ The destination was Camp Tamakwa, located three hundred kilometers north of Toronto in Algonquin Park. This story of Michael Budman, Don Green, and Roots Canada Ltd., begins as the two founders describe their first encounter as young children with Algonquin Park, an “outdoors paradise – the ying to Detroit’s yang”.² According to the two Motor City natives and the founders of Roots Canada Ltd., Detroit was one of “America’s leading urban centres”, both a cultural and economic hub.³ The city was home to the thriving athletic teams, “the Red Wings, the Lions, the Tigers, the Spartans, and the Wolverines”, alongside Motown Records and the likes of “Marvin Gaye, the Temptations, Smokey Robinson, [and] the Four Tops”. Budman and Green describe the city as “a lively, upbeat place, brimming with promise and possibility”.⁴ However, this excitement was irrelevant to the two Roots founders, compared to the Canadian wilderness, which opened up “another world” to Green and Budman, where they experienced Canada as a “pristine, expansive beauty”.⁵ The two boys drew inspiration from Algonquin Park’s “rustic clothing, which was authentic, comfortable, and rooted in heritage brands”.⁶

To this day, Roots has come to embody the Canadian wilderness and the “camp chic” aesthetic. In 2013, Roots Canada Ltd. celebrated its 40th Anniversary since it was

¹ Forward to *Roots: 40 Years of Style*, by Michael Budman and Don Green (Toronto: Anansi, 2013).

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

first founded in 1973. In conjunction with this anniversary, the Canadian company released *Roots: 40 Years of Style* in which Michael Budman and Don Green, tell this story of Roots' authentic and humble beginnings. Today the company is synonymous with Canadiana, and has over 120 retail locations in North America and more than 100 in Asia.⁷ Throughout the last four decades, Budman and Green have striven to “translate their affinity for the Canadian wilderness and sports into a distinctive line of genuine leather products and authentic athletic wear”.⁸

In the summer of 2014, Roots released the Tom Thomson Collection that resulted from a partnership with the Tom Thomson Gallery of Owen Sound, Ontario. The collection presented the Canadian artist as “the Original Roots Man”, as it honored and paid tribute to the life of the “iconic Canadian painter, outdoorsman and Algonquin Park resident” (Fig.1).⁹ Tom Thomson is presented by Roots as the “quintessential Canadian” and as a national icon who successfully developed an “authentic vision [...] [of] the Northlands of Canada.”¹⁰ The retailer claims that Tom Thomson embodied many of the same principles, values and aesthetics that Roots continues to be inspired by. Budman stated that his admiration for the landscape artist began during his time at Camp Tamakwa, as Thomson's affinity towards the Canadian wilderness resonated with the founder's. The collection includes men and women's “apparel, accessories and leather items”. Although some of the garments and accessories have been inspired by Thomson's paintings (*Canoe Lake* [1915], *Soft Maple in Autumn* [1914], and *Melting Ice* [1917])

⁷ “Our Roots: The Initial Idea in 1973 and the Inspiration Behind it All,” Roots Canada Ltd., accessed May 24, 2014, <http://bitly.com>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “The Source,” Roots Canada Ltd., accessed March 1, 2015, <http://bitly.com>.

¹⁰ “Media Release,” Roots Canada Ltd., accessed March 7, 2015, <http://bitly.com>.

Sean Vicary, Roots' Licensing Creative and Graphics Manager wanted to recognize Thomson for what he represented.¹¹ Alongside Vicary, Associate Designer Alice Mallinson and Special Collections Designer Adrian Aitcheson, Senior Accessories Designer Lynne Morris and Design Director Diane Bald designed the collection with the intention to "tell the story of him the man".¹² Virginia Eichhorn, curator of the Tom Thomson Gallery stated that "If you take a walk along almost any city or town in Canada, you'll see young people walking about in plaid, shirts, jeans and woolen touques. It's as if everyone is channeling the spirit of Tom."¹³ The collection is meant to inspire and remind Canadians, in the city or country of Tom Thomson's legacy and the Canadian outdoors.

Landscapes are imbued with symbolic meaning and values, the Canadian landscape is no exception. Budman and Green's early childhood journeys to Algonquin Park resonate within Canadian national mythology. This image of Canada as North was relevant at the time of Tom Thomson's life at the turn of the twentieth century, and it was relevant in the 1950s and 1960s with Budman and Green, and continues to remain relevant today. Tom Thomson has become a symbol of national identity because of his painted reproductions of the Canadian landscape, but also because of the life he led and the "intimacy" he had with the Great Outdoors. He continues to represent the Canadian wilderness and a sense of rugged authenticity.

Landscape has been an important backdrop of the Canadian cultural consciousness. The Canadian wilderness references our settler past and in many ways is

¹¹ "The Source."

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

loaded with patriotic meaning. Our interaction with the Canadian wilderness is associated with “[symbolism] of Canadian experience”, as Canadians “believe that ‘they were following in the footprints of the European explorers and coureurs du bois’”.¹⁴ Nature has become “a means of inserting oneself into the national story”.¹⁵ In many ways the way that we see and understand the Canadian landscape corresponds Michel Foucault’s definition of the heterotopia in his book *Of Other Spaces*. Foucault argues that space has become a popular concern of the twentieth century and introduces the term “heterotopia”, to describe a specific kind of space within a given society. A heterotopia, unlike a utopia exists within a society as a sort of counter site, whose role is to mirror, “[represent], [contest] and [invert]” places within a society, as they signify a space that is “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed and jumbled”.¹⁶ Heterotopias are not static spaces and can take on different meanings and functions over time. These spaces also have a temporal function as they can act as a window into an imagined past that allows for individuals to reach into a different time through space. In many ways, the Canadian wilderness can be seen as a form of heterotopia. The Canadian wilderness acts a counter site to the everyday spaces in the reality of most Canadians’ lives, as it also allows for the performance of identity through the access to an imagined past.

National identities require a collective mythology and memory, national heroes, and landscapes. These act as markers and guides to help us imagine what it is that makes

¹⁴ Peter A. Stevens, “A Little Place in the (Next) Country: Negotiating Nature and Nation in 1970s Ontario,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47.3 (2013): 44.

¹⁵ Ibid, 45.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York: Routledge, 1998), 235.

us Canadians. Regardless of whether it is recognizable or noticeable, nationalism permeates throughout our everyday lives in order to reinforce and maintain our ideas of ourselves as Canadians. The Tom Thomson Collection by Roots exemplifies this form of banal nationalism (Michael Billig) and the continued reiteration of national mythology that is involved in day-to-day experiences. This Canadian mythology plays a role in understanding national identity, an understanding that, moreover, has been shaped and colored by antimodernist, nostalgic and masculinist rhetoric that continues to inform the way that Canadian identity is defined to this day. Thus, this paper will examine the intersections between and among space, masculinity, national identity and its commodification, through theories of national identity and memory (Anderson, Halbwachs and Connerton), nostalgia (Boym), antimodernism (McKay) and nordicity (Grace). My case study is Roots' Tom Thomson Collection of 2014, reading that Canadian national identity has been shaped by nostalgic antimodernist ideas that are exemplified materially in Canada's landscape. As we shall see below, heritage brands like Roots support the collective mythology by commodifying an essentialist understanding of the Canadian past that tends to ignore the complexities involved in history.

"Part One: Theorizing Canada, Memory, And Identity" discusses the idea of Canada as the "North" through theorizing the intersections of national space with concepts of memory and identity. I will examine the way that Canadian urban and rural spaces were shaped by antimodern and nostalgic sentiments, and look at how these reactions affected approaches towards art and masculinity. Some of my research questions include: What is the understanding of northern space and how does it intersect

with notions of memory? How did the development of the urban centers and mechanization of labour affect perceptions of rural Canadian space? What values does Tom Thomson signify within Canadian imagination, and how does he relate to Canada's collective memory? By addressing these questions, Part One sets out to provide the theoretical framework that will enable me to look at material culture and branding involved in the Roots Tom Thomson Collection of 2014.

“Part Two: Analyzing the Roots Collection” applies the theoretical concerns of Part One to a material culture analysis of the Tom Thomson Roots Collection. More specially, Part Two analyzes the Memorial Cairn T-Shirt and the “Guide, Artist, Canoeist, Woodsman, Canadian” T-Shirt from the collection. A material culture analysis is used to parse the symbolic value of Tom Thomson as a national icon, in relation to nostalgic and heritage branding. Ultimately Part Two of the essay examines how notions of space and memory are reproduced and commoditized, resulting in the maintenance of Canadian mythology.

PART ONE:

THEORIZING CANADA, MEMORY, AND IDENTITY

Nordicity is oftentimes a qualifying characteristic of Canada as a nation state. This section of the essay examines some of the social, cultural and historical elements that were involved in shaping and reinforcing this association made between Canada and its Nordic character. Themes that will be discussed include the differentiation of urban and rural spaces in relation to the development of cities around the turn of the twentieth century, nostalgia and the longing for a different time and place, alongside the reactions that were elicited by these cultural and economic shifts. I will be returning back to Foucault's idea of the heterotopia, relating it to the use of rural spaces in Canada as it has become an imagined door into the past for Canadians. This section also examines how historical figures such as Tom Thomson are used to support these views of the Canadian landscape, identity and performativity.

Nationalism and Space

The Canadian wilderness has become inseparable from the way that Canadians imagine the past, present, and future of the distinctive Canadian experience. Tom Thomson has been an icon within Canadian cultural consciousness for nearly a hundred years. His status as an icon within the cultural pantheon is partly based on the landscape paintings he produced, and partly on his connection with landscape. The Canadian North or wilderness has become a distinctive feature in the way that Canadians see themselves, and Tom Thomson has come to represent this connection. Sherrill E. Grace, author of

Canada and the Idea of North, discusses this link between Canadian national identity and its “North”. She argues that the Canadian “pseudo historical narrative”, also referred to as a collective or national mythology, is largely constructed around the space which the nation inhabits. Canadian nordicity is a collective mythology that is supported and maintained by geography, history and popular culture.¹⁷ Roots’ Tom Thomson Collection serves as an example of this nordic myth. Many cultural icons and rituals such as “hockey, [the] Group of Seven Paintings, [and] Bob and Doug Mckenzie” have been derived from, or relate to the country’s landscape. The North exists as a sort of imagined backdrop to the everyday Canadian experiences, regardless of whether or not individuals experience the Great Outdoors or even choose to interact with it.

Although the North plays an integral role in the maintenance and reproduction of Canadian identity, this space is a largely abstract concept. Historically the North has not been an easy place to pinpoint or locate, by historians and geographers alike. Grace points out that claims have been made over where this “real” or “imagined” North is situated.¹⁸ The title that she uses to describe the Canadian North is borrowed from Bruce Hodgins, as the North is labeled as a “territorially shifting concept”.¹⁹ In many ways, the landscape that is integral in the way that Canadians see themselves, may in fact exist more in cultural imaginings, more than in reality. As Grace writes, the North “defies [...] maps, statistics, measurements and analyses”, but nevertheless, it continues to play an important role in informing our collective Canadian identity.²⁰

¹⁷ Sherill E. Grace, *Canada and the Idea of North* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 45.

¹⁸ Ibid, 48.

¹⁹ Ibid, 51.

²⁰ Ibid, 51.

This “collective mythology” that Grace mentions plays an essential role in nationalism and nationalizing projects. A collective narrative serves as the glue that holds members of nation states together. Although individuals of a nation state will never meet all the members of their nation or even know of their existence, a collective mythology allows them to feel a sense of belonging, that helps them move beyond the chasms that exist between individuals and communities across a nation state. The collective narrative provides a shared identity that ties members together. Benedict Anderson defines nationalism as “imagined political community” in his seminal 1983 book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Anderson describes nationalism as the modern day equivalent to kinship and religion. He argues that nationalism first resulted from the changes brought about by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution of the eighteenth century. Anderson outlines the shifts that occurred during this period, and describes it as an era of “rationalist secularism” that was marked by a fatalist “modern darkness”.²¹ Nationalism arose from this period as a socio-political phenomenon that was meant to provide societies with a sense of community and connectedness. Ultimately a nation is defined not by its territorial divides and boundaries, but by the collective narrative and imaginings of its people.²²

This collective mythology answers questions like “who are we?”, “What [do] we share?”, and “What [do] we do together as [a] community?”²³ A national mythology informs a communal sense of the past, the present, and the future. However, an important

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kenneth E. Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, “Toward a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public Memory and Commemoration,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 35.1 (2007): 127.

point to highlight is that, the term “mythology” rather than “history” is used to describe these national narratives. These collective myths are generally not concerned with accuracy and truthfulness and are commonly misrepresentative “[embellishments] or mythologized version of events, people, and places”.²⁴ The employment of selective memory in national myths tends to gloss over the violence that was involved in bringing nation states together, while they “[celebrate] its antiquity, [and] forgets its historical recency”.²⁵ The heroes, events and landscapes are meant to reinforce the stories of the nation. Heroes are usually presented as exceptional figures who “step out of the banal progress of calendrical time” while epitomizing a society’s beliefs, values and aspirations.²⁶ Landscapes, on the other hand, provide an image of home and nationhood, regardless of the fact that this space is not required to be experienced universally. This place has to be imagined as “an ‘overall’ country”, that moves beyond the “immediate experience of place”, and “involves the imagining of a bounded totality”.²⁷ National buildings or rural spaces oftentimes characterize these spaces. An important feature of collective mythologies is that it reflects a society’s “arrangement of the past, whether real or imagined, in patterns that resonate with a culture’s deepest values and aspirations”.²⁸

Nationalism is oftentimes associated with very strong and overt displays of political beliefs and emotions. Whereas nationalism is commonly tied to days of commemoration and nationalist movements, Michael Billig contends that nationalism has been treated and studied in a very limited way by sociologists in the past. His belief is

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), 38.

²⁶ Ibid, 70.

²⁷ Ibid, 74.

²⁸ Ibid, 7.

that nationalism has been framed as the beliefs and sentiments of “others” rather than ourselves. While nationalism is viewed as an irrational phenomenon and as “a property of others”, our own nationalism is naturalized and made invisible.²⁹ The author provides a very general definition of nationalism, as it is “the ideology that creates and maintains nation states”.³⁰ He does however, make a distinction between overt nationalism that relates to social and political movements, and the nationalism of the everyday, which he distinguishes as banal nationalism. In contrast to overt nationalism, banal nationalism is woven and embedded into the routines of citizens’ daily lives. Banal nationalism reinforces national identities in ways that are barely noticeable, such as in people’s sartorial choices and the popular cultural images they see.

Memory and Commemoration

The past plays an important role in the way national identity is imagined and constructed. Although Tom Thomson died only a hundred years ago, he signified Canada’s early settler past, in the beginning 1600s. This memory is not individual, as it does not represent twenty first century lived experiences; instead, he informs today’s collective memory and the way we see ourselves as Canadians. Public or collective memory is defined as the way that groups remember their past. In many ways, collective memory informs national mythology. It involves “the senses, emotions, imagination, and intellect”, as significance is placed on events and people in order to formulate the “register of sacred history”.³¹ Although memory is oftentimes thought of as a very

²⁹ Ibid, 17.

³⁰ Ibid, 19.

³¹ Foote, “Toward a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public Memory and Commemoration,” 127.

personal and individual experience, Maurice Halbwachs redefines memory in *On Collective Memory*. In this text, Halbwachs furthers the idea that memory can be a social and collective phenomenon attributed to groups. In fact, a collective memory is an important feature of the familial, social and religious affiliations that we all have. However, just like national mythology, memory can be flawed and selective. Halbwachs argues that memories are always being recollected and reproduced in “[incomplete] and [imperfect] ways”.³² Their reproduction and recollection are always influenced by the social context and temporal framework that they exist within. Both individuals and groups choose what period of the past to recollect, as they imagine a society that does not have the same hold and constraints on them as it does now, while they separate themselves from the “suffering, fear, hostility, and hatred” of yesterday.³³ The past reproduced through memory exists in a “clearly defined framework”, that no longer “[evokes] [...] uncertainty, rivalry, nor envy”.³⁴ The “most painful aspects of yesterday’s society are forgotten because constraints are felt only so long as they operate and because, by definition, a past constraint has ceased to be operative”.³⁵ This nostalgia and selective memory shapes both group and individual identities, as it reflects a “retrospective mirage”.³⁶

³² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 50.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, 51.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 48.

Given the fact that memories are shaped by the context, temporal framework and group affiliations, it is possible to “acquire, to localize and to recall their memories”.³⁷ Paul Connerton, author of *How Societies Remember*, argues that even our unexpressed beliefs and thoughts “exist in relationship with a whole ensemble of notions which many others possess: with persons, places, dates, words, forms of language, that is to say with the whole material and moral life of the societies of which we are a part of”.³⁸ Collective memories can either be recent or very distant memories of the past. Halbwachs uses the example of religion and the collective memory that exists within that group affiliation. He argues that history is inscribed in religious texts and practices, as “migrations and fusions of races and tribes, of great events, wars, establishments, discoveries, and reforms” are collective memories of those within the religious group.³⁹ A way that these memories are recollected and remembered is through commemoration and traditions, such as “ceremonies, feasts, beliefs [and] superstitions”.⁴⁰ He provides the example of Christianity and the centrality of the crucifixion as Christians commemorate this event every Sunday around the world as they take the Eucharist.⁴¹ There are also the constant visual reminders of the crucifixion through reproductions of the cross.⁴² Broadly speaking, collective memories inform group identities and reveal their values, “teachings”, “qualities and weaknesses”.⁴³

³⁷ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 88.

⁴² Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 47.

⁴³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 59.

The example of the cross illustrates how collective memory can be recalled and reproduced. In relation to Billig's definition of banal nationalism, everyday practices and objects can become symbolic in the way that nationalism and collective mythology is maintained, remembered and reproduced. Meanings and associations can be rendered materially or visually through both natural or built environments.⁴⁴ Memories can be recalled through material culture, visual representations, rituals, and by material spaces that are occupied by groups.⁴⁵ Material space is especially important, as it is relatively stable and provides the "illusion of not changing and of rediscovering the past in the present. We conserve our recollections by referring them to the material milieu that surrounds us".⁴⁶ Paul Connerton states that collective memories are held within the "mental and material spaces of the group".⁴⁷ James G. Mellon argues that landscapes have a "surprising endurance through the centuries of their power to shape institutions that we still live with".⁴⁸ He argues that national identity "would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition".⁴⁹

Within the Canadian context, the North or the Great Outdoors has become the material space that Canadians use to recall collective memories and reinforce national mythology. Billig points out that it is important that the collective mythology must be easily referred to and remembered. He emphasizes the fact that the "narrative structure of these stories can be well known, with citizens easily able to summarize the story in

⁴⁴ James Mellon, "Urbanism, Nationalism and the Politics of Place: Commemoration and Collective Memory," *Canadian Journal of Urban Research* 17.1 (2008): 59.

⁴⁵ Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 37.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mellon, "Urbanism, Nationalism and the Politics of Place: Commemoration and Collective Memory," 60.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

conventional forms”.⁵⁰ Canadian geographer Brian S. Osborne discusses public memory and commemoration within Canada in “Landscapes, memory, monuments, and commemoration: putting identity in its place”. Landscapes, monuments and rituals are all mnemonic devices that are used to produce and reproduce the national mythology. Landscapes, monuments and rituals are used to not only develop but also to maintain the mythic narratives and continually convey the values and aspirations of a nation. They serve as both temporal and spatial references to the past and the future of a nation. Alongside these three mnemonic devices, a nation’s mythology is also constructed and maintained through “archives, museums, school curricula, official histories, monuments, and public displays”.⁵¹ In Canada, Osborne argues that this takes place through the “National Archives, Dominion Parks Branch, Historic Sites and Monuments Board, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, National Film Board, and the Canada Council”.⁵²

Although not all nation states use collective myths to produce and reproduce national identity, many civil and liberal nations are faced with the issue of creating a shared identity within the context of increasingly culturally, politically, religiously and ethnically diverse population. Osborne states that the reality is that “we live in a dynamic and complex culture in which experiences, memories, and stories are not necessarily shared by others”.⁵³ The nationalizing project is meant to “subdue complex realities of plurality and diversity by constructing iconic landscapes and mythic narratives intended

⁵⁰ Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 71.

⁵¹ Brian S. Osborne, “Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place”, *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33.3 (2001): 6.

⁵² Ibid, 7.

⁵³ Ibid, 5.

to nurture a cohesive collective memory”.⁵⁴ The building process of the nation state is “historical with an emphasis on reconstructing and preserving the past, to encourage the present, to build and secure the future—and this has often required the use and misuse of history and heritage”.⁵⁵ The author ultimately argues that

landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock... once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery.⁵⁶

The Tom Thomson Collection pays homage to the Canadian landscape, through the celebration of a national icon that has come to be inseparable from it. This form of banal commemoration has been accomplished through a form of material culture and visual representation, which reinforces the link between the wilderness, Canadian identity and Tom Thomson. This Collection also further presents *Roots* as the authority on Canadian identity, heritage and lifestyle.

Nostalgia

The use and emphasis placed on the past and collective memory, is oftentimes informed by a level of nostalgia. In many ways the use of landscape within Canadian national identity can be understood as colored with nostalgic longing and desire for past eras. The reality is that the vast majority of Canadians live in urban centers or in the areas surrounding them, and have little to no interaction with this Canadian North. This reverence towards Canadian nordicity reflects a certain way of thinking about time, space

⁵⁴ Ibid, 2,3.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 8.

and history. Halbwachs notes that memories of the past are always understood imperfectly and incompletely. The “suffering, fear, hostility, and hatred” of yesterday is no longer operative and this can be easily forgotten.⁵⁷ The use of Tom Thomson as an icon of Canadian identity is in line with the sense of nostalgia, both in the present day and a hundred years ago. Tom Thomson was and is viewed as a man who represented a different way of life both a hundred years ago and today. Thomson’s life was juxtaposed with the realities of life around him. As Billig puts it, national heroes represent men who have stepped outside of the confines of calendrical time. In Tom Thomson’s case, he seemed to go back in time, as he represented and still represents a world where the speed of progress is different.

Nostalgia informs the way that we see Canadian identity, its landscape and its heroes of the past. The term nostalgia is derived from the two Greek terms, *nostos*, which means “a return home”, and *algia*, which refers to “longing”. Svetlana Boym discusses this longing for another time in relation to nationalism in *The Future of Nostalgia*. The author states that nostalgia does not solely reflect the longing for a return home, but also the longing for a different time, or even speed of history and progress. Nostalgia is largely a modern malaise that was first diagnosed in the seventeenth century. It was a global phenomenon that developed as a result of the fragmented life within the world social and historical upheavals. Boym points to the quick speed of industrialization and modernization as the source of this intensified “longing for the past, continuity, social cohesion and tradition”.⁵⁸ Nostalgia does not need to be based on a specific or even real

⁵⁷ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 50.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 16.

understanding of the past, and can be centered around an imagined or even fantastical time or space. Boym states that nostalgia can be a “romance with one’s own fantasy”.⁵⁹

Antimodernism and the City

Ian McKay situates nostalgia within the Canadian context with his 1994 book entitled *The Quest of the Folk*. Although this book closely examines the development of Nova Scotian folk history and folklore, it also discusses the larger antimodernist sentiments of the time that led to the development of nostalgia and the differentiation of urban and rural spaces. McKay looks at how antimodernism led to the construction of a romanticized folk history by urban producers, alongside the differentiation and romanticization of space. His argument is that beginning from the turn of the twentieth century and up until the 1970s, urban producers, including “writers, visual artists, promoters, advertisers”, projected their views of industrial urban life onto narratives of the countryside and the “folk”.⁶⁰ Although the period that this phenomenon grew out of was one that McKay describes as “emphatically nonfolk”, these antimodernist sentiments stretched across the ideological spectrum from the left to the right.⁶¹ Antimodernism had its roots in the late nineteenth century, as there was a growing “skepticism about ‘progress’ and fear that unprecedented social and economic changes were destroying the possibility of ‘authentic’ experience.”⁶² The countryside was romanticized and othered as the antithesis of city life, reflecting Foucault’s definition of the heteropia. The city was viewed as a place of decay, degeneration, “class divisions, secularism, and progress of

⁵⁹ Ibid, 14.

⁶⁰ Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 9.

⁶¹ Ibid, 16.

⁶² Ibid, 31.

the urban industrial world”, while the folk represented a communal simple way of life, where “tradition, custom and faith” was upheld.⁶³ The countryside was constructed as a community free of economic and ethnic division, informed by the “myth of the Golden Age” which told the “story of a lost age of social cohesiveness” and simplicity.⁶⁴ These antimodernist sentiments that helped construct the story of the folk, idealized the past, while emphasizing nature’s proximity to an authentic way of life. This untouched countryside represented a space and period of progress and history that was unlike that of the growing urban industrial centers.

Between 1881 and 1921, Canada underwent a massive demographic revolution. Paul Rutherford discusses this shift in “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: The urban reform movement in Canada, 1880-1920”. Within those four decades, Canada’s urban population went from 1.1 million to 4.3 million, which led to the rapid expansion of urban centers, which was met with inadequate infrastructure and resources. Rutherford argues that this shift was largely unexpected and the general response towards these developments was rather negative. Many Canadians did not imagine the nation’s future as one of an urban frontier. Even though the city was viewed as a “physical embodiment of progress, the home of literature and the arts [...] many people, looking to the sad experience of Europe and America, feared the further spread of the city”.⁶⁵ Rutherford writes that many Canadians believed that urban growth would threaten the future of the country.

⁶³ Ibid, 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁵ Paul Rutherford, “Tomorrow’s Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920,” *Historical Papers* 6.1 (1971): 203.

It is not coincidental that late nineteenth and early twentieth century was met with the rise of nature vacations. Sharon Wall, author of *The Nurture of Nature*, argues that with the rapid development of the so-called “dirty, immoral, cold, and indifferent” city, “host of temptations, including excessive drinking prostitution and all sorts of consumer products”, two reactions emerged.⁶⁶ There was the desire to flee the city or the attempt to improve it. Around the mid to late nineteenth century, popular conceptions of nature were slowly changing. Instead of seeing nature as “hostile and alien” something that had to be “tamed and subdued”, nature began representing a source of solace and therapy from urban industrial life.⁶⁷ Although perceptions of nature were already shifting in places like Europe especially, these position readings of nature were only accelerated in Canada with urban growth and industrialization. The shifting views towards nature coincided with the development of park movements in North America and the rise of nature vacations and the North American Wilderness cult.⁶⁸ For those who had the means to afford it, nature became the source of “rest cures”, where individuals (mostly men) could spend leisure time “big game hunting, canoe-tripping, cottaging and resort holidays”.⁶⁹ It was around the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that cottages and summer camps became popular wilderness excursions. This was a far cry from the early North American settler experience, where they “worked for years to clear stubborn stumps from recently reclaimed land, those dependent on the vagaries of climate and weather for subsistence,

⁶⁶ Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 5.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

were not inclined to see nature as the benevolent Mother Earth”.⁷⁰ However, the cult of wilderness and nature vacations have been embedded with nationalist and patriotic meaning. Peter A. Stevens argues that it is largely understood that to go into nature, is to have a “symbolic of Canadian experience”, as Canadians “believe that ‘they were following in the footprints of the European explorers and coureurs du bois’”.⁷¹ Nature has become “infused with patriotic purpose, and was a means of inserting oneself into the national story”.⁷²

Although the nostalgic antimodernist sentiments initially started off with wealthier urban elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these views gradually spread throughout larger segments of Canadian society. Stevens discusses this in “Roughing it in Comfort”, as he examines the rise of the cottage from the Second World War up until the 1970s. In this text, Stevens argues that the antimodernist views towards city life were democratized after the Second World War, spreading amongst the Canadian urban middle class. During the postwar period, there was a dramatic development of a North American consumer culture. Stevens describes it as “the greatest shopping spree in North American history”, as “postwar prosperity led to a surge in consumer spending that continued with only minor downturns, until the 1970s”.⁷³ Despite the increased availability of consumer goods and the comforts they provided, there was still a sense that modern urban life had an “artificial quality” to it.⁷⁴ In contrast, nature seemed to

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Peter A. Stevens, “A Little Place in the (Next) Country: Negotiating Nature and Nation in 1970s Ontario,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 47.3 (2013): 44.

⁷² Ibid, 45.

⁷³ Peter A. Stevens, “Roughing it in Comfort,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 94.2 (2013): 239.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 246.

offer a more authentic alternative that “provided an antidote to the waste, complexity, conformity, alienation that some people saw as being part and parcel of postwar consumer society”.⁷⁵ Nature vacations provided a time where people felt like they could experience the simple life, albeit temporarily. Canadians could leave the city for “primitive accommodations donning casual clothing and engaging in robust outdoors activities, [...] [as the regained] the health and vigor that had been sapped by the speed, opulence, and ephemerality of modern life”.⁷⁶

An important feature that Stevens attributes to the nature vacations were the parallels that people drew between early settlers and themselves when they embarked on their temporary nature escapes. Settlers were viewed as embodiments of “individualism and self-reliance”; they “represented the wholesomeness, creativity, and authenticity that supposedly had been extinguished”.⁷⁷ Although many early cottages were primitive at first, they slowly did adopt new technology such as “electric lighting, stoves and refrigerators [...] just as they were at home in the city”.⁷⁸ Stevens suggests that many developments appeared to be almost suburban. It is important to note that there is a distinction between nature and wilderness. Although the two are related, the expansive wilderness does not have road access and all the amenities that are included in cottage life. Julia D. Harrison proposes this desired interaction with nature that Canadians seek out, may be motivated by a “symbolic or aesthetic interaction”, rather than a true return

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 236.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 243.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 248.

to the wilderness.⁷⁹ Although nature vacations have become a way that Canadians can insert themselves into the national mythology, this practice may be prompted by a sense of nostalgic nationalism for romanticized settler life. In fact, these nature vacations can be read as ritual or performance, which Brian Osborne describes as a mnemonic device within the nationalizing project. In reality, most people probably do not wish to return to life in the 1600s. Harrison argues that this desire to escape modernity is in fact a largely modern phenomenon. The creation of automobiles and roadways have facilitated the nature excursions, just as “much dependent on the city, the factory and ‘progress’ to define its parameters”.⁸⁰ Nature vacations should not be seen as a “simple rejection of modern life but rather as one of the complex negotiations of modernity”.⁸¹ Nature offers an “other” space that is temporary and outside of everyday life, that represents a different period of history and progress, it fulfills the role that Foucault associates with heterotopias.

Heroic and Rugged Individualism

In relation to the growth of urban industrial centers, the nature of work also changed. Michael S. Kimmel examines how industrialization brought about the so-called crisis of masculinity. With the “increased mechanization and the routinization of labour” that resulted from industrialization, workers had less claim of ownership over the work

⁷⁹ Julia D. Harrison, *A Timeless Place: the Ontario Cottage* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 78.

⁸⁰ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55*, 14.

⁸¹ Ibid, 15.

that they were involved in.⁸² Kimmel suggests that the days of the “independent artisan, the autonomous small farmer, the small shopkeeper” quickly disappeared.⁸³ The city and the nature of work were blamed for “sapping men of their virility”.⁸⁴ Antimodernist approaches towards labour and masculine identity praised and embraced “individual achievement” and “the “ideal of heroic individuals battling faceless bureaucrats””.⁸⁵ There was a dichotomy between city and rural life that resulted in the view that there were the “false pale-faced emasculated men of the modern city” and the real authentic and superior men of rural settings.⁸⁶ The rest cures and nature vacations offered a way in which men could recover their masculinity through “rigorous sports and a return to nature”.⁸⁷ These ideas are reflected in the different forms of hegemonic masculinity that were associated with nature.

These notions of rugged individualism, individual achievement or heroic individualism refer to an older form of hegemonic masculinity that is based on “a frontier entrepreneurial masculinity bent on individual conquest”.⁸⁸ Although it has been largely replaced and superseded by a model of masculinity that fits better into corporate culture, rugged masculine individualism has remained relevant today. Christopher J. Greig examines this topic in *Ontario Boys*, as he uses the title “heroic entrepreneur” to describe this masculine ideal. This heroic entrepreneur is largely associated with hyper

⁸² Michael S. Kimmel, *Contemporary Crisis of Masculinity*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 138.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 140.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 139.

⁸⁶ McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, 255.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 252.

⁸⁸ Christopher J Greig, *Ontario Boys: Masculinity and the Idea of Boyhood in Postwar Ontario, 1945-1960* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 55.

masculinity, self-reliance, independence and adventure, in contrast to the “organization men” of corporate bureaucratic culture.⁸⁹ A central feature of the heroic entrepreneur was the “call to adventure [that] took the hero away from his domestic setting”.⁹⁰ The heroic entrepreneur was viewed as real, authentic and self-sufficient. A common trope associated physical action to men and weakness and passivity to women, as this idea was largely based on an oppositional relationship between the two sexes. In many ways, Tom Thomson seemed to embody this masculine ideal of heroic masculinity. He has been celebrated for his intimacy with the Canadian landscape, and more specifically the Muskoka region. Tom Thomson reflected and reflects the rugged individualist in the picture of the escapes to nature. He has been viewed as a figure who was not confined by the corporate bureaucratic culture (regardless of his job as a commercial artist). He has been seen as a self-sufficient, independent and adventurous figure, as he embodies and has been continuously associated with the values of the rugged masculine figure.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 56.

Art and the Canadian Wilderness

Coinciding with the changing views towards nature and the antimodernist sentiments in and around the turn of the twentieth century, images of the Canadian wilderness and the North were produced and disseminated. Although the nordicity has partly defined Canada since initial colonial contact, artists such as the Group of Seven, Emily Carr, Tom Thomson, and other Canadian artists, successfully furthered, developed, and consolidated it in the twentieth century.⁹¹ These artists were largely supported by the economic and social elites of Toronto, as well as the National Gallery's Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Sir Edward Walker, and its director, Eric Brown.⁹² In Canada, artists such as the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson popularized the wilderness aesthetic that continues to persist today. Peter White argues in "Out of the Woods" that the Canadian landscape has continued to capture Canadian imagination to this day. He states that there is an:

unrelenting flow of exhibitions and books on these artists; the extraordinary, continuously appreciating financial value of their works; the myriad Canadian novels, films, and television programs set in the landscape; the scenery adorning Canadian currency; the endless commercial spinoffs it generates, from calendars, postcards, and coffee-table books to advertising and the Roots lifestyle [...] it is the clear that the clear association of this image of landscape with national spirit and meaning is deeply ingrained in Canada's national psyche.⁹³

⁹¹ John O'Brian, "Wild Art History," in *Beyond Wilderness*, eds. John O'Brian and Peter White. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2007), 22.

⁹² Peter White, "Out of the Woods," in *Beyond Wilderness*, eds. John O'Brian and Peter White. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 14.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 11.

The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson have maintained their position within the Canadian Cultural Pantheon, alongside the likes of a few politicians and hockey players.⁹⁴ At the time, these artists promoted “rugged virility and hard work” that appealed to the public, as they managed to bring forth a new “type of artist [...] who puts on the outfit of the bushwhacker and prospector; closes with his environment; paddles, portages, and makes camp, sleeps in the out-of-doors under the stars, climbs mountains with his sketch box on his back”.⁹⁵

The use of landscape served as a way to create a national identity during this period and was a theme found in numerous post-colonial countries, including countries such as “Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia”.⁹⁶ Artists and writers featured landscapes as a politically unifying force. Their depictions acted as a way to communicate an identity that was free of any foreign influence. The use of the Canadian wilderness facilitated claims of national sovereignty at a time when there still existed ties to Britain.

The depiction of the Canadian landscape featured diluted elements of the Canadian wilderness that were primarily inspired by areas in the Precambrian Shield, such as Algonquin Park, Northern Ontario, Lake Superior, and Algoma. The changing perceptions towards the wilderness in the nineteenth century, as a tame and therapeutic space, were reiterated and reflected in these early twentieth century landscape works. Peter White argues that they “carried a tone much softened from the often harsh and

⁹⁴ Dennis Reid, “Introduction to The Group of Seven,” in *Beyond Wilderness*, eds. John O’Brien and Peter White. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2007), 101.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 101, 102.

⁹⁶ John O’Brien and Peter White, “Introduction,” in *Beyond Wilderness*, eds. John O’Brien and Peter White (Montreal: McGill Queen’s Press, 2007), 4.

fearful themes of survival that had characterized responses to the physical Canadian environment in the nineteenth century, substituting instead a nature that may have been wild by was essentially non-threatening, accessible, and well suited to both recreation”.⁹⁷

Tom Thomson

Within the Canadian collective memory, Tom Thomson has become a heroic figure who epitomizes many Canadian values, along with its landscape. Over the last hundred years, a mythology has developed around the artist as he has come to signify a Canadian icon. The mythology surrounding Tom Thomson as a national hero involves but surpasses his artwork. The Canadian landscape artist has become one of the most symbolic figures within the Canadian cultural pantheon. Since his death nearly a hundred years ago in July 1917, the mythology surrounding the artist has developed through biographies, films, exhibitions, novels, plays and even fashion collections, showing very few signs of it letting up. Thomson has been constructed as a “legendary woodsman, canoeist, and fisherman who is inseparable from Algonquin Park, and, thus, from Canadian ideas of northern identity”.⁹⁸ Sherrill E. Grace discusses the Thomson myth in *Inventing Tom Thomson* and argues that the artist has come to represent “foundational Canadian values”.⁹⁹ Grace notes that whether or not the realities of Thomson’s life reflected those that were associated with him after his death has become irrelevant, as “his image was easily incorporated into the dominant narrative of Canadian

⁹⁷ White, “Out of the Woods,” 13, 14.

⁹⁸ Sherrill E. Grace, *Inventing Tom Thomson* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 3.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

development”.¹⁰⁰ The Thomson myth reflects broader Canadian ideas towards space and landscape, settler past, and arguably Canadian masculine identity. Tom Thomson was born in Claremont, Ontario in 1877 and died on Canoe Lake, Muskoka at the age of 39. He lived through a period that McKay argues was “emphatically non-folk”, during a huge urban population explosion, and he worked as a commercial artist in both Seattle and Toronto for many years. However, the mythology involving him constructs the artist as “the ideal of a true man of the North”.¹⁰¹ To this day, Tom Thomson signifies “manliness, solitary independence, practical skill in the northern bush, sympathetic but unsentimental intimacy with nature, silence and humility, and the curiosity and courage of the explorer (on land and on canvas)”.¹⁰²

Grace argues that the circumstances surrounding his life and death allowed the opportunity to construct him as an ideal Canadian icon. Thomson’s death has remained a mystery for nearly a hundred years. The artist’s death occurred at Algonquin Park in 1917 when he was supposed to be on a fishing excursion. On July 8th, his body went missing in Canoe Lake, only to be found eight days later. When his bloated corpse was found, there was blood coming from the skull and a fishing line was wrapped around his ankle. The details surrounding his death have remained sparse, as many view it with suspicion. To this day, there are rumours of murder, accident, and suicide, but none of these theories have ever been proven. Grace argues that the speculation and suspicion surrounding his death only works to further mythologizes the artist. On top of this mystery, Thomson left very few “personal markers of identity”, which Grace states

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

provides an outline of him which is “full of suggestion, but it is empty, inviting others to fill it”.¹⁰³ Upon his death, he had few close friends, no wife or children.

At the time of his death, Thomson left behind “50 canvasses and over 300 sketches”.¹⁰⁴ He was renowned for his work on the Canadian landscape, drawing inspiration from Northern Ontario and Algonquin Park. Although he worked as a commercial artist in Seattle and Toronto, he spent many months in Northern Ontario sketching and painting with his friends, including the members of the not yet formed Group of Seven. There has been a persistent association made between Thomson and the Canadian landscape, as he is oftentimes viewed as having an “intimacy with nature (a feminized bush or wild) as measured by his virile command of canoe, fishing rod, back pack and camp fire, and his perceived uncanny ability to capture the essence of Canada in paint”.¹⁰⁵ Thomson is continually framed as the “individual genius living on the margins of so-called normal society”.¹⁰⁶ In many ways, his mythology fits into Billig’s definition of the national hero that steps out of history and “calendrical time” in pursuit of life in the outdoors.

Grace highlights the context surrounding Thomson’s death, as she points towards Canada’s involvement in the First World War. She argues that the nation was coming of age and needed a national hero, a position that the artist filled. Tom Thomson plays a special role in, to apply Benedict Anderson’s concept, the Canadian imagined community. In the words of Ross D. Cameron, the identity of a “priest-like, solitary, ascetic worshipper of nature, or as the pervasive spirit of the North” has been projected

¹⁰³ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰⁴ “Tom Thomson,” Canadian encyclopedia, accessed August 10, 2014, <http://bitly.com>.

¹⁰⁵ Grace, *Inventing Tom Thomson*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 9.

onto him after his death.¹⁰⁷ Regardless of whether or not Tom Thomson lived up to the mythology surrounding his life is beyond the point, his myth represents an intersection between nationalism, antimodernism and masculinity. Grace argues that “the inventions of Tom Thomson that contribute to the story enshrine white, masculine, homosocial identity as the national ideal”.¹⁰⁸

This traditional form of virile and heroic masculinity that Tom Thomson represents can be linked to antimodernist sentiments. As Boym mentions, nostalgia relates to the longing for a different period of time and history. The modern and antimodern dichotomy has shaped the myth surrounding Tom Thomson, while revealing the link between antimodernist rhetoric and Canadian masculine identity. Ross D. Cameron examines these themes in relation to the Thomson myth in “Tom Thomson, Antimodernism and the Ideal of Manhood”. As discussed by Grace, Cameron also recognizes Tom Thomson’s role as a national icon. However, he argues that the Thomson myth relates directly to both antimodernist views towards the developing urban centers, as well as the anxiety over the state of masculinity in these emerging environments. Cameron’s belief is that Tom Thomson has been mythologized as a “modern reincarnation of a coureur de bois” or a woodsman.¹⁰⁹ This title emerged as a way to reinforce and revitalize the idea that Canada was an “untamed country filled with rugged virile men”.¹¹⁰ The mythologized Thomson reflected the idealized Canadian man, overlooking the known details about his life, in order to reinforce these values. Cameron

¹⁰⁷ Ross D. Cameron, “Tom Thomson, Antimodernism, and the Ideal of Manhood,” *Journal of Canadian Historical Association* 10.1 (2009): 175.

¹⁰⁸ Grace, *Inventing Tom Thomson*, 180.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 186.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

argues that the Anglo Canadian Torontonians intellectuals and elites, who played a role in supporting the Thomson myth, experienced antimodernist anxiety towards the changing face of Canada. These fears were based on issues having to do with “urban growth, industrial development, cosmopolitan immigration and corporate consolidation” as well as, the state of heroic masculinity in the changing times.¹¹¹ Again, nature represented an escape for this modern ennui, as men could go on wilderness and rest vacations in order to reignite their primal masculinity. This notion that nature could act as a counteracting force against effects of the modern life was a theme in art, in the rise of nature vacations, and in the mythology of Tom Thomson.

The way that Tom Thomson fit into this equation was through his interaction with the North, the nature of his employment, and his lack of a spouse or children. Thomson had never received professional artistic training, which only added to his unique persona. This fact related to the idea that he was not influenced by the canon of European Salons, which was also associated with overcivilization. The artist’s lifestyle was viewed as antithetical to the modern way of life. Cameron points out that comparisons were made between Thomson and early settlers or *coureurs de bois*, which further highlighted his significant role as an idealized Canadian icon through early Canadian history. However, the Thomson myth is an exaggeration of the artist’s life. Cameron discusses the fact that Thomson did spend a significant period of time in Algonquin Park, yet, this Ontario cottage country was hardly a comparison to the “primeval untouched unpeopled wilderness which defined Canada as a whole”.¹¹² Cameron also points out that Thomson had not been trained traditionally in his craft, but had received tutoring from his peers,

¹¹¹ Ibid, 191.

¹¹² Ibid.

such as A.Y. Jackson who was trained in France. It has been largely ignored that Thomson spent winters in Toronto, and would work as a commercial artist who designed for advertisements for newspapers and magazines. The Thomson myth ignores large portions of his life that would have taken away from his symbolic value as a pure, authentic, virile man, as his myth was used as a way to create a national hero that dealt with their anxieties towards modernity and masculinity.

PART TWO:

ANALYZING THE ROOTS COLLECTION

While Part One introduced the key concept of Canadian national mythology in relation to commemoration, space and nostalgia. Part Two is concerned with how these concepts relate to my case study: the Roots Collection of 2015, notably its focus on Canadian icon Tom Thomson. As I have argued above, the Canadian landscape has an important role in Canada's collective mythology. The use of the Canadian North as a heterotopia arose during a period fraught with change. This allowed figures like Tom Thomson to come to signify a different place and time, which were associated with the unquestioned true and authentic essence of Canada. Part Two: Analyzing the Roots Collection uses this theoretical and contextual information to examine the way that these meanings and values have been embedded into material culture, such as the 2015 Roots Tom Thomson Collection. Specifically, I now turn to examine two T-Shirts in hopes of demonstrating how commemoration and the reproduction of mythology can take place through dress. To that end, I look at the way that material culture, and heritage and nostalgic branding can work to further consolidate collective ideas of nationhood.

Material Culture and the T-shirt

Roots' inspiration is largely based around the Canadian landscape. The retailer has come to represent Canadiana, as it claims the status of "Canada's leading lifestyle brand". The Tom Thomson Collection seeks to celebrate and remember the life of the

“quintessential Canadian” and national icon who not only developed an “authentic vision [...] of the Northlands of Canada”, but also reflects the founding values of Roots. Embedded within Roots’ founding rhetoric and the mythology surrounding Tom Thomson’s life is the dichotomy between the urban and rural experience. In *Roots: 40 Years of Style*, Michael Budman and Don Green highlight the gulf between Detroit, the booming economic and cultural hub of 1950s and 60s, in contrast to the Canadian wilderness, that represented another world of an authentic outdoors paradise. They have taken this inspiration of the Canadian wilderness and translated it into “genuine leather products and authentic athletic wear”. This approach towards the Canadian wilderness, as an authentic place of respite, has become a part of Canadian national identity. This is exemplified by the use of Tom Thomson as a national icon and the success that Roots has had over the last forty years. The Tom Thomson Collection reflects this narrative, and reproduces the Canadian collective mythology and memory through dress. This partnership resulted in both a men’s and women’s line that consisted of jackets, t-shirts, pants, belts, shoes, knapsacks, and accessories. Some of the proceeds from the sale of these items went to the Tom Thomson Art Gallery. The large majority of the collection was marked in Tom Thomson insignia, including the Tom Thomson 1917 crest, images of the artist, images of his memorial cairn and the reproduction of his paintings *Melting Ice* and *Canoe Lake*. In the company’s press release, Tom Thomson was heralded as the “quintessential Canadian” and a “national icon”, who was “a rugged individualist [who] [...] was interested in developing an authentic vision to depict his experience in the Northlands of Canada”.¹¹³ The introductory title for this collection described the artist as

¹¹³ “Media Release.”

the “Original Roots Man – One of Canada’s most influential painters and the driving force behind the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson is a true Canadian icon” (Fig. 2).¹¹⁴ The language that is used to describe the collection makes a clear reference his legacy within Canadian identity and nationalism. Tom Thomson is presented largely as the true and authentic representative of Canadian identity. Heralded as the “quintessential Canadian”, he both represents and is inextricably tied to the Canadian landscape. A “rugged individualist”, he communicates an authentic vision of the “Northlands of Canada”.

Curator Virginia Eichhorn stated that the purpose of the Tom Thomson collection was meant “provide an ongoing reminder to anyone who sees the collection about what an amazing landscape we have here in Canada and they’ll be encouraged to explore it for themselves”.¹¹⁵ The garments from this collection act as mnemonic devices of commemoration that highlight Tom Thomson’s status as national icon, as well as the centrality of the Canadian landscape within the country’s cultural consciousness. The collection includes two t-shirts that demonstrate this connection between material culture, commemoration, memory and national identity. The t-shirts play two different roles as one commemorates the past, while the other reiterates the connection between nature and Canadian identity. The t-shirts that will be discussed are the “Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn t-shirt” and the “Guide, Artist, Canoeist, Woodsman, Canadian” t-shirt.

The study of material culture can reveal the “beliefs, values ideas, attributes and assumptions of a particular community or society at a given time”.¹¹⁶ Artifacts can provide a window of opportunity to “[journey] into the past”, whether it be through

¹¹⁴ “Tom Thomson,” Roots Canada Ltd., accessed January 10, 2015, <http://bitly.com>.

¹¹⁵ “The Source.”

¹¹⁶ Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17.1 (1932): 1.

vision, feeling, taste, smell or sound.¹¹⁷ Jules David Prown, discusses the development of material culture as a field of study, arguing that artifacts can reveal nuances that are not necessarily apparent or articulated through the study of abstract texts and ideas. Although Prown recognizes that the list of artifacts is endless, she does introduce classifications of different forms of material culture. The author categorizes artifacts into six groups, including: art, diversions, adornment, modifications of the landscape, applied arts, and devices.¹¹⁸ Clothing falls into the category of adornments, which is grouped together with “jewelry, [...] hairstyles, cosmetics, tattooing, and other alterations of the body”.¹¹⁹ Because of its proximity to the body, dress is a special form of material culture that implies a direct association with the wearer’s identity.

The t-shirt is a ubiquitous and mundane artifact that we interact with on a near daily basis. It has become the “quintessential product of modernity”; it is cheap and non-precious, while “both the cloth substrate and the design or text applied to them are multiples”.¹²⁰ It serves the practical function of covering the body, although, its value is generally not associated with its materiality, but rather in its communicative capabilities.¹²¹ The t-shirt was lauded as a homespun garment that was meant to be worn as an undergarment. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the t-shirt started to be mass-produced and sold by department stores and mail orders such as “J.C.

¹¹⁷ Martin Blum, “Remaking the East German past: Ostalgic, Identity and Material Culture,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 34.3 (2000): 231.

¹¹⁸ Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Aaron Glass, “Crests on Cotton: ‘Souvenir’ T-shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance Among the Kwakwaka’wakw of British Columbia,” *Museum Anthropology* 31.1 (2008): 3.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Penney, Sears, Roebuck and Company; and Hudson's Bay".¹²² Although it remained a private garment, companies began to brand them with their logos and names. It was not until the 1960s that t-shirts emerged as a public garment, worn as an outer layer. From the 1970s onwards, the purpose of t-shirts better reflected its current day function, as they became "an assemblage of signs [...] [that] conveyed messages while residing in an 'open text' or contained many messages that the reader or observer could interpret".¹²³ There are endless possible embellishments found on t-shirts that can range from images, texts, messages or logos. Upon first glance, t-shirts can be read as a claim of identity, whether it be through social, political, cultural or of one's affiliations. The t-shirt can mark the attendance of an event, it can be a marker of kinship or even connote lifestyle.

Cullum-Swan and Manning argue that the underlying purpose of the fashion system is display and the marketing of differences and differentiation. The t-shirt has become "one of the prime emblems or icons of modern life, encoded in changing codes, and carrying sign functions".¹²⁴ It is a garment that has the ability to communicate ideas on the social, cultural and political world around us. It no longer serves as a private and solely functional garment, but has become a very public sign vehicle. Material culture has the ability to act as a mnemonic device of memory.¹²⁵ The t-shirt can act as a "public articulation of memories and identities" from diverse experiences and in an endless

¹²² Betsy Cullum-Swan and Peter K. Manning, "T-shirt in the Fashion System," in *Essays on the Socio-semiotics of Objects*, ed. by Stephen Harold Riggins (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1994), 419.

¹²³ Ibid, 421.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 417.

¹²⁵ Blum, "Remaking the East German past: Ostalgic, Identity and Material Culture," 231.

variety of contexts.¹²⁶ This communicative feature of the t-shirt is flexible and fluid, as it can be easily worn or removed.¹²⁷ Although the Roots' Tom Thomson Collection featured a number of different garments and accessories, the t-shirts are very clear markers and indicators of what curator Virginia Eichhorn wanted to be communicate through the collection, which was the story of the man and his Canadian iconicity.

The first t-shirt that will discussed is the "Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn T-shirt" (Fig. 3). Roots reproduced the memorial cairn onto men's and women's grey short-sleeve t-shirts for this collection, which featured the commemorative monument erected in honor of Tom Thomson soon after his death. In the month of September 1917 two months after his body was found, a group of Tom Thomson's friends including Bill Beatty, Jim and Thoreau Macdonald erected the Memorial Cairn at Hayhurst Point, located across Canoe Lake from Mowat Lodge.¹²⁸ This specific location was selected because Thomson had frequently set up his tent overlooking the water at that very spot.¹²⁹ Jim Macdonald, future member of the Group of Seven was responsible for the inscription on the bronze cairn that read (Fig.4):

To the memory of Tom Thomson artist, woodsman and guide
who drowned in Canoe Lake July 8th 1917

He lived humbly but passionately with the wild it made him
brother to all untamed things of nature it drew him apart and
revealed itself wonderfully to him it sent him out from the
woods only to show these revelations through his art and it
took him to itself at last.

¹²⁶ Glass, "Crests on Cotton: 'Souvenir' T-shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance Among the Kwakwaka'wakw of British Columbia", 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Wayne Larsen, *Tom Thomson: Artist of the North* (Toronto: Dunhorn Press, 2011), 149.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

His fellow artists and other friends and admirers join gladly in
this tribute to his character and genius

His body is buried at Owen Sound Ontario near where he was
born August 1877

To this day, the cairn continues to overlook the lake where Tom Thomson's body was found. This commemorative site recognizes Tom Thomson for more than just his artwork, as it highlights his role as a "woodsman" and "guide", a man who is one with nature. He is viewed as free from confines of the city and the "routinization of labour". There is an association made between Thomson and an authentic life of self-sufficiency, independence, and adventure. The cairn immortalizes him as a rugged individual, free from the confines of the city and corporate bureaucratic culture, as he has "[stepped] out of the banal progress of calendrical time".

Monuments, like landscapes play an important role in creating and maintaining the collective mythology. Monuments, however, reference and commemorate a specific event or figure, in contrast to landscapes, which are more general in their nature. Monuments provide both a visual and material reference to both the past and national identity. An interesting feature of monuments is that they are largely unchanging. Osborne argues that monuments are a conservative form of commemoration, as they are meant to withstand time. He states that "while other things come and go, are lost and forgotten, the monument is supposed to remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and cognitive landscape"¹³⁰ The very materials that they are made out of "attempt to freeze ideas in space and time [...] they are frozen in space while time moves around

¹³⁰ Osborne, "Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place," 12.

them, their rigid materiality ensuring their estrangement from the ever-changing values of the society in which they are located”.¹³¹

The reproduction of the memorial cairn on the Roots’ t-shirts serves as a form of both material and visual culture within popular culture. The cairn has been replicated and imprinted on the t-shirt using the same type and formatting that is found on the original copper monument. The t-shirt reinforces Tom Thomson’s heroic individualism and his iconic status within Canadian cultural consciousness. Cultural meaning and symbolic value is inscribed on the t-shirt, as it incorporates a commemorative device that furthers the collective mythology and the values that were associated with Tom Thomson following his death. Curator Virginia Eichhorn wanted the collection to act as a reminder of Tom Thomson’s legacy and the landscape that he was so closely associated with, in relation to Canadian identity. Relating back to the idea of banal nationalism, the t-shirt is generally viewed as a mundane form of material culture that is mass-produced, while the design or text imprinted on them are copies. They are objects that we barely take note of, but this t-shirt still expresses collective memory and acts as a commemorative device in an everyday setting.

The second t-shirt, like the “Memorial Cairn t-shirt”, was produced for both men and women, in a grey and white long and short- sleeve. On the t-shirt, the titles “GUIDE, ARTIST, CANOEIST, WOODSMAN, CANADIAN” are imprinted on the front of the t-shirt (fig. 5). All of these titles relate to the Canadian landscape in one way or another. There is no mention made of Tom Thomson, with the exception of the label found on the inside of the t-shirt. However, it does make a clear reference to titles that were given to Tom

¹³¹ Ibid, 13.

Thomson on the memorial cairn. The t-shirt ascribes and associates the titles of “guide, artist, canoeist, and woodsman” to the final title of “Canadian”, referencing Tom Thomson subtly, but ultimately connecting it to the present and to Canadian identity. An important feature of the collective mythology is the continuity and connection between the past, present and future. Tom Thomson’s relevance and the appropriation of the titles given to him nearly a hundred years ago are still relevant today, demonstrating his importance and the potency of landscape within our national rhetoric. Eichhorn mentioned in Roots’ bi-monthly online magazine *The Source* that throughout Canada there all throughout Canada there are young people in “plaid, shirts, jeans and woolen touques [sic]. It’s as if everyone is channeling the spirit of Tom.”¹³² The “Guide, Artist, Canoeist, Woodsman, Canadian t-shirt” accomplishes this in an overt fashion, and is in line with what Eichhorn describes.

The t-shirt not only references attributes and characteristics that are associated with Canadian identity, but it also assigns them to the t-shirt’s wearers. The titles imprinted on the t-shirts can be read as claims of personal identity by the wearer. However, just like the way that national identity is complex and constructed, identity claims on t-shirts are not as clear as they may appear. Although t-shirts oftentimes make obvious claims of identity or status, this cannot be taken at face value. Cullum-Swan and Manning argue that “t-shirts are disconnected from direct experience and no longer unambiguously communicate membership status”.¹³³ Within the current postmodern era, the status and function of a t-shirt allows anyone to wear it, it is manufactured almost anywhere, while

¹³² “The Source.”

¹³³ Blum, “Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgic, Identity and Material Culture,” 422.

featuring any sign or symbol on it. This garment and its signs “grasp at fragments of meaning and experience, pun on them, or signify what is not true for the wearer. It signals an image or tentative picture that may be validated by others, but the validation lacks intrinsic meaning”.¹³⁴ Regardless of the fact that t-shirts are an important form of visual representation in a culture of display, they can be misrepresentative of the reality. Cullum-Swan and Manning suggest that the t-shirt communicates “messages about one’s self, status, lifestyle, and attitude(s) to life, as well as what one wishes to be known as. They display what one is not, and may call out for validation of one’s absent desires”.¹³⁵ They have become “a cornerstone of modern capitalism and tourism, a means of publicly advertising one’s experience, or one’s (often imagined) affinities to the famous or the past or the far away”.¹³⁶ In many ways, this reflects not only upon the two t-shirts that were discussed, but also on the way that national identity and collective memory is understood. Canada’s settler past, its landscape, and Tom Thomson embody the Canadian experience, but this is arguably imagined and reproduced through the material culture and visual representations found in Roots’ Tom Thomson collection.

In dealing with nationalism and the Tom Thomson Collection, we also need to consider the larger gendered legacy. Roots’ Tom Thomson Collection was designed for both men and women. The t-shirts discussed in this essay represents a genderless garments, with uniform patterns, except for slight changes and differences in fit and size. At the same time, however, this collection is gendered in the rhetoric involved in the celebration of this “quintessential Canadian”, and more broadly, nationalism at large. The

¹³⁴ Ibid, 429.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 430.

¹³⁶ Glass, “Crests on Cotton: ‘Souvenir’ T-shirts and the Materiality of Remembrance Among the Kwakwaka’wakw of British Columbia,” 3.

Tom Thomson Collection speaks to an idealized figure who represented a form of Canadian hegemonic masculinity. Quickly immortalized as a Canadian hero following his death, Tom Thomson came to symbolize Canada's close association to its landscape, as well as a very specific type of masculinity, at a time when masculinity was evolving. To this day, the life that he has been celebrated for has been ritualized in Canadian nature excursions. Tom Thomson remains a prominent national icon, as the heroic rugged masculinity that he represented has continued to remain relevant and is still celebrated.

Regardless of the fact that the Tom Thomson Collection is created for both men and women, the products' underlying masculinist undertones reflect an argument that some sociologists and political scientists have made in the past. That is, that nationalism and nation-states are largely gendered projects and institutions. In "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations", Joane Nagel argues that the "making and unmaking of states" involves "scripts in which these roles [citizens, members of the nation, activists, leaders] are written primarily by men, for men, and about men".¹³⁷ That is not to say that women are not involved within the nation-building process; rather women have long been expected to play supporting, secondary, or symbolic roles as evidenced in the short list of women involved in the Canadian cultural pantheon. In fact, Nagel argues that women are generally "subordinated politically in nationalist movements and politics", as "they occupy an important symbolic place as the mothers of the nation" and within the "national hearth and home".¹³⁸ An interesting question to bear in mind is that, if the Great Outdoors is celebrated as one of Canada's

¹³⁷ Joanne Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21.2 (2010): 243.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 254, 256.

defining features, where are those who do not fit into this space politically, culturally and socially within the Canadian model? This issue extends beyond gender, as it includes sexuality, ethnicity and class.

Nostalgic and Heritage Branding

Roots and its branding exemplify a trend that Ian McKay discusses in *The Quest of the Folk*. In relation to postmodernity or late capitalism, there has been a “frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel- seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes)” which has resulted in a culture of simulacrum.¹³⁹ This is where the “use-value” of things are obsolete and all that is left is the image, or the simulacrum, the copy of an original. As a result of this, there has been a “cultural panic” and fears over whether or not authenticity exists “beyond a casual consumer encounter”.¹⁴⁰ Within this context, heritage branding and the implied authenticity have become appealing to certain consumers. Ian McKay argues that there is a growing demand for “rustic hideaways” and “rural authenticity”, a general upsurge in the simulacrum of heritage.¹⁴¹ This trend has become so popular that the “mass-production industry, from beer to automobiles, shamelessly markets its product by draping it in the images of craft legacies that mass production helped extinguish”.¹⁴² Even when consumers may attempt to move away from this culture of consumer capitalism, they may just fall into the trap of becoming “pioneers of Folk postmodernism”.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ McKay, *The Quest of the Folk*, 277.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 278.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid, 279.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 283.

K. Damon Aiken argues in “Manufactured Memories and Nostalgia Advertising” that we are currently undergoing a “nostalgia boom”.¹⁴⁴ Although the concept of nostalgia has already been discussed by Svetlana Boym as a sociological phenomenon, Kathy Hamilton and Beverly A. Wagner expand on the definition within a consumer capitalist context. They state that nostalgia has extended beyond its original definition, and now includes the “contemporary obsession with the simulacra of the past”.¹⁴⁵ The authors argue that the term nostalgia has now become the “catchword for looking back, an emotional state in which people yearn for the idealized past”, which includes “objects, places, people, experiences and ideas from the past”.¹⁴⁶ Nostalgia and authenticity has become commodified. Nostalgia and authenticity are important features of heritage, which can serve as significant markers of brand identity. Heritage implies longevity, stability, and quality, whether that is reflective of reality or not. In some cases, brands have a long history and heritage to refer back to, but “marketers [can also] embellish, augment, or create a fictitious heritage”.¹⁴⁷ This is accomplished through the association made between products and the brand to the past.¹⁴⁸

In line with the nostalgia boom and the demand for heritage, Steven Jackson, author of “Globalization, Corporate Nationalism and Masculinity in Canada”, argues that nationhood has been increasingly integrated in branding processes within the context of globalization. Nationalism and its symbolic value have been co-opted into the rhetoric

¹⁴⁴ Damon K Aiken, “Manufactured Memories and Nostalgia Advertising,” *American Marketing Association* 10 (1999): 44.

¹⁴⁵ Kathy Hamilton and Beverly A. Wagner, “Commercialised Nostalgia,” *European Journal of Marketing* 48.5/6 (2014): 815.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 815.

¹⁴⁷ Altaf Merchant and Gregory M. Rose, “Effects of Advertising- Evoked Vicarious Nostalgia on Brand Heritage,” *Journal of Business Research* 66 (2013): 2620.

¹⁴⁸ Aiken, “Manufactured Memories and Nostalgia Advertising”, 44.

surrounding brand identity as a way to align companies with national identity. This branding is accomplished through the use of “symbols, images, stereotypes, collective identities and memories”.¹⁴⁹ Jackson contends that citizens have been “conceptualized, appealed to and transformed into consumers”.¹⁵⁰ On top of playing a role in the production and consumption processes, the corporate use of nationalism has increasingly become a part of the ongoing nationalizing project. Over the last three years Roots has collaborated on projects with a number of companies and corporations such as Target, Travel Alberta, and the National Film Board, reiterating the theme of authenticity and its connection to Canadian heritage. They have arguably succeeded in creating a brand that represents this “authentic” and historical rural Canadian experience, whether it be through the icon of the beaver that has come to represent Roots, the merchandise, or through the store décor. Heritage and historicity is implied in both the collaborative projects and Roots’ general brand identity. In “Winter in Alberta”, the advertisement featured a couple in nature-vacationing the Rocky Mountains, chopping wood, taking photographs with their vintage camera, and snowshoeing with wooden snowshoes, all the while wearing the 2013 Roots Holiday Collection. The Target and Roots partnership was in line with the 2013 Canadian launch of Target stores, as well as the 40-year anniversary of Roots. The line was inspired by “national imagery and symbols synonymous with the brand, including the beaver, [and] the Maple Leaf”.¹⁵¹ Roots Design Director Diane Bald also stated that Algonquin Park and Tom Thomson served as sources of inspiration for

¹⁴⁹ Steven Jackson, “Globalization, Corporate Nationalism and Masculinity in Canada: Sport, Molson Beer Advertising and Consumer Citizenship,” *Sport in Society* 17.7 (2014): 901.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Lauren La Rose, “Target in Canada: Roots to Create Limited- Edition Line for Stores,” *Huffington Post*, accessed January 24, 2013, <http://bitly.com>.

the clothing and the home furnishings released by Target. For the second Roots-Target collaborative collection, the 1982 Roots' Beaver Canoe brand was revived, which was primarily inspired by the legendary Canadian outdoorsman Omer Stringer".¹⁵² These ideas of genuine and authentic products have once again been reiterated in the year of 2014, with the "We are Makers" campaign that illustrates how Roots' leather goods "[pass] through the hands of no less than 40 artisans" in their local Toronto factory, before they come into your possession (Fig. 6).¹⁵³ This campaign features five of their "artisans" and "craftsmen", who discuss the lack of automation involved in the production process, the focus on the "finer details" of their product, and the years of experience that they have as artisans.¹⁵⁴ The photographs used for the campaign showcases the local artisans in leather Roots aprons, sitting in a portraiture pose with what appears to be the use of an instagram filter. Quality, authenticity and heritage is implied through this campaign and reflects an attempt to make a nod to the past, a time before mass production, referencing the ideas of longevity, quality and stability. At the same time, the vast majority of the clothing that Roots sells is produced offshore, rather than locally.

As discussed, an important marker of a national mythology is the continuity between the past, the present and the future. Roots has used Canadian heritage and iconography in its branding and exemplifies the use of nostalgic and heritage branding. Altaf Merchant and Gregory M. Rose describe it as the use of collective nostalgia as a way to get consumers to "emotionally [connect] to and [fantasize] about experiences and

¹⁵² "Beaver Canoe – The Story of the Beaver Canoe," Roots, accessed May 24, 2014, <http://bitly.com>.

¹⁵³ "We Are Makers," Roots Canada Ltd., accessed February 27, 2015. <http://bitly.com>.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

associations from past eras”.¹⁵⁵ Roots’ brand identity is centered around the idea of the Canadian landscape and its history. Bradford T. Hudson and John M.T. Balmer categorize the different types of heritage brands in “Corporate Heritage Brands: Mead’s theory of the past”. The authors classify brand heritage into four categories, beginning with *structural heritage*, *implied heritage*, *reconstructed heritage*, and *mythical heritage*. Roots fits into the category of mythical heritage. Two important features and elements that are involved in mythical heritage brands, are the references made to a partially or wholly constructed past, alongside, an association made with the brand and its products, to escape and adventure.¹⁵⁶ Mythical heritage are also available for consumers to “project their own historical associations” onto.¹⁵⁷ Associated with the integration of mythical heritage is “both idealized or romanticized versions of history”.¹⁵⁸ Balmer and Hudson also point out that with mythical heritage, involves “a viewpoint or action sequence from present to past”, whereby nostalgia is used to allow consumers to imagine reaching into the past through the products or the associations made with lifestyle brands.¹⁵⁹

The use of geography in Roots’ branding is not an uncommon theme either. Depending on the company, geography may be emphasized or ignored. However, it can largely affect the way that consumers respond and relate to the brands. Author Andy Pike discusses brand geography in *Brands and Branding Geographies*“, observing that “over time branded objects and branding processes accumulate histories that are social and

¹⁵⁵ Altaf Merchant and Gregory M. Rose, “Effects of Advertising – Evoked Vicarious Nostalgia on Brand Heritage,” *Journal of Business Research* 66 (2013): 2620.

¹⁵⁶ John M.T. Balmer and Bradford T. Hudson, “Corporate Heritage Brands: Mead’s Theory of the Past,” *Corporate Communications* 18.3 (2013): 351.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 352.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 353.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

spatial and matter to their evolution”.¹⁶⁰ Brand geography may emphasize space in order to imply an association with heritage and quality, and in Roots’ case, heritage and the Canadian wilderness is emphasized in its branding. The use of geography in branding can vary in its purpose, as it can materialize in a number of different fashions, whether it be “[materially], [symbolically], [discursively], [visually], [or] [aurally]”.¹⁶¹ Brand geography does not relate solely to economics, but is also associated with social, cultural and political ideas. Pike notes that these kinds of geographical associations can be completely imagined and aspirational. Balmer and Hudson acknowledge that the reason why consumers may still be attracted to this historical pastiche is because it can be done “in the spirit of an homage”.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Andy Pike, ed., *Brands and Branding Geographies* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 8.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁶² Balmer and Hudson, “Corporate Heritage Brands: Mead’s Theory of the Past”, 355.

CONCLUSION

One might ask whether there is anything inherently wrong with looking at the Canadian past through nostalgic lenses. The short answer to that question is no, but this approach ignores what may be “wrong about the structure of power”.¹⁶³ McKay argues that if we are committed to a “society of equals”, then we must be able to problematize the “commandeering of history and identity, which excludes at the outset a critical dialogue with the past and a realistic grasp of the present”.¹⁶⁴ According to the 2011 Canadian census, 23.1 million Canadians were living in one of Canada’s census metropolitan areas (CMAs).¹⁶⁵ That means that 7 out of 10 Canadians were living a metropolitan area with a population of at least a 100,000.¹⁶⁶ 35% of Canadians were living in Canada’s largest CMAs- Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver.¹⁶⁷ Regardless of these statistics, the Canadian wilderness still plays an integral role in national cultural consciousness: it is intricately connected to the way that Canadians see themselves.

In addition to this, the Canadian North is largely presented as an uninhabited space in which white hetero-normative masculinity is reaffirmed and proven. Whether interpolated during the seventeenth century, the first half of the twentieth century, or in the present day, the Canadian landscape continues to be understood as a masculine space. Tom Thomson’s mythology proves this point through his legacy as the heroic rugged

¹⁶³ McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, 295.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ “The Canadian Population in 2011: Population Counts and Growth,” Statistics Canada, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://bitly.com>.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

individualist at a time when urban growth and the rise of corporate bureaucratic culture were seen as threats to masculine identity. Although the Tom Thomson collection has been produced for both men and women, it celebrates the life of the Canadian artist who signified an idealized masculine identity and has continued to do so. One might ask, where do women fit into this narrative of the Canadian landscape? Lawrence D. Berg and Matthew G. Henry reiterate this point in “Geographers Performing Nationalism and Hetero-masculinity”, as they argue that narratives surrounding nations are largely hetero-masculine. Nationalism emerged at a time when “manliness ‘was treated as the essence of civic virtue and the root of heroic achievement’”.¹⁶⁸ This was the case in Victorian Britain and throughout its colonies. Hetero-masculinity is built into national myths and narratives as they have been repeated, naturalized, and are made normative over time. Although the “nation” was meant to be inclusive and universal, Henry and Berg contend that it was in fact “highly specific to members of hegemonic classes [...] White, European, bourgeois, masculine, heterosexual and able-bodied”.¹⁶⁹ The national myth is repeated and established through “markers of nationhood- a flag, stamps and banknotes”, and arguably clothing as well, as they reflect the hegemonic iconography.¹⁷⁰ Another important issue to raise is the notion of the North as an “uninhabited space” free for the taking. In 1871, estimates were made over the size of the Aboriginal population in Canada. The estimations claimed that there were around 102,358 Aboriginals living in Canada at the time.¹⁷¹ More recently, in the 2006 census, “a total of 1,172,790 people

¹⁶⁸ Lawrence D. Berg and Matthew G. Henry, “Geographers Performing Nationalism and Hetero-masculinity,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 13.6 (2006): 631.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 634.

¹⁷¹ “Aboriginal Peoples,” Statistics Canada, accessed March 10, 2015,

identified themselves as Aboriginal persons, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit”.¹⁷² Canadian mythology has largely written out Aboriginals and their history from its narrative, ignoring the colonial encounters that were directly linked to the present state of the country and its ideas of the North.

The collective memory that informs national mythology and identity can be flawed and incomplete. Tom Thomson’s life demonstrates the way that individuals, events and landscapes can be mythologized in order to fit into larger narratives of national identity. An important feature of looking at the past that Halbwachs brings to attention is the fact that nostalgic memories are seen through a retrospective mirage, “most painful aspects of yesterday’s society are forgotten because constraints are felt only so long as they operate”.¹⁷³ The nostalgia that informs this particular sense of Canadian identity takes shape through the cultural lens that we see our landscape through, which may in fact, just reflect a “romance with our own fantasy”.¹⁷⁴

The Tom Thomson Collection pays homage to the Canadian landscape, through the celebration of a national icon that has come to be inseparable from this space. This form of banal commemoration has been accomplished through a form of material culture and visual representation, which reinforces the link between the wilderness, Canadian identity and a rugged masculinity. Upon first glance, the collection’s two t-shirts communicate identity claims, yet, they are actually more reflective of modern capitalism and the simulacrum of heritage. Roots has succeeded at presenting itself as an authentic

<http://bitly.com>.

¹⁷² “Population Counts,” Statistics Canada, accessed March 10, 2015,

<http://bitly.com>.

¹⁷³ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 51.

¹⁷⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 14.

source of Canadian heritage, as their brand pays homage to the likes of early settlers, the coureurs du bois and Tom Thomson. The brand has drawn links between the Canadian past, the present and the future, but unlike the Tom Thomson memorial cairn, time does not stand still and lives of Canadians do not remain unchanged.

IMAGES

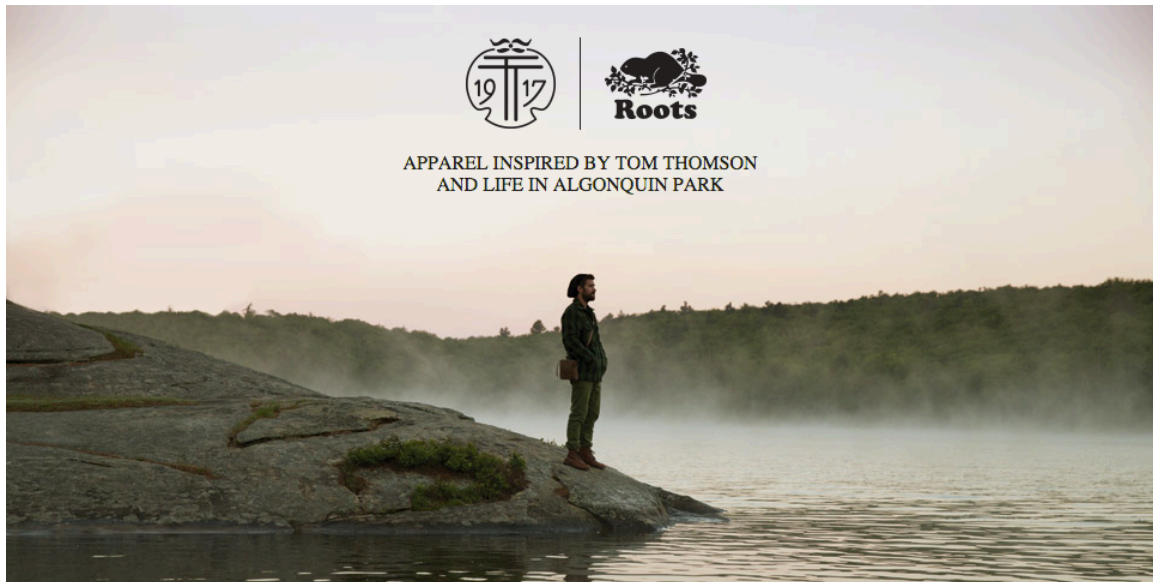


Fig.1. *Roots Tom Thomson Collection Lookbook Cover Image*. July 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image. Available from: <http://bitly.com> (accessed September 22, 2014).

TOM THOMSON

THE ORIGINAL ROOTS MAN

One of Canada's most influential painters and the driving force behind the Group of Seven, Tom Thomson is a true Canadian Icon.



In partnership with the Tom Thomson Art Gallery of Owen Sound, Ontario, this collection honours both his art and his life; living off the land and capturing its beauty.

Fig. 2. *Tom Thomson Roots Collection Introductory Paragraph*. July 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image: Available from: <http://bitly.com> (accessed September 22, 2014).



Fig 3. *Roots Women's Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn Short Sleeve T-Shirt*. July 2014.
Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image. Available from: <http://bitly.com> (accessed September 22, 2014).



Fig.4 Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn. July 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd, Algonquin Park, Ontario, Digital Image. Available from: <http://bitly.com> (accessed September 22, 2014).



Fig.5. Roots Men's Tom Thomson Collection "Guide, Artist, Canoeist, Woodsman, Canadian" Long Sleeve Grey T-Shirt. July 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image. Available from: bitly.com (accessed September 22, 2014).



Fig.6. *Roots We Are Makers Campaign Photograph*. November 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image. Available From: <http://bitly.com> (accessed March 14, 2015).



Fig. 7. *Roots Tom Thomson Lookbook Photographs*. July 2014. Source: Roots Canada Ltd. Digital Image. Available from: <http://bitly.com> (accessed September 22, 2014).

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