

Eaton's Department Store:  
An Example of the Ethics of Desire

by Donald Stoesz

Introduction

We as a family would travel every Christmas from southern Manitoba to the window display at the south-east corner of the Eaton's Department Store in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba (figure 1). Snow was on the ground, winter was in the air, and people were crowded around the large window that housed a display of Santa's workshop. Warm in our parkas, we were eager with anticipation as we lined up to see (figure 2). Children and elves were scurrying about inside, packing Christmas presents for Santa to bring us (figure 3).

Figure 1: South-East Corner Window of Eaton's Store in Winnipeg, Manitoba



Figure 2: Lining up to See



Figure 3: Example of Christmas display



An enticing aspect of the display had to do with the fact that we were being invited into the Eaton's department store itself. With glass display windows surrounding the store on the main floor, high ceilings inside to accentuate space, escalators that took customers to every one of the eight floors (figure 4), and a restaurant called the Grill Room on the fifth floor (figure 14), these features represented a truly mesmerizing experience for us young children. We would ride the escalators up and down again and again, get lost from our parents' care, and be astonished at the sheer amount of goods being sold. We would wander from one aisle to another, wondering what we would find next.

Figure 4: Eight Floors of the Eaton's Store in Winnipeg



I have become convinced that the Eaton's store represents a capsule of desire. It contains all the things a family needs, forming a hierarchy of values that leads its customers on a series of steps from desire to intimacy, intimacy to love, love to commitment, commitment to marriage, marriage to a house, house to a home, and finally to children representing a consummation of desire as well as a progenic future.

This article details the manner in which the Eaton's store encapsulates all of these things in an analogical and structural manner. It builds on the work of William



Leach, who has shown in his book, *Land of Desire*,<sup>1</sup> how nineteenth-century commercialism in the department store industry became so successful because of things like mind cure, imagination, happiness, dreams, and fairy tales to foment the fulfillment of desire.

### I. Eaton's Store as a Hierarchy of Values

The best way of showing how the Eaton's store entices customers into its hierarchy of values is to take the reader on a journey. We start at the ground floor, where everyone starts as they meander their way to success and happiness. Most of the items on this floor are portable, easily accessible, and represent impulsive purchases (figure 5). What person does not yearn to check out the jewelry, cosmetics, wallets, umbrellas, hats, lingerie, flowers, shoes, souvenirs, gloves, silverware, watches, and other "notions" that tickle one's fancy?

Figure 5: Detailed Description of Items on First Floor<sup>2</sup>



The main floor entices the imagination. Having entered the store with a subconscious urge to buy something, the store provides plenty of opportunity to do just that. The small portable items are just the right thing to buy for oneself or for one's girlfriend. A hat or wallet is needed to complete one's wardrobe. A gift card allows one's girlfriend to visit the cosmetics department, check out the handbags, and linger at the glass jewelry display. Who knows, maybe some earrings or even a ring is going to be a present soon for someone special?

The inviting glass windows with their displays all around the store, ready access through a series of large oak double doors, and the many portable items within easy reach stir the desires of the heart. Manufacturing desire is indeed a truism. Who would have thought one needed a new wallet until it was right in front of you, waiting to be picked up? Who came up with the idea of buying flowers every time you visited a friend's house? And then there are the more intimate items on display, such as lingerie and fashion accessories. The sheer availability of these items gets the imagination going.

These examples are illustrative of what takes place at any party of single peers. The women are looking their best, flashing glances at the men. The men are taking in the possibility of getting to know someone new, wondering how they are going to introduce themselves. The stage has been set for the availability, may I use that cavalier word, of fulfilling interactions between the sexes. Each exchange, suggestive gesture, and animated conversation give the parties concerned the idea that the other person is, indeed, available -- or at least, looking. Why invite all of these young adults to a party if not for the purpose of having these individuals take the interaction further?

Figure 6: Alluring Displays in the Large Store Windows



The buying of merchandise such as a skirt fulfills a desire for consumption and ownership. And yet, why dress up if not to attract someone else? Why flash one's jewelry if not to show off the fact that one might have money? And why look so handsome and dashing if not to give the impression that one has a successful career to sustain this lifestyle?

Desire for consumption and attraction to another person are alluring because of the fleeting, momentary, and transient nature of the encounters. Tomorrow, the flowers will fade, the souvenirs look cheap, the makeup overdone, and the jewelry unaffordable. Tomorrow, one will have regrets about the one night stand, the misconstrued suggestion that one was actually interested, the misconception left of having a successful business, and the notion that one was actually available.

We gain immediate, gratifying pleasures from these momentary flings and exciting encounters. It is precisely because they are in the play of our imagination that we get so much satisfaction from them. We have let our mind wander far beyond what was intended. We believed the suggestion that the person left with us, giving us the idea that all things are possible.

These flights of fancy are fundamental to the yearnings of the heart. We all believe that love and happiness are possible, especially if we are not experiencing it at the present. The hungrier we are for love, the more impulse buying we do -- human and material -- to satisfy the emptiness of our hearts. We believe the innuendoes that the merchandise in the store suggest to us, namely that we are worthy and deserving of love. We believe the love that others tell us that they have for us, in the form of flowers, a card, a glance, or a suggestion. We have not yet come to love ourselves. We fill the void by grabbing onto as much as we can grasp.

John James and Russel Friedman have suggested that these "short term energy relieving behaviours" are precisely what are needed to gratify the soul (figure 7).<sup>3</sup> Whether that refers to going to movies, shopping, using drugs, having sex, gambling, accessing pornography, or buying things at convenience stores, these activities foster the idea that many things in life are immediately available for gratification.

Perhaps we got this idea from the easily accessible items in the department store. Consumerism is alive and well precisely because we need so much of it. The sheer amount of merchandise on the first floor leads to flights of fancy. So do the fleeting parties that we attend as young people longing for a connection that is more than momentary. Because satisfaction is so hard to come by, why not indulge in what is available to see whether it will be enough?

Figure 7: Short Term Energy Relieving Behaviours, STERBS

Here is the list of short-term energy-relieving behaviors from earlier in the chapter. Use it as a guideline to help determine whether you have been relying on short-term relief.

- Food
- Alcohol/Drugs
- Anger
- Exercise
- Fantasy (movies, TV, books)
- Isolation
- Sex
- Shopping (humorously called Retail Therapy)
- Workaholism

Harville Hendrix, in his book on relationships, *Getting the Love You Want*,<sup>4</sup> and Macolm Gladwell, in his book, *Blink*,<sup>5</sup> accentuate the role of impulsivity and intuition in finding love and gaining insight. The five minutes of exhilaration you feel when you meet someone who understands you only too well represents a falling in love that may last a lifetime.

Galdwell defines intuition as “the content and origin of those instantaneous impressions and conclusions that spontaneously arise whenever we meet a new person or confront a complex situation or have to make a decision under stress.”<sup>6</sup> This statement illustrates the connection between impulse buying on the ground floor of the Eaton’s Department Store and the desires one has when one “falls in love.” Buying things on the first floor is like the beginning of a relationship that ends up at a very different place from what one consciously intended. The Eaton’s store provides a visual display of the development of relationships. Let us follow these bread crumbs to see where they will lead.

## II. From Enticement to Love

The second floor always scared me as a young man. Having arrived via escalator, I was surrounded by endless rows of women’s dresses, skirts, coats, blouses, lingerie, shoes, and accessories. I fled the scene, finding my way to the third and fourth floors.

The fourth floor was just as scary a place. It replicated everything that I had found on the second floor, adding more of the same in the form of bridal gowns, prom

dresses, fur coats, bathrobes, bras and panties, hairdressers, beauty salons, and so much more.

Figure 8: Items on the Second, Third, and Fourth Floors<sup>7</sup>

**Second Floor**

Fashion Fabrics 233 • Creative Stitchery 224 • Sewing Machines • Flame and Flower 208 • Popular Price Sleepwear 209 • Popular Price Loungewear 209 • Popular Price Lingerie 209, 509 • Body Fashions 609 • Slipper Bar 238 • Women's Shoes 238 • Popular Price Dresses 345 • Popular Price Sportswear 545 • Popular Price Coats 445 • Shoe Repair • Custom Gift Wrapping

**Third Floor**

Seven Seas Gift Shop 270 • Impulse Shop • Glassware 252 • Crystal 252 • China 252 • The Gift Shop 218 • Bar Shop 218 • Bridal Registry • Silver Holloware 515 • Silver Flatware 515 • Housewares 254 • Creative Kitchen • The Current Electric 277 • Kitchen Country 254 • The Open Hearth Shop 276 • Mowers 253 • Snowblowers 253 • Ranges 256 • Washers and Dryers 257 • Dishwashers 256 • Refrigerators and Freezers 259 • Vacuum Cleaners 258 • Personal Care 477 • Furnaces 556 • Plumbing 456 • Pet Shop 253 • Sporting Goods 261 • Coins, Stamps 405 • Toys 271 • Third Floor Meats 281 • Fancy Food Shop 579 • Cake Counter 1108K • Char Bar • Grill Room Products

**Fourth Floor**

The Colony 744, 246 • Colony Dresses 341 • Young Sophisticates 341 • Mayfair Place 444 • Women's Place 446, 546 • Shoe Salon • Millinery 264 • Wigs 304 • Fur Salon 248 • Bridal Shop • Lingerie 609 • At Home • Loungewear 609 • Foundation Garments 609 • Beauty Salon • Fourth Gear 640 • Attitude 646 • No. 1 Shop 442 • Coats and Suits • The Weather Vane • Like Young Shop 611 • Mayfair Place 444 • Beauty Salon • The Trimmers • Junior Dresses 241

My anxiety reminded me of the time that I, as a recent college graduate, went to visit a friend of mine that I had worked together with on a farm in southern Manitoba. We knew each other casually, had not seen each other in a while, and liked the camaraderie of each other's company. On the evening in question, she appeared for my visit in a dress. I was nonplussed. I had never seen her in a dress before. I realised that there was no mistaking this invitation. She assumed that I had come a courting – and that more appropriate attire was necessary for the somewhat formal occasion. I got the picture and fled the scene as soon as I could. How naïve can a young man be? I still remember our relationship with fondness, while thinking about how scared I was at what it could all possibly mean.

The message I received while skirting the second and fourth floors at Eaton's was that this was, indeed, a world utterly foreign to me, deeply attractive on the one hand, while utterly intimidating on the other. Women's shops outnumber men's



stores ten to one, give or take. Women have so much more to choose from . . . Eaton's mimicked this trend by having two whole floors dedicated to women's fashions. Men's clothing was relegated to 20 per cent of the space on the first floor (figure 5).

Figure 9: Window Display of Women's Dresses



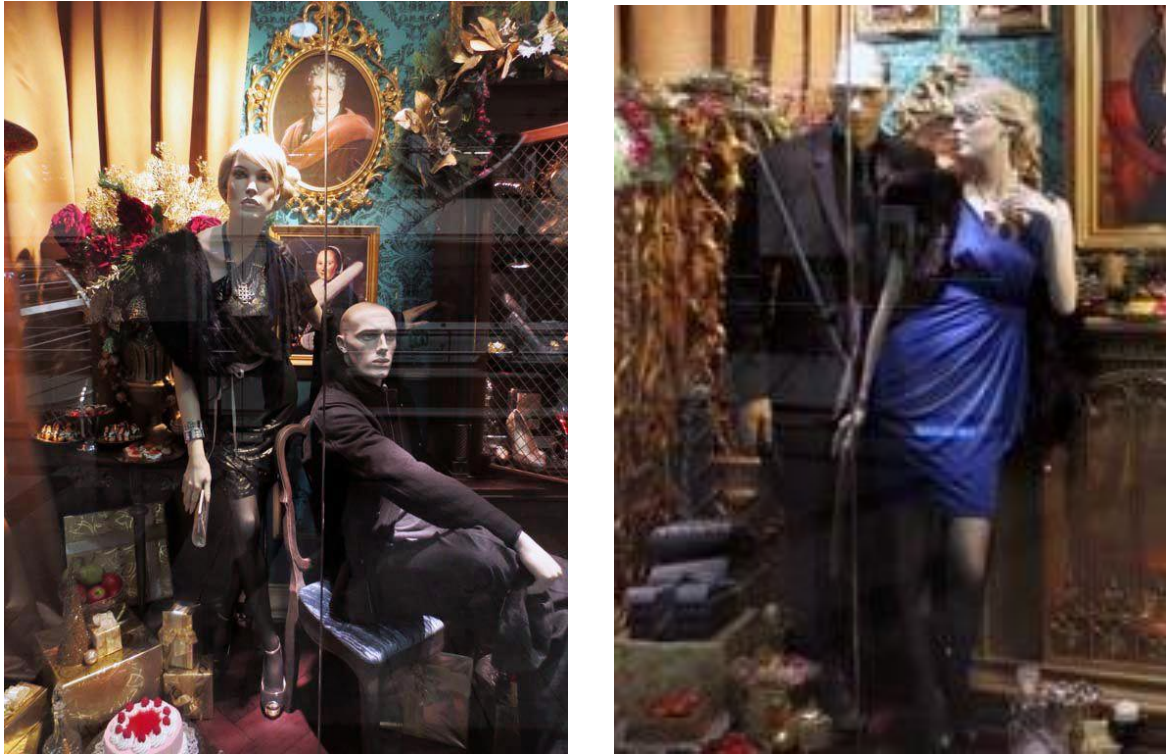
The disproportionate placement of gender merchandise reveals that men are lazier about buying clothing for their wardrobe. They need it readily at hand to give it some attention. Two dedicated floors to women's fashions, on the other hand, showed me that dressing up is serious business for women.

This fact was revealed to me in glaring detail when my (girl)friend showed up in a dress for our evening encounter. She was sending a clear message. We have flirted long enough. We have become friends. We like each other. You recently graduated from college and are ready to get down to business. The attraction I feel for you could easily turn into love. I am available to be your fiancé. Why do we not start right now and move on to the next step?

This is what happens when one takes the escalator and discovers two floors of women's fashions. The friendship that I had with this woman was interpreted as something that could become more. The dress gave a clear non-verbal sign that more was intended. I descended quickly to the first floor, preferring a continuation of innuendo, flirtation, friendship, and impulse buying. The seriousness of what

women's fashions meant had not yet made its impression on me. For anyone who is interested, there is a bridal shop on the fourth floor -- more about that later.

Figure 10: Entrapment of Love through Fantasy



The fact that culinary items, kitchen appliances, washing machines and dryers, vacuum cleaners, and home maintenance equipment -- along with sporting goods and toys -- occupy space on the third floor should be enough of a reality check for any male college graduate. While I may want to linger among the sporting goods and toys for some time to come -- shall we say ten years -- there is a certain inevitability about where interactions with the opposite sex will lead. Where did I think all of this enticement and flirtation was headed, to some fairyland of never ending foreplay? The fact that I had grown up within a family of two parents and three siblings should have given me some idea of what could happen to me, now that I was living on my own and wondering about what sorts of attachment I wanted.

The Eaton's Department Store, with its organic display of what is possible, is an analogy for life itself. While I may remain a bachelor all of my life, visiting and revisiting the third floor to buy a new lawn mover, hedge clipper, furnace, and snow blower to maintain my yard, this stab at real life does not encompass the richness of relationships indicated as possible by the second and fourth floors. While

heterosexual relations are assumed in this article, with gender divisions of labour implied, the steps of intimacy to love and commitment can be applied to any type of relationship. Divisions of labour can just as easily be adjusted.

The point I am making is that a profound reality exists on the second, third, and fourth floors of Eaton's department store that is not as evident on the first floor. While I may wear a handsome outfit to the prom, I may really be a pauper living out of the back of my truck. While I may seem loving and charming and interested, the truth of the matter is that I will take whatever you have to offer without giving a lot in return.

These other realities -- masked from view by presentation -- are warning indicators that all is not as it seems when one remains on the first floor. The alluring trinkets and momentary pleasures give the impression that there is more to come, more to experience, more to achieve, more to gain.

We have arrived at the place where fiction and reality, fantasy and enjoyment, attraction and commitment come together. As long as we stay on the fiction, fantasy, and attraction side of the equation, we delude ourselves that there is actually something real to our relationships -- our flings, our mutual interests, the parallel paths on which we have ventured. Every person can name the time when a relationship went from the first to the second, third, and fourth floors -- from attraction to commitment -- and the reality checks that appeared regarding what the other person was really like.

I have offered relationship courses during the course of my career as a chaplain because of the jarring reality of the moment that arrives when we realise that our partner, spouse, lover, and confidante are different from whom we had assumed them to be. We had based our impressions on the initial, first floor experiences of infatuation, intimacy, immediacy, and pleasure.

Hendrix has written a book about relationships for couples who are on the verge of breaking up. He believes that the love experienced in the first five minutes of infatuation can, in fact, last a life time. Couples who have been jarred from their illusory perches while visiting the second, third, and fourth floors need to descend to the impulsive pleasures experienced on the first floor. What was it about the fleeting glance of fancy, endearing smile, and inviting stance that had meant so much in the first place? Can one be attracted to the same person for the same reasons ten and twenty and thirty years after the initial encounter?

The Eaton's Department Store encapsulates so well -- through its display of merchandise -- all of the things necessary for living. This organic whole is alluring precisely because of its non-existence in reality. Many of the Eaton's stores have

been torn down. The ever expanding ranch-style malls that feature ground level access to everything has put hierarchy into question. Like the *Field of Dreams*,<sup>8</sup> the store with its displays on eight floors has become an organic metaphor for life because of its attractiveness to the imagination.

Dynamics of attraction, consummation, and continuation of profoundly intimate relationships are better understood through a structural analysis of the layout of the store. The displays provide visual ways of conceptualizing the nature, progression, and destiny of love. The physical accoutrements of the cosmetic department represent a foil for speaking about why anyone would adorn themselves in that way in the first place. What are these accessories but entrapments of love? And where do these entrapments lead but to the purchase of washing machines, fridges, ranges, and dryers?

Figure 11: Window Displays of Love and Passion





### III. From Love and Commitment to Babies and Families

The fifth floor represents the store's organic centre because this is where children are most protected, in the womb of all beginnings. Couples who arrive as lovers and significant others, husbands and wives, leave as parents. Far from the lure of relationship beginnings, infant apparel and children's accessories have been placed here because so many people are not ready for this next step. Ascending the escalator from the fourth to fifth floors has everything to do with the nine months of pregnancy necessary to become prepared to care for a baby. There are, of course, many couples who cannot have any of their own biological children. They may adopt or provide foster care of children who become their own. Others give of themselves in other ways, volunteering, writing books, and caring for others. Each in their own way live tremendously fruitful lives. The Eaton's store represents an arbitrary snapshot of average life, in which children are often included as part of the overall picture.

Figure 12: Items on the Fifth Floor

**Fifth Floor**

Hostess Shop • Portrait Studio 612 • The Grill Room • The Valley Room •  
The Soup Kettle

**Young World**—Infants' Wear 210 • Nursery Shop • Young Happenings •  
Children's Wear 210 • Eaton's Juvenile • Children's Shoes 239 • Girls' Wear  
211 • Jean Tree 211 • Younger Crowd Shop 211 • Children's Hosiery 201 •  
Junior Shoes 239 • Action 5 611 • Boy's Clothing • Students' Clothing 432 •  
Abstract Shop 332 • 1-2-3 Boutique • Blue Tube

The fifth floor represents a transition from the mutual benefits that each person receives from the love and passion of relationships and marriage to the responsibility of caring for a third, utterly helpless baby. Parenting displaces these mutual benefits of interactive adulthood with something called responsibility, namely, selfless care for another human being. There are many benefits that result from having children. Some of these may only become apparent thirty years later.

Parents are caught up with the sheer enjoyment of throwing themselves into this new adventure. The fifth floor provides many opportunities to satisfy these desires. Baby carriages and baby clothes, cribs and baby car seats, family pictures and mementos of this auspicious occasion, along with all the fuss that goes along with caring for this tiny little infant.

Figures 13: Christmas is for Children, Dolls, Toys, and Baby Carriages



Children appear in the Christmas window display, on the cover of the Eaton's catalogue, and in a variety of promotional materials about toys. We as adults relive the innocence, excitement, anticipation, joy, and sheer embrace of life that we experienced as young children. Why take your children to the Eaton's display

window if not to get some satisfaction for yourself? Why take your children on the ferris wheel if not to relive again the enjoyment you experienced thirty years ago in being lifted weightless into the sky? What does a visit to the toy department represent but an opportunity to buy adult toys for oneself, boats and trucks and furniture and paintings and rugs and dressers and snowmobiles and building equipment that one played with in miniature fashion when one was young?

#### IV. Oral Gratification of Culinary Delights

A second delight of visiting the fifth floor has to do with the opportunity to dine in fine style, with silver cutlery, cloth napkins, crystal glasses, and fine china on clean white tablecloths, Indian rugs on the floor, and a sacred canopy of glass chandeliers, opulent paintings, and open space above. Every Eaton's store was furnished with one of these restaurants, personally designed and looked after by Lady Eaton.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 14: Grill Room on the Fifth Floor of the Eaton's Store in Winnipeg<sup>10</sup>



While Winnipeg's Grill room was located on the fifth floor (figure 14), the Georgian Room in Toronto and the *9ieme* in Montreal were located on the top ninth floor (figures 15 and 18). An array of analogies suggests themselves. Breakfast, lunch, and supper are when family meets most often as a collective unit, agreeing on meals, disagreeing on chores, commiserating with each other about work travails, and teasing each other about possible boyfriends, *faux pas* in etiquette, and sharing news about family and friends.



Sitting around a table with family and friends represents a microcosm of society in which young and old, helpless and responsible, peers and mutual friends experience camaraderie and belonging on a deeply intimate level. We are more than the sum of our parts, a subconscious collective that participates in a vicarious way with all of the associations, concerns, anxieties, and joys of larger society.

For one brief moment, we consume the pleasures of contemporary life as a niche market, convinced that we have arrived and are living securely. The fruits of our labour, our love, our care, our commitment, and our loyalty are

evident in the sumptuous food before us, the gleaming plates off which we eat, the company of children, adults, and friends that gather around us, and the secure living space within which we dine.

Figure 15: Georgian Room on the Ninth Floor in Toronto's Eaton Store<sup>11</sup>

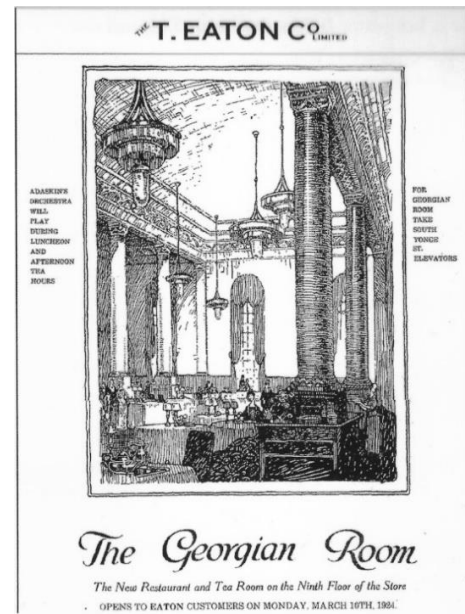
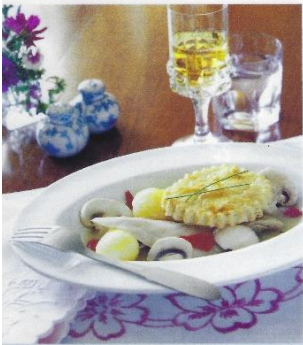



Figure 16: Recipes of Some Dishes on the Menu<sup>12</sup>

Original Georgian Room Chicken Pot Pie



- 1 pastry for one double-crust pie
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 2 tbsp. soft butter
- 2 tbsp. chicken fat
- 8 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 1 cup mushrooms — sliced
- 4 oz. jar red pimento — drained and chopped
- 12 potato balls — steamed until just tender
- 1½ generous cups cooked white chicken meat in large pieces
- 1½ generous cups cooked dark chicken meat in large pieces

Iced Beet Borscht



1. Bring stock to boil. Add vegetables and simmer for 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender.
2. Heat tomato juice and stir in.
3. Mix flour and butter into a roux. Whisk into above mixture. Add sugar and vinegar.
4. Simmer 5 to 10 minutes.
5. Push through a fine sieve and chill.
6. Re-season if necessary. Serve cold with a tablespoon of whipped cream with each serving.

- 4 cups beef stock
- 1 cup tomato juice
- 1½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup beet (finely shredded)
- ¼ cup carrot (finely shredded)
- ½ cup cabbage (finely shredded)
- 3 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 1½ tbsp. soft butter
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. vinegar
- 1 tbsp. whipped cream/bowl



Figure 17: Feasting at Christmas



Another explanation is possible when one considers the fact that the Eaton's dining rooms in Toronto and Montreal were placed on the top, ninth floors. Lady Eaton deliberately designed the Montreal restaurant after the elongated formality of the first-class dining room located on *Ile de France*. Having just completed a transatlantic voyage from Europe to Canada on the ship, she included as many exotic elements into the design as possible: seven shades of Scotch Ruboleum tiles, a marble called *Escalette breche* to complement the use of black Belgian marble on the floor, raised balconies with railings of Monel metal, beige and pink French fabric to cover the walls, opal glass to reflect light in the windows, in addition to columns, lintels, bas-reliefs, large ceramic vases on either end of the room, and to top it off, two large murals by Natacha Carlu entitled "Amazonian Arcadia, representing 'The Pleasures of the Chase' and 'The Pleasures of Peace.'" <sup>13</sup>

I am reminded of a colleague who explained to me why he went on cruises. "All the drinks and dining and entertainment and sleeping arrangements are supplied. You are served by waiters and waitresses at every turn. You live like a king. It is the only time that I feel as though I am a rich man, living at the expense and on the avails of others."

Figure 18: Montreal's *Le 9ieme*, on the Ninth Floor of Eaton's<sup>14</sup>



How true that statement sounded to me, on a similar middle class income, stuck between the responsibilities of family life on the one hand, and marvelling at the riches and opulence with which a few people could live.

The Eaton's store replicates this reality perfectly, leaving the functionality of daily living on the lower floors while offering more exotic pleasures on the top floors. While one could say that the Grill Room on the fifth floor of Winnipeg's store represented the middle class existence of most of this small prairie city's residents, the same could not be said for Toronto or Montreal. That (upper) society deserved so much more, a restaurant touching the sky and reflecting the richness of its (deserved) wealth. Who says we do not live in a class society?

The fact that us commoners, so to speak, could partake of the lavishness of the 9<sup>th</sup> floor restaurants of Toronto and Montreal, or more humbly, the fifth floor restaurant in Winnipeg, says a lot about our wish fulfillments to live the American dream. A healthy amount of imagination is needed to know what a million dollars can buy. Just ask Lady Eaton for the price of those Scottish tiles, French bricks, and Belgian marble. You will come to understand that its price range is beyond the price of actual items for sale in the Eaton's store. The items featured, after all, have been

presented as attainable on a middle class salary, with more luxurious items available on the upper floors should you choose to ascend those escalators.

I have suggested that eating at these three opulent Eaton's restaurants, like being served on a cruise ship, represents a momentary sense of being master of one's own universe and destiny. I bolster my argument through an illustration of some movies that feature heroes and heroines. One thinks of the Indiana Jones series, in which the female heroine and supporting actress, Marion Underwood, is shown wearing a dress throughout most of the movies. What's up with that? Why would Marion be wearing a dress in the middle of the Amazon Jungle and on the deserts of Egypt?

My reflection above about the meaning of dresses gives a clue to the fact that this adventure has as much to do with the personal relationship between Indiana Jones and Marion Underwood as anything else. Wikipedia makes reference to the fact that the movie, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984) represented a darker theme because of "Spielberg and Lucas' personal moods following their respective breakups and divorces."<sup>15</sup>

In terms of Marion and Indiana's relationship, they meet in the first movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and marry in the last one, *Indiana Jones and the Crystal Skull* (2008). Whatever else these movies have to offer, like the merchandise in Eaton's Department Stores, they speak on a structural level about the possibility, impossibility, and successful fulfillment of deeply personal relationships. The dress should give it away!! It has to do with the wooing and re-wooing of old flames, lost loves, unrequited lovers, and the possibilities that lie therein.

## V. The Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Floors

While items on the sixth and eighth floors could be regarded as surplus value to those things that appeared on the third floor, the seventh floor is the one I remember the best. I rarely ventured there, for fear of being turned away in my dower attire. When I did manage with courage to find out what was there, I was truly astonished. *The Gallery of Fine Furniture, Studio of Interior Design, Colonial Room, and Gallery of Fine Art* were not arbitrary designations (as though the store had run out of superlative adjectives to name all of the nooks and crannies that were represented). An endless supply of Persian rugs graced the floor, soft leather couches, maple dining room tables, oak desks, mahogany buffets, wrought iron end tables, and matching bedroom sets were scattered at random throughout the large space. I had

truly arrived, unwilling to ask for prices and unable to imagine that I would ever be able to afford such luxuries.

Figure 19: Items on the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Floors

**Sixth Floor**

Bed linens 236 • Bath Linens 336 • Bath Boutique • Table Linens 356 • Entertainment Centre 248, 460 • Musical Instruments 560 • Home Comfort 356 • Draperies 267, 456 • Upholstery Fabrics 267 • Home Improvements 353 • Books 205

**Seventh Floor**

Gallery of Fine Furniture 770 • Accent 7 718 • Furniture 270, 470 • Colonial Corner • Scandinavian Shop • Studio of Interior Design • Pictures 266 • Wall Decor 266 • Gallery of Fine Art 271 • Mattresses • Mirrors 276 • Lamps 377 • Assembly Hall

**Eighth Floor**

Hardware 263 • Garden Equipment 280 • Potting Shed 480 • Lawn and Garden Furniture 280 • Sporting Goods 261 • Pro Shop • Rod and Gun Shop • Outdoor Shop • Paint and Wallcovering 274 • Unfinished Furniture 370 • Luggage 264 • Eaton's Travel

This was, after all, the point. Like the opulent items featured as décor in the dining rooms, these unaffordable items from a buyer's perspective were meant to excite the imagination. Like the car salesperson who asks you which car or truck you would really like, this knowledge gives the retailer an idea of what you would like to spend, regardless of whether you can afford it. The fact that the Persian rugs look so lush means that you now know what you really want, no matter how many *faux* imitations you will buy to convince yourself that this or that “knock-off” will do. The real thing continues to tempt, just out of reach.

An analogy to relationships is, again, apropos. Why settle for what has grown old when the beautiful young new relationship offers so much more? As the man exclaims after being married for two years to just such an idyllic person in *Why Did I Get Married?*,<sup>16</sup> “how can the 20 percent that she offers replace the 80 per cent of love and affection and caring and loyalty and bonding that my ‘real’ spouse offered for the last twenty years?”

The antique furniture and expensive paintings and luxurious rugs represent what one has once one has arrived, namely a solidity, heritage, fondness, trust, bonding, and familiarity that can never be replicated, no matter how many new relationships into which one enters. The younger spouse can only offer 20 per cent of what was,



Figure 20: Celebration of Family at Christmas



simply because of the newness of the relationship.

This new relationship is like buying items of the first floor all over again. While immediately satisfying and immeasurably pleasurable, the trinkets and jewelry and hats and gloves and lingerie cannot compete on a substantial level with the fine furniture that is meant to last on the seventh floor. Fine furnishings can only be acquired when they come to mean something, such as the celebration of a love that has flourished and endured.

Mementos are great to have as souvenirs from the week-long trip to Hawaii. How much more does the memento of love mean when it comes in the form of durability, strength, elasticity, and firmly etched faces. The carefully selected pieces of art and carelessly arranged couches, buffets, and mantles within a breadth of space on the seventh floor that gives one pause shows the customer what being rich is all about. One needs so few things with an exorbitant price (of sacrifice) to say so much.

## Conclusion

This journey through “Santa’s winter wonderland” called the Eaton’s Department Store has been intended to endear itself to the reader. Consumerism is alive and well. Let us celebrate its presence among us by knowing exactly why it is there, namely to point to the things that really matter, like safety and security, love and commitment, intimacy and love. The Eaton’s Store Catalogue at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century featured a whole house in a kit that they were willing to ship to your door. How we wish that such things were possible today. Is it any wonder that tiny houses have become a fantasy item to buy and build? The world has become too large. We need it more manageable, at our supper tables, in our bedrooms, in the yard, with our children, with our parents, and with each other.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Allen Kopytek, *Eaton’s: The Trans-Canada Store* (Charleston: History Press, 2014), p. 410.

<sup>3</sup> *The Grief Recovery Handbook* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> (New York: Back Bay Books, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Kopytek, *Eaton’s*, p. 411.

<sup>8</sup> Janice Dreese wrote a play entitled *Field of Dreams* (2020) that was made into a movie (Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2019) and was based on W. P. Kinsella’s book, *Shoeless Shoe*. (Wolfpack Publishing, 2020).

<sup>9</sup> Carol Anderson and Katharine Mallinson, *Lunch with Lady Eaton* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2004), pp. 50, 67, 72-73, 98.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 163.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-74.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72-73.

<sup>14</sup> “Indiana Jones,” Wikipedia reference.

<sup>15</sup> Tyler Perry, *Why Did I Get Married*, DVD (Lionsgate Films, 2007).