Martha Ostenso, Periodical Culture, and the Middlebrow

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Abstract

Between 1938 and 1942, border-crossing Norwegian-Canadian author Martha Ostenso published three short stories in Chatelaine *magazine, stories that engage in complex ways with themes of femininity, nationalism, and consumerism. In this article, we consider how the context of* Chatelaine *shapes and complicates readings of these stories by placing the stories in conversation with surrounding material, including advertisements and editorial content. The fiction, we argue, unsettles romantic tropes and nationalist rhetoric, and contests the correlation between the attainment of happiness and the acceptance of class and gender norms. In examining authorial identity, textual complexity, and print cultural contexts, we show how middlebrow magazines are a vibrant means of understanding middle-class culture's anxieties and aspirations.*

Résumé

Entre 1938 et 1942, l'auteure canadienne-norvégienne outre-frontière Martha Ostenso a publié trois courtes nouvelles dans la revue Chatelaine*, des nouvelles complexes qui portent sur des thèmes comme la féminité, le nationalisme et le consumérisme. Dans le présent article, nous évaluons la façon dont* Chatelaine *modèle et complique la lecture de ces nouvelles, ces dernières étant entourées de publicités et de contenu éditorial. Nous faisons valoir que la fiction déstabilise les demi-séries romantiques et la rhétorique nationaliste, et conteste la corrélation entre l'atteinte du bonheur et l'acceptation des normes de classe et de genre. À l'examen de l'identité de l'auteur, de la complexité textuelle, et des contextes culturels de l'imprimé, nous démontrons comment les revues grand public sont un moyen vibrant qui permet de comprendre les anxiétés et les aspirations de la culture de la classe moyenne.*

> "I came here because I had to make up my mind where I belonged in this cockeyed world. I didn't want to stay here on the farm—now I don't know."
>
> —"The Stars Over Home," *Chatelaine* 1942

Text and Context: Martha Ostenso in *Chatelaine*

These are the words of Lige Bascombe, the main character of Martha Ostenso's short story "The Stars Over Home," published in 1942 in the mainstream Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine*. Having returned home a hero after serving Canada in the Second World War, Lige has reached a defining moment: does he return to the family farm, and by extension, to tradition, and the physical

labour of a life on the land? Or does he accept a managerial post in an office in the city, and thus embrace the possibilities of a modern, urban lifestyle and professionalised, intellectual labour? The question exposes the tensions between urban and rural ways of life, between modernity and tradition, between masculine mobility and feminine stasis that Canadians were negotiating at midcentury. *Chatelaine*, aiming to be attuned to the interests of Canadian women, published fiction that imagined these tensions. The fiction, in this instance, was written by an author who could be framed by the magazine's editor as both a fellow Canadian woman and a celebrity "known around the world for her fiction" (Sanders, editorial 1938, 2). In addition to "The Stars Over Home," Ostenso also published "The Years Are Shadows" (May 1938) and "No Time for Sentiment" (July 1941) in *Chatelaine*. All three stories possess a potency derived from their grounding in the contemporary problems outlined earlier, yet none of them have received any critical attention. There is only a relatively small body of work on Canadian periodical literature in general, and magazines and authors that may be construed as middlebrow, in terms of both target audience and aesthetics, have been particularly neglected. The three Ostenso stories were recently unearthed as part of Michelle Smith's doctoral project on *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Home Journal*, and have since become the inspiration for her present research on aspiration, middlebrow literature, and periodicals.[1]

Ostenso's relationship to periodical culture is vital to a renewed understanding of her place in literary history. Hannah McGregor's research with Editing Modernism in Canada at the University of Alberta (EMiC UA) on the magazine serialization of Ostenso's first novel *Wild Geese* (1925), through which Ostenso earned her initial fame and for which she is still best known, reveals that the novel was serialized simultaneously in two middlebrow magazines: *Pictorial Review*, published out of New York, and *Western Home Monthly*, published out of Winnipeg. Examining Ostenso's relation to middlebrow periodical culture thus affords an opportunity to move beyond the familiar narratives of nationality or canonicity that have shaped scholarship on her. Her periodical publications reveal the remarkable flexibility of this diasporic Canadian-American-Norwegian figure, as she adapts her fiction to different print contexts. Our aim, in this article, is to advance scholarship on both Ostenso and *Chatelaine* by elucidating the complex relation between authorial identity, literary content, and print context.

Launched in March 1928 by the Maclean Publishing Company, *Chatelaine* built on the success that the company's founder, John Bayne Maclean, had achieved first in publishing trade journals, such as *Canadian Grocer* (1887), *Financial Post* (1907), and *Farmer's Magazine* (1910), and later in publishing consumer magazines directed at a broad and increasingly urban audience, such as the general-interest magazine *Maclean's* (1911), the

home decor magazine *Canadian Homes and Gardens* (1924), and the high-society magazine *Mayfair* (1927). The appearance of *Chatelaine* in 1928 was an unabashed attempt to tap into the expanding market of female readers who belonged to Canada's emerging urban middle class—or who aspired to be a part of it. As such, *Chatelaine*'s readers were constructed as consumers while Canada's society made a transition from a predominantly rural, agrarian culture to an urban, industrial one during the interwar period. To address Canadian women in this manner positioned them as part of Canada's first "professional managerial class," to use Richard Ohmann's phrase (118). This class, Ohmann argues in his work on American mass-market periodicals, possessed disposable income and a desire for consumer goods as well as tasteful entertainment and types of knowledge that would advance their economic and social standing. Magazines became intermediaries between advertisers and readers, juxtaposing advice to readers with the promotion of goods. In the May 1938 issue, for example, fashion writer Carolyn Damon's piece promised women "a wealth of ideas for achieving summer smartness with two dresses and a little sound home planning" (19). Sketches of slender women either dressed for an evening out or poised with a bag over one arm as if ready for a day of shopping framed the article, which was embedded in advertisements for soup and household cleanser that instructed women on being better mothers through the use of certain goods, and advertisements for bread and face cream that pressured women to maintain slender figures and flawless complexions. Read together, the article and advertisements sketched out the parameters of the feminine ideal imagined by *Chatelaine*: the expert homemaker and the fashionable consumer. Both roles required continuous self-education, and the magazine positioned itself as a source of advice across the whole spectrum of feminine activities.

In this sense, Canadian and American periodicals had much in common. In order to distinguish themselves from their American competitors in the magazine marketplace, publications like *Chatelaine* (as well as *Maclean's* and other mainstream periodicals like *National Home Monthly*) yoked their identity to nationhood. Whether it took the form of presenting Canadian authorship, exploring Canadian politics, or surveying Canadian regional distinctions, the discourse of Canadian identity was always prominent in the magazines. While it is important to keep in mind that Canada's literary landscape and publishing industry were markedly different from those of the US, the nature of the mainstream magazine during this period, with its mixture of advertisements and cultural content, transcends national borders.

Periodicals such as *Chatelaine* were thus uniquely positioned to cater to Canada's emerging middle class, and they contributed significantly to the construction of that class's identity—an identity that was inherently tied to the question of upward mobility. A reading of the advertisements published in the same issues as Ostenso's stories illuminates the production of this identity.

A Canadian Pacific advertisement that accompanied "The Years Are Shadows," for instance, encouraged readers to set "Sail on a Stately Duchess" (52). Complete with private baths, sport decks, glass-enclosed observation rooms, lounges, and delicious meals, the names of the cruise ships—Duchess of Atholl, Duchess of Bedford, Duchess of Richmond, Duchess of York—spoke to that most defined of class boundaries, the English aristocratic ranks, and suggested that readers could cross over into this otherwise exclusive world by purchasing passage on one of their ships. Periodical culture, especially that constituted by mainstream magazines and the fiction they circulated, is central to understanding this aspirant middle class as it came to stand in as a normative Canadian identity.

By 1938, the year in which the first of the three Ostenso stories appears, *Chatelaine* was celebrating its first 10 years in print. While it had undergone a change in editorship in 1930, as Anne Elizabeth Wilson left and Byrne Hope Sanders began her 23-year tenure, the editorial attitude toward fiction was consistently defined by a twin attention to publishing Canadian authors and ensuring their fiction adhered to the conventions of the romance genre. This adherence by no means resulted in simplistic fiction. The May 1938 issue provides a microcosm of the range and scope of *Chatelaine*'s fiction. In this issue, London (Ontario) author Amy Campbell Thorburn published her first short story in a Canadian periodical. "Relations and That . . . " shifts from a young boy's precociously observant school composition on his family to a young man's decision to pursue a poetess instead of a debutante, balancing a portrait of middle-class domestic sociability with a romanticization of writing itself as an antidote to the superficiality of modern life in a way that both endorses and transcends the normative middle-class values advertised on surrounding pages. The domestic theme is carried through in Darragh Aldrich's "Parents Should Take Interest," about a wealthy but emotionally distant single father struggling to care for his young daughter. Minnesota-based Aldrich, like many authors of the day, published novels as well as magazine short stories and had links to the film industry. The Montreal setting of the story suggests the border-crossing nature of the middlebrow publishing scene as well as *Chatelaine*'s dedication to Canadian content, while the story's movement from domestic instability back toward the balance of the family unit implies both the challenges to domesticity posed by modernity and the possibility of overcoming those challenges.

The issue also features an instalment in the serialization of Reita Lambert's "Make-Believe Gypsy," a novel less overtly domestic in nature but still explicitly concerned with problems of shifting contemporary gender roles. It is the story of preacher's daughter Marta, a young woman whose success as a fortune teller at a New York City night club leads to challenges, including her immersion in city life and her capacity to out-earn her romantic interests.

Lambert, like Aldrich and Ostenso, would likely have been a familiar name to regular magazine readers; an October 1938 article on her visit to St. Petersburg, Florida, in *The Evening Independent* describes her as the "famed light fiction author" of "five popular novels and more than 200 stories" (Reese 9). Taken together, this mix of fiction demonstrates an interplay between generic adherence and social commentary, new and established authors, and Canadian and international settings. While it is true that the stories concentrated on romantic love and pursued plots that resolved happily, the plots themselves were defined by tensions in contemporary society, populated by characters who, like Lige Bascombe, faced difficult choices, and set against backdrops that range from Maritime fishing villages to urban centres to prairie farmsteads. Through the inclusion of a variety of regional settings, as well as a frequent focus on contemporary issues, *Chatelaine* hailed a disparate readership as a community of modern Canadians—a strategy that, as the sustained popularity of the periodical suggests, was successful.

Ostenso is a particularly intriguing author to study within this context. Her novel *Wild Geese* has established her as a key figure in the Canadian canon, yet her position is a complicated one. While *Wild Geese* continues to be viewed as an exemplar of realism and the psychological novel, Ostenso's status as a writer has been questioned for nearly as long as she has possessed it. Ostenso's placement in the Canadian canon resides largely in the success and popularity of *Wild Geese*; critical emphasis on this novel has resulted in ongoing debates about whether she counts as a Canadian author, a debate that may, as Faye Hammill points out, be less important than an acknowledgment of Ostenso as a paradigmatically border-crossing figure ("Martha Ostenso" 18). An analysis of Ostenso's magazine publications demonstrates the ways in which she shaped her fiction to her audience in terms of setting, content, and style. Stories published in the American agricultural magazine *Country Gentleman*, such as "The Autumn Vineyard" (September 1934) and "Olaf—Called Ole" (February 1940), focus on rural settings and the social values of prairie farmers, while "The Calendar" (April 1945), published in *Canadian Home Journal*, foregrounds explicitly Canadian content like the fur trade and the city of Winnipeg. "Good Morning, Son" (September 1938) broaches unusually taboo subjects such as female sexuality and divorce, appropriate to its publication in *McCall's Magazine* at a time when editor Otis Wiese was trying to shape the magazine into a venue for serious realist fiction for women. At the same time, as a comparison of the double serialization of *Wild Geese* demonstrates, textual meaning is significantly impacted by print context. Thus even as Ostenso arguably shaped her work to the well-established conventions of *Chatelaine*, the context of the magazine itself shapes how these stories signify.

Ostenso's *Chatelaine* publications exemplify concerns about middle-class mobility, the tension between rural domesticity and urbanization, and the

shifting gender roles associated with the Second World War. More specifically, each of the stories features one or more female figures strongly associated with domesticity and stasis who become loci for the male characters figured in terms of mobility and modernity. Such representations of women have received much attention from feminist scholars, who have illuminated the ways in which the magazine espoused repressive societal norms for women.[2] Our awareness of these conservative gender roles is heightened by the fact that the stories are framed by advertisements for domestic products intended to align women's identities with the ideal of the well-run domestic sphere. At the same time, however, each of Ostenso's stories complicates gender roles in different ways, reflecting the various cultural forces, including the Second World War, that influenced women's freedoms and opportunities in the 1930s and 1940s. The construction of femininity in Ostenso's stories for *Chatelaine* can thus be read productively as an alignment of constrained gender roles with nationalism, one that performs while subverting the links between femininity, domestic interiority, and the nation.

"The Years Are Shadows"

The story that most overtly critiques women's association with domestic space, "The Years Are Shadows" (May 1938), does so through an ironic rendition of a familiar romance plot, in which an unlikely couple—the pretty rich girl and the rebellious poor boy—come together despite the forces of small-town prejudices and unaccepting parents. The opening illustration depicts an embrace between the protagonist-couple, Norma Castleton and John "Spot" Galway, the cinematic tableau preparing readers for the inevitable romantic storyline. Ostenso plays with these generic conventions by sketching in a generically predictable romance: Norma and Spot share one passionate night before Spot is torn away by the war; years later he returns home, where Norma has remained faithful and beautiful, qualities that prove redemptive to the scarred hero. These familiar elements are, however, subtly subverted in ways that challenge the genre's restrictive association of women with stasis and domesticity.

In the conservative town of Redmond in which the story unfolds, social position is clearly associated with the domestic sphere, with the size and nature of the home, and the ways in which differently gendered subjects inhabit it, defining that position. Within this highly structured social space, the Castletons occupy a "mansion," the Galways a "farm" (both words appear within quotation marks in the story). The respectability of farming is refuted through the description of the Galways: the father is a failed farmer marked by indolence and a penchant for disrupting the established order of things ("he experimented fantastically and unsuccessfully in the crossing of vegetables which would have been better left as they were" [5]), while the mother is forced to "[take] in washing to support the family" (5). Where the Galways suggest a disruption of domestic stability and gendered behaviours, the Castletons embody an almost

parodic excess of domesticity. Norma is effectively trapped by a mother fanatically obsessed with their family's superiority to the rest of the town, with only hand-picked friends allowed "into the rear garden for lemonade and cucumber sandwiches," and none of them into the interior of the house, "the blinds of which . . . were always drawn almost to the sills" (6). A figure of pathetic stability, Norma is "stiffly alone" and "joyless" (6), while Spot is characterized by his aspirations; the school principal "was often heard to say that if he had the money he would send the Galway boy to college, because he was eating his heart out to go and had not the means" (7), but "the smug town" of Redmond (37) derides such longings.

The story, once Spot and Norma's unsuitability has been established, proceeds as expected, yet the narrative tone constantly problematizes its generic tropes. While Spot—now known as John—makes his fortune in Montreal, Norma stays at home, imprisoned by "her mother's vague and tyrannical invalidism" (75); the two are not reunited for 20 years. Before this reunion can take place, however, two things must first occur: Spot's fantasies of aspiration are destroyed, and Norma is finally freed from her domestic prison by the death of her mother. Both take place in rapid succession. In the same sentence readers learn of John's financial ruin and his parents' death in the automobile that he gifted them, the "resplendent plum-colored car" that had signified the Galways' upward mobility and disrupted the status quo of Redmond (75). If John's financial ruin and return home suggest the triumph of Redmond's status quo, Norma's decision "to turn the Castleton estate into a tourist camp and the 'mansion' into a boardinghouse" (76) offers the possibility of change through her escape from multiple prisons: her social position, the house itself, and of course two decades of waiting. In the story's final scenes, however, it is not Norma's freedom that is emphasized but her beauty, unchangeability, and passivity. The narrator observes "that the twenty years had never touched her, that she had been living all the time back there in a moonlit charivari night when she was seventeen," and the extent of her agency lies in her capacity to stop John's desperation-driven suicide with her face: "she leaned toward him, her hands on his arms, her exquisite head tilted slightly backward, and the rosy last dusk made an ineffable beauty of her eyes, her mouth," in response to which John's "self-destruction . . . seemed to lift from him like a tangible pall" (76). Norma thus resembles what Maureen Honey, in her study of feminist periodical fiction of the 1920s, calls the "sentimental heroine," characterized by delicacy and domesticity.

Honey opposes the sentimental heroine to the New Woman, who is associated with "the nondomestic world" and with the qualities of physical health and activity (91). This more useful and productive model of womanhood is suggested through the figure of Bessie Westhope, the narrator who observes and comments on the action of the story, and with whom the readers of

Chatelaine are invited to identify. Bessie controls the often-ironic narrative, pursues a career in nursing, and leaves Redmond. It is Bessie to whom Norma spins her "legend . . . about herself and Spot Galway" in which they are secretly engaged (75), and it is Bessie who is witness to the couple's reunion, during which John initially fails to recognize Norma at all (76). Through Bessie's perspective, readers are invited to feel pity rather than admiration for Norma's patient waiting, and relief when that pathos can be transformed into the celebration of the final wedding scene. If Bessie's narrative voice, full of dramatic irony and fascinated voyeurism, encourages readerly identification with the active female force, one that leaves behind the domestic sphere in favour of career-based agency, that association is further complicated by the advertisements that accompany the story. These advertisements by turns endorse a Norma-like image of femininity as aesthetic stasis and a Bessie-like valuation of energetic usefulness, though generally still in the space of the home. An ad for Ipana toothpaste, for example, draws on the sentimental language of feminine beauty: "Like a song in your heart, her loveliness warms you, holds you enthralled. 'Such fresh, young charm!' you say, 'this is the beauty of youth and the Springtime!' But when she smiles, that devastating, dismal, shocking smile, how quickly the illusion fades! How swiftly you and the world turn away!" (1). The ideal of femininity as aesthetically pure, locked in an eternal springtime, contrasts with an equal emphasis on domestic management: Fels-Naptha Soap admonishes new brides to get their whites whiter (27) while the detailed chart of the "Meals of the Month" feature structures the reader's time in terms of her responsibility to provide three square meals a day with minimal repetition (Hucks 64). Even the mobile college girl that Bessie is depicted to be appears in advertisements as the "enlightened" woman "Lead[ing] the Way in discovering TAMPAX" (53). The ambivalence of gender roles within the pages of this story speaks more broadly to the context of *Chatelaine* in the 1930s and 1940s as a discursive space in which the complexity of women's roles in a changing society was being actively worked out.

"No Time for Sentiment"

"No Time for Sentiment," published in July 1941, picks up on the role of women as the Second World War breaks out, situating the wartime demands placed on women in terms of a gap between traditional expectations and modern possibilities. To illustrate this, Ostenso structures the central conflict as one that occurs between two generations. The older generation, represented by Matt and Sadie Hubbell, took part in the First World War; now, the time has come for the younger generation, represented by their son, Ted, and his girlfriend, Lucy Evans, to defend Canada again. Matt Hubbell, however, does not think much of the younger generation, and has been hurt by his son's failure to realize, or even pursue, Matt's aspirations for him. All of this is related by Sadie Hubbell. From

Sadie's perspective, Ostenso delineates the conflict between tradition and modernity, with aspiration underwriting this conflict. Ostenso also shows, through the figure of Sadie, that women possess the power to articulate social problems, though they themselves can do little to resolve them. From the editorial's gloss of this story as "worth reading for the added understanding it may bring on the young people you see about you" (Sanders, editorial 1941, 1), it is clearly Sadie's perspective with which readers are encouraged to identify.

The story begins with Sadie listening for the sound of Ted's car horn as he arrives at his parents' farmhouse with his friends from the city. Ted works as a "soda jerk," a job that is a point of contention between him and his father:

> Sadie wondered if Ted had ever glimpsed what a blow it had been to Matt when he took such a job after graduating from high school. Matt—who had expected his only son to strive for something higher than he himself had ever hoped to reach. Matt—who had slaved and sacrificed here on the farm so that Ted might get through his high school and go on to college to become a doctor or a lawyer or something important! But did Ted want to go on to college? No. He had managed to get through high school by the skin of his teeth, and he was through with books. (10–11)

Ted's choices are a disappointment to his parents, who wish for him to pursue professions that are the domain of successful white, middle-class men. The fact that they are not particular about whether he becomes a doctor or lawyer throws into relief the underlying desire of such aspirations, suggesting that the work that one does is less significant than the position it grants one on the social scale. The surrounding articles and stories play on these aspirations. "Don't Be a Dub!" exclaims the article appearing before "No Time for Sentiment," as it exhorts young people to learn the profoundly middle-class sports of tennis and golf (Young 8–9). The short story that follows, "Fathers Are Born," features a full-page illustration of a man dressed in the professional garb of suit and tie helping his children into what appears to be a Studebaker—an accoutrement that contrasts with Ted's battered car—for a Saturday excursion (Scott 15). Perhaps the poem "Beacon," embedded in the text of a third story from the July 1941 issue, summarizes the demands of aspiration most clearly. The poem describes a woman in a comfortable house knitting garments for charity, and concludes, "Pity speeds her fingers, and peace has found/Its own small echo in the soothing sound/Of clicking needles; while this room of light/ has fed the torch of courage for many a death-dark night!" (Havard 19). It is key that the men and women figured in *Chatelaine* are never those in need; rather, they are always the ones able to help through their own secure socio-economic position and their impulses toward self-improvement, including charitable acts. Within this context, the demands on Ted and his girlfriend, Lucy, are legible:

they are meant to move up the social scale, and help others upon achieving a greater degree of affluence.

Ted's lifestyle is characterized as frivolous, consisting of dance crazes and "running around in that loose-jointed contraption he called a jalopy, with Lucy Evans always beside him in the front seat" (11). Sadie describes Lucy as "no worse than other girls you met every day in town. Or on the neighbouring farms, for that matter. Permanents, lipstick, nail polish, and pert little ways, heads cocked for dance music" (11). Intriguingly, this version of Lucy is consistent with the model of femininity promoted in *Chatelaine*'s fashion features and advertisements for beauty products. An advertisement for "Your Own 'Personalized' Beauty Scrapbook" meant to "accompany *Chatelaine*'s series of beauty lessons" (*Chatelaine* Beauty Scrapbook) appeared beneath the concluding paragraphs of the story, and nearby pages promote beauty products such as Woodbury face cream, which promised buyers "peach-bloom freshness" (18). The previous issue of *Chatelaine* (June 1941) made this link between youthful feminine beauty and the latest products even more explicit, devoting its beauty pages to "Your Manicure and Pedicure" (26–27) and including a full-page colour advertisement for "lollipop and butterscotch," two new shades of nail polish manufactured by Cutex (4). The other advertisements that frame the story, however, are less glamorous, and include ads for laundry detergent, toasters, and toilet bowl cleaners. All of these were geared toward women in Sadie's role as domestic managers, the role that Lucy Evans is prepared to adopt as the story closes. The early 1940s saw a transition in what *Chatelaine* asked of women, as the magazine began calling for austerity in the form of rationing. While it did not surrender its emphasis on consumerism in general, or on beauty and fashion in particular, it did exhort young women to contribute to the war effort by joining the Canadian Women's Army Corps, knitting clothes for soldiers, or working in war-related industries.

Lucy and Ted eventually do fall in line with the demands of the Second World War. The story ends with Ted's departure for military training, but not before he proves his worth to his father. A log falls on Matt while he is working to prepare the farm for winter, pinning him so that he cannot move. Ted rescues his wounded father by shifting the heavy log and then carrying him the long distance to his "jalopy" and rushing him to the doctor in town. The doctor assures Ted and Sadie, after many tests, that Matt will make a full recovery, thanks to his son. Matt subsequently takes his son aside and says only, "I guess you'll do, Ted. You'll be able to tote your load" (46). Through this stereotypically terse masculine response, Ted and Matt achieve the understanding for which Sadie has been wishing.

Lucy, too, shows her worth. Just before the accident, Lucy tells Sadie that she and Ted are engaged, but aren't going to get married right away because

"'we'd be sure to have a baby first thing, and what on earth would we do with it? I have to keep on working at the office, and save every cent for furniture and stuff!' Sadie wasn't sure she had heard right. Could this be the frivolous little Lucy who never thought of anything but the newest dance step, the newest shade of lipstick?" (46). Lucy also copes with Matt's accident, staying "pale but controlled," and, afterwards, Ted tells Sadie that Lucy wants to live "on a farm after we're married. Can you beat that? Thinks it's the only place to bring up kids" (46). Ted and Lucy accept the respective gender roles of soldier and woman-who-waits, ensuring continuity between their parents' generation and theirs. Nonetheless, there is something alarming, rather than reassuring, in the achievement of this continuity. Sadie refuses to engage with the fact that her only son is about to join the front lines of a war, thinking to herself only that "in another five days their big son would be on his way to the training camp. They would see very little of him now for the next few months. After that—well, who could tell anything about that?" (10). Sadie is the narrator of the story because she is the one aware of how everyone feels, yet her own anxieties go unexpressed and remain unacknowledged by others. The traditional role of women, then, is not only to wait at home and maintain the domestic sphere, but also to wait silently while one's only child risks death in order to sustain the society under attack.

"The Stars Over Home"

"The Stars Over Home" expands on the tension between the urban and the rural that is part of the backdrop for both "The Years Are Shadows" and "No Time for Sentiment." Published in October 1942, the short story begins with the trope of the soldier's return home from his war service, following Lige Bascombe's train as it travels from east to west. He is coming home a hero, his right arm severely damaged by wounds he suffered from helping to sink an enemy submarine. His injury is visible but not completely debilitating, and his narratorial voice indicates that he is psychologically stable. He has been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for actions that he dismisses as "what any of the fellows would have done if they'd been in the same lucky spot" (5). He articulates his experiences without signs of trauma and, indeed, most of his thoughts focus on the best way in which to resume his old life in Sun Rock. Through Lige, Ostenso creates an image of masculinity that was idealized during the war: the brave yet modest young man who is not afraid of self-sacrifice or hard work, and who proves physically and psychologically resilient. This was the stereotype of the soldier, set out routinely in advertisements, fiction, and illustrations. In another short story that appeared in the October 1942 issue, "A Color for a Lady" by Naomi Campbell White, a stalwart young soldier has only to smile, his eyes "crinkly and fringed with thick lashes" (40), to make the heroine Elizabeth's heart beat faster. Canadian Women's Army Corps advertisements, while directed at women, tended to feature the male soldier in some respect, with

one such advertisement from *Chatelaine* showing a young woman seated in a chair, a photograph of a lantern-jawed man in uniform on the table beside her and a letter, presumably from him, in her hand. The ad copy summed up the qualities of the returning soldier, and what he would want in his future wife: "Are you the girl he left behind?" the ad copy asked. If so, then joining CWAC was "your chance to show him that you are made of the same kind of stuff—that you, too, have a sense of obligation and duty" (inside back cover, March 1944).

Lige's joining up, as we discover, is not necessarily motivated by obligation and duty. Rather, it is prompted by the treatment he has received from his childhood sweetheart, Lileas Danby. As his train traverses the Canadian nation—a narrative touch that recalls again Ostenso's capacity for strategic nationalism—"the old feeling of humiliation returned to plague him every mile that brought him closer to home" (6). His humiliation is grounded in Lileas's rejection of him because, as he puts it, "a farmer's son couldn't rate with the college boys who tore into Sun Rock on Saturday night to play the slot machines and dance with the pretty Sun Rock girls. Especially Lileas Danby, whose father just about owned the town" (6). While Lige and Lileas have been close for years, their relationship crumbles after Lileas is sent away to finishing school. She comes home for Christmas and, upon seeing her, Lige supposes that

> it was only natural that she should use the latest college slang, wear the latest clothes, and speak of certain McGill-Varsity touchdowns as if she had made them herself. But in the same breath that she assured Lige that he was the "handsomest brute on earth," she also hinted critically that he could be "smooth" if he'd make up his mind to go to college next year and get away from his straw stacks. Make up his mind! As if that was all there was to it. (6)

His family does not have the money for college, and they need his help with the farm, yet Lileas's new-found snobbery dictates that Lige should put himself first and join the competitive, professional world of the emergent urban middle class.

Lileas herself goes to college, and attracts a string of admirers, but she remains determined to change Lige. She suggests that he sell his land and routinely reminds him "that he should be doing something more important than running a farm" (6). She even arranges for her father to offer Lige a job, but Lige rejects the offer, arguing, "I've got my job here. Besides, if I ever do make a change, I'd rather make it myself. I don't fancy having a woman handle it for me. You mean all right, but look—I'm not in your class the way I am. What kind of a heel would I be if I let you wangle a soft job for me with your old man?" (67). This passage highlights the class disparity between them and illustrates the gap between urban modernity and rural tradition. Lige takes pride in his

masculinity, refusing to let a woman help him climb the social ladder and rejecting the very idea of a "soft job." Despite this altercation, Lige remains convinced that "after all they had been to one another" Lileas will remain loyal to him and "wait for another year or two until he could build a house for her on his own land" (7). Instead, she snubs him in front of her other suitors: "Lileas picked a cigarette out of her silver case, lighted it and said to the bright young people at her table, 'Funny, but this cigarette smells like *straw*!'" (7). Lileas's true nature is defined by middle-class aspiration, and Ostenso's characterization of her suggests that such aspiration is underwritten by shallow cruelty, as Lileas prizes status over character and materiality over love. Her character contrasts with the images of women during the war, whom *Chatelaine* depicted as heavily invested in war work. The article "Home Front," which appeared on the opening pages of the issue, advised women on rationing and advocated the purchase of war savings certificates and the salvaging of such things as old car tires to be made into rubber boots for soldiers (2–3). These ideals of restraint and inelegant hard work were situated between advertisements for mouthwash and face powder, reminding us that women were expected to keep up appearances while demonstrating their patriotism.

Humiliated by Lileas's jibe, Lige takes the midnight train to the city, and joins the Navy in the morning. The shame that motivates Lige to enlist inverts the standard of national pride and unsettles the easy correlation between women and the nation. According to Gill Plain,

> The equation of women with peace and creativity is as old as the association of women with a domestic sphere detached from the politics of public life. Society has long constructed women in opposition to war. Woman has been appropriated as a symbol of peace and domesticity, a repository of the values that must be left at home in the heat of battle, and she has constituted the object of battle—a prized possession that must be protected—the struggle for which personalizes war aims that are otherwise abstract and distant. In times of war, an abstract notion of woman symbolizes the nation under threat. (ix)

Ostenso resists constructing Lileas as someone worth fighting for, and instead construes Lige's entry into the military as an escape from the limitations of his current life—limitations he would have readily accepted, if not for Lileas's taunts. He is therefore shocked by the hero's welcome he receives upon his return from three years of service. The whole town appears to be waiting for him on the train platform, and the band is playing "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow." Lileas and her father force him into a car for the parade through town and throw a party in his honour, after which Mr. Danby offers Lige a job. When Lileas encourages Lige to take it, he resists the urge to remark sarcastically "and you go with the job, don't you, Lileas?" (24).

When Lige finally returns home with his parents, they find that the house has been lit up and decorated for his arrival by Thora, the young "farmerette" who has joined the Bascombe household. Her absence from the town celebration separates her out from town life and its machinations, and Lige's mother remarks that Thora is "worth at least twenty of your Lileas" (25). Thora is clearly a foil to Lileas: where Lileas is fair and fragile, Thora is dark-haired and, though tall and slender, still capable of back-breaking farm labour. Thora also quit college to become a farmerette; whereas Lileas tries to persuade Lige that he has now done his "share" and ought to forget about the war (25), Thora has committed to contributing to the war effort for the duration. Thora, then, represents an idealized vision of home and nation that are worthy of defence. The contrast between these women recalls the opposition of Norma and Bessie in "The Years Are Shadows," but whereas Norma's stasis and Bessie's mobility mapped (albeit unstably) against the domestic and the urban, Lileas and Thora further complicate these associations through linking the active and useful Thora to home and country while the beautiful but vapid Lileas stands in for a threatening mobility that quite literally drives Lige away to war. Much like the fashionable Lucy's unexpected desire to raise her children on a farm, these young women complicate simplistic gendered identities while ultimately promoting traditional values. Lige may not have signed up for patriotic reasons, but he returns to a family home that includes a woman who recuperates his actions into patriotic ideology.

Unable to sleep that night, Lige goes out for a walk across his land, with "the smell of the fields, sombrely rich with wheat and oat and barley and rye and corn—with food beginning, food for nations that must live against the powers of hell—this fragrance swept over the senses of Lige Bascombe so that he had to close his eyes for a moment, wondering who he was now, wondering what he had become" (25). He finds the answer swiftly, as he discovers Thora sitting nearby, alone and distraught. She tells Lige that she received word earlier that night that her brother has been killed in the war, disappointing her dream of owning a farm with him upon his return. Lige is astonished at the stoicism and self-sufficiency evident in her ability to concentrate on welcoming Lige home, despite her own loss. Thora's longing for the farming life coincides within his new feelings for his land, and the story ends here, as "Lige stared up at the starlight, and then at the girl, Thora, and found that he could not see her very clearly" (29). While he, overcome with emotion, may not be able to see Thora clearly, the reader can. The alternative to Lileas, she represents growth and tradition. It is his masculine prerogative—and responsibility—to choose between these two sets of values (the urban, individualistic, and materialistic, versus the rural, communal, and frugal), thus defining the future of society. Intriguingly, Ostenso does not conclude the story with a definitive choice on Lige's part. The reader knows that he ought to choose Thora, but whether he

does so remains a mystery, generating a sense of unease about the postwar future and its relation to urbanity and aspiration.

Conclusion: Mobility and Modernity

"The Years Are Shadows," "No Time for Sentiment," and "The Stars Over Home" all engage with questions of work and mobility, commitment to family and to home, and the shift away from a traditional, agrarian way of life into something less clearly defined, but certainly more modern, consumer-driven, and urban: in short, mobility and modernity are at stake in the choices made by Ostenso's characters. As Victoria Kuttainen's article in this special issue demonstrates, modernity and aspiration are closely linked, and magazines are a key medium for developing a nuanced understanding of both middlebrow culture and the interwar period. Such issues stemmed from the emergence of a professional, urban middle class in Canada, and the anxieties they provoked were heightened by the outbreak of the Second World War, which aligned the performance of traditional gender roles with duty to the nation. Middlebrow magazine fiction often reproduced these gendered expectations and, on the surface, Ostenso's stories appear to do so. Beneath the surface, however, narrators unsettle romantic tropes and nationalist rhetoric, and plots contest the easy correlation between the attainment of happiness and the acceptance of class and gender norms. The complexities of individual choice and the opportunities and restrictions of Canada at midcentury are intrinsic to the work that Ostenso published in *Chatelaine*, communicating, then, both the questions faced by contemporary readers and the potential of magazine fiction in enabling current scholarship to understand such questions.

Our reading of Ostenso's *Chatelaine* publications proposes a dialectic between text and context. The tensions in these stories generate similar tensions in surrounding material, inviting a rereading of the metanarratives of gender, nation, and class propagated by advertisements and columns. The complication of Ostenso's literary historical construction as a Canadian novelist who wrote a single novel of worth, alongside a renewed interest in the short fiction published in *Chatelaine*, enables an approach to reading magazines that places authorial identity, textual complexity, and print cultural contexts into conversation. As a result, an image of middlebrow magazines as a vibrant microcosm of middle class culture's anxieties and aspirations emerges—a microcosm deserving of further study.

Notes

1. Michelle Smith and Faye Hammill's current research for the project "Magazines, Travel, and Middlebrow Culture in Canada, 1925–60," has unearthed two further stories: "The Calendar" (*Canadian Home Journal* April 1945) and "The Storm" (*Maclean's* 1925). While most, if not all, of Ostenso's American magazine publications are documented in Joan Buckley's 1976 dissertation on Ostenso's

novels, there remains a distinct possibility that more short stories remain undocumented in other Canadian or international periodicals.

2. See Vipond 12; Korinek 229; and Strong-Boag 145.

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