Postcards of "Cape girls": Telling an Edwardian story of Cape Town

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ABSTRACT

Picture postcards originated in the nineteenth century as an efficient, cheap, and democratic form of mass communication that encompassed many functions, including entertainment. As bimodal texts, comprising a visual image, anchoring textual caption, and (sometimes) the written message by the sender, postcards assumed the power to communicate complex ideas and ideologies in a compact format. Under the influence of cultural studies in the 1960s, which stated that culture itself is the site of struggle for social meanings expressed in class, race, and gender relations, postcard studies (deltiology) has become an important interdisciplinary field since the 1980s. The postcard exposed millions of people to visual culture and predated the functions of mobile phones, the Internet, and social media platforms such as Instagram.

In this article, I focus on a series of artist-drawn, lithographic postcards by Dennis Santry (1879-1960) in Cape Town in 1904. They depict six so-called "Cape Girls" engaged in leisure activities against the backdrop of iconic Capetonian sites. My interpretation of the postcards suggests that a selective story privileges the tastes of a white, middle-class, English-speaking, imperial audience.

Keywords: Postcards, Cape Town, Dennis Santry, imperialism, Edwardian, Belle Époque.

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Introduction

> Postcards are also about storytelling … If a picture is worth a thousand words, it's guaranteed that the images on picture postcards have long said more than could be crammed into the message space on the back. Postcards offered an easy, immediate, and visual story (Pyne 2021:9-10).

> Cape Town is an imperial city and … as such, it has certain obligations … as one of the dozen great important centres of Imperial life in the Empire (quoted in Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden 1999:14).

In this article, I examine a series of six colour lithographic postcards drawn by Denis Santry (Figure 1) in Cape Town in 1904. Although postcards were formerly considered to be inconsequential, academic discourse has pointed out the capacity for postcards, as commodities, to act as agents of social commentary, propaganda, and ideological manipulation that reflect the power bases of society.[1] As Lydia Pyne (2021:7) proposes, postcards are 'deceptively complex objects' that can exercise subtle power through light-heartedness that ostensibly serves only to entertain. To tease out this idea, I focus on a small data set that represents "Capetonian" females, depicted unmistakably through the prism of the imperialist gaze prevalent in the early twentieth century, and inflected by Belle Époque notions of style, escapism, and diversion.

I start my article with a short history of the postcard before providing a brief historical contextualisation of South Africa and Cape Town. Thereafter, I introduce Dennis Santry and his contribution to South African visual culture, before considering each of the six postcards.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

DC Boonzaier, caricature of Denis Santry, ca. 1915. (Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1983:214).

Postcard history

The plain postcard was created in the Northern German Confederation by Dr Heinrich von Stephan, a post official who felt that people should be able to communicate more cheaply than by letter. The Austrian General Post Office took up the idea – the first examples of correspondence cards were issued on 1 October 1869 (Atkinson 2007:3). Adding pictures to postcards gained momentum in 1889 with the Paris Exhibition when postcards with photos of the newly-erected Eiffel Tower proliferated (Schor 1992:213). The earliest postcards usually featured lithographic images, engravings and line drawings, and improvements in technology around 1900 made it possible to mass-produce affordable photo-postcards (Woody 1998:14-16). Early postcards had undivided backs designated only for the recipient's address. The front was dedicated to the image, and the short message was written across or around it (Figures 2, 3). In 1902, the British publisher F Hartmann initiated the divided back format where the message and address shared the back, and the picture took up the whole front (Schor 1992:212).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Front of old format postcard with undivided back, posted in 1905. (Collection of author).

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Back of old format postcard with undivided back, posted in 1905. (Collection of author).

The Golden Age of postcards dates from around 1898-1918, when astonishing numbers were published and consumed worldwide. Spennemann (2021:1464) and Pyne (2021:7) estimate that 200-300 billion postcards were in global circulation until World War One. This was largely driven by the revolutions in print technology, transport, tourism (Symes 2019:642), and improved postal services. During the early twentieth century, postcards were sent almost daily as a fast and cheap method of communication. Jeremy Foster (2008:213) underlines that postcards were the principal form of communication in South Africa from the late nineteenth century to 1914, and they were essentially the only source of cheap and accessible visual images. Postcards were used to confirm appointments, send greetings, order goods, as advertising, as pin-ups, as satire, to reflect contemporary events, as national and political propaganda, to educate, to entertain, as souvenirs and mementoes, and to collect (Albers & James 1988:138-139; Pritchard & Morgan 2005:55). Although postcards developed their own conventions and frequently became formulaic, the earliest artists, photographers, and printers often combined graphic skill with considerable imagination, and provided 'a vehicle of popular art within the reach of all classes of society' (Carline 1971:12).

In South Africa, the first plain postcards were issued as official postal stationery at the Cape of Good Hope in 1878, the Orange Free State in 1884, and the Republics

of Transvaal and Natal in 1885. The first picture postcard in the Transvaal Republic appeared in 1896, published by Epstein and Booleman. The earliest use of the divided back format in South Africa seems to be by Hallis & Company in Port Elizabeth in 1903, and Epstein in Johannesburg used it from 1905 onwards (Atkinson 2007:67). Hubrich of Grave Street published the first picture postcards in Cape Town in June 1897 (Atkinson 2007:10).[2]

Postcards typically reflected the attitudes, activities, and tastes of many people. The social and cultural contexts of production informed what was produced – the early publishers knew what kind of postcards would sell. Therefore, we can gather which topics were popular, as only the designs with the widest appeal were published (Atkinson 2007:4). There were specific postcard trends and fads that appealed to buyers and these were thus the staple of most postcard publishers (Pyne 2021:10). Spennemann (2021:1465) confirms that postcards were 'creations made for consumption by a given market'. Edwardian (1901-1910) postcards 'recorded interesting details of the way of life and the mores of the day, often not recorded anywhere else' (Atkinson 2007:2; Spennemann 2021:1460), but they also challenged social conventions regarding class, gender, and modes of communication. Carline (1971:57) therefore considers that as symbols of modernity, the dismantling of outmoded nineteenth-century practices 'was hastened by postcards, showing young people of either sex cycling or motoring together or even fraternising on the beach.' As I suggest here, although Santry's series of postcards is small, it nonetheless spoke to an audience familiar with certain topics, types,[3] and places.

In the next section, I briefly sketch the context within which the selected postcards were produced in South Africa, and particularly Cape Town.

South Africa in historical context

The first white colonial settlement of South Africa was conducted by the Netherlands in 1652, but following intermittent conflicts with the British, Britain became the dominant imperial power after 1815. After 1652, the indigenous San and Khoikhoi people were displaced and were subject to successive white regimes, as were the descendants of Malay slaves imported to the Cape. Under British governance, the frictions between English-speaking settlers and primarily Dutch descendants known as the "*boers*" or Afrikaners, disenchanted with British dominance, undertook the Great Trek inland in 1838. This left Cape Town as the administrative centre of British imperial power, and South Africa was divided into four colonies: the Cape Colony, the Republic of Natalia, the Republic of the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal

Republic. British domination was maintained until after the defeat of the *boers* during the South African War (1899-1902). After this victory, the need to reunite English and Afrikaans-speaking *white* people became a national priority, but the humiliation of the Afrikaans-speaking community was hard to overcome (Lange & Van Eeden 2016:62).

Under British rule, middle-class property owners in Cape Town increased and were 'bourgeois rather than aristocratic' (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith 1998:96,129). Following the accession of Queen Victoria in 1901, Cape Town became 'an unambiguously British colonial place', dominated by men (Worden *et al* 1998:149, 153). Many British settlers came to the Cape in the late nineteenth century; 'white English-speaking immigrants', especially women, were preferred by the British regime (Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden 1999:24-25); by 1904, the European population was 27 per cent, and "English" values and identity dominated the town (Worden *et al* 1998:149,153).

Even after the end of the War, the Imperial government kept a few regiments in South Africa, and these soldiers sent postcards to their families back home (Atkinson 2007:64). Moreover, the arrival of British civil servants in South Africa post-1902 led to a 'great flood of correspondence from South Africa to Britain', mainly in the form of postcards (Atkinson 2007:65) that depicted the landscape, exotic Others, or reassuring images of "civilisation" in the colony. It is important to understand the Santry postcards against this background of a cultural and ideological divide in Cape Town, specifically between Afrikaans-speaking people and the British. I shall, therefore, argue that the Santry postcards endorsed a British way of life and its concomitant values.

Denis Santry

Santry was born in Cork, Ireland, in 1879, and studied at the School of Art in Cork. He was articled to JF McMullen MSA in Cork in 1895, and was the Arnott Scholar, Cork Municipal School of Art from 1894 until 1896. He was apprenticed as a young man to a joiner before he won a national art bursary, enabling him to study at the Royal School of Art in Kensington, London.[4] Whilst studying there, from 1897 to 1898, he won the Queen's prize for freehand drawing.

Santry came to South Africa for health reasons in 1901, and exhibited watercolour and gesso paintings at the South African Art Association in 1903. He became a council member of the South African Association of Arts in 1903, and founded the

South African School of Art and Design (Schoonraad & Schoonraad 1983:215). Santry was employed as a draughtsman in the office of Tully & Waters from 1901 until 1902, and thereafter, he seems to have worked in William Black's office in Cape Town for about a year, and he continued to work as an architect in Cape Town until June 1910. From 1908, Santry produced cartoons for the Cape Town weekly newspaper *My Cape,* using the pseudonym 'Adam' (Atkinson 2007:147-148).[5]

After being involved in the Union Pageant in 1910, Santry moved to Johannesburg to take up a position as a cartoonist for the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Times* (Atkinson 2007:147-148), still using the pseudonym 'Adam'. Santry's Arts and Crafts-inspired house in Rhodes Avenue, Johannesburg, was designed by Herbert Baker's office, Baker & Fleming. According to the publication *Men of the Times* (1906:374), '[Santry's] sketches and cartoons in the local papers, under the *nom-de-plume* of "Adam," are decidedly clever and amusing.'

Drawing cartoons, architectural projects, and film work comprised Santry's most important work after 1910. During the First World War, his drawings commenting on the War were reproduced all over the world. These cartoons were collated in three books published in 1915 (Figures 4, 5, 6). His last cartoon was published in the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1917. Santry's cartoons were drawn in brush and ink and often parodied political events as scenes from Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and other theatrical productions.[6]

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Santry's three *War Cartoons* books, published in Johannesburg, 1915.

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Santry's three *War Cartoons* books, published in Johannesburg, 1915.

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Santry's three *War Cartoons* books, published in Johannesburg, 1915.

Santry was also a pioneer of animated cartoons and animated film in South Africa (Berman 1983:451) and applied to go to America in 1918 to further this interest, but was refused entry owing to his medical history. Santry then worked for the African Films Trust and African Film Productions in South Africa. His so-called *Topicalities*, with Joseph Albrecht as cameraman, 'were animated shorts that commented on issues of the day (notably the war in Europe) and were also released in Great Britain' (https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Denis_Santry). He also worked on the drawings for, and co-directed the silent feature film *An artist's inspiration / The artist's dream* with Harold Shaw in 1916.

In 1918, Santry joined the architectural firm Swan & McLaren in Singapore, and he designed many public buildings, mosques and churches. By 1924, he was a partner in the firm (Figure 7). His most well-known building is the Sultan Mosque in Singapore. Santry retired in 1934 and returned to England, but returned to South Africa in 1940, again owing to his health. After the Second World War, Santry again practised as an architect and died in Durban on 14 April 1960.

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Photograph of Santry at Swan & McLaren, Singapore, seated fourth from the left. (Sarawak General Post Office Collective 2013:[sp]).

Santry's "Cape Girls"

For this article, it is important to consider the genre of Santry's postcards. The earliest postcards tended to depict topographical scenes, cities, and portraits, but other genres rapidly evolved, which catered to different audiences. Of these, the comic postcard or "vulgar/saucy seaside postcard" was very popular. As epitomised by Donald McGill in England from 1904, this genre used double entendre, an unsophisticated graphic style, and bright colours (Figure 8). This type of postcard usually appealed to working-class consumers and reflected their experiences and values, as notoriously pointed out by George Orwell (1941) in his essay. The comic postcard usually focussed on the satirical, transgressive, and carnivalesque excesses of the body (Wolfreys 1999:554).

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Donald McGill postcard, ca. 1920s. (Collection of author).

Humorous postcards, however, were generally aimed at a more sophisticated market, and depicted the subtle humour of everyday life and fashionable topics. The most popular topics depicted the hazards of motoring, cycling, sports, pastimes, new inventions, people, events, seaside scenes, holidays, but also political satire. The pictorial genealogy of humorous postcards is located in hundreds of years of printed imagery in Europe, including popular prints and satirical works by William Hogarth, James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson, and George Cruikshank (Carline 1971:23-36). Many humorous postcards derived from the political cartoons in *Punch* and *Vanity Fair* that were reproduced as postcards (Pritchard & Morgan 2005:56). These late-nineteenth-century postcards appealed to the educated, primarily male, middle-class viewer. As the taste for humorous postcards grew, accomplished Edwardian graphic artists such as Tom Browne, Will Owen, Lawson Wood, Lance Thackeray, Louis Wain, and Phil May, who worked for *Punch* and *Vanity Fair*, were commissioned to create original works for the postcard medium. They produced political cartoons, as well as commentary on contemporary culture, including the bicycle (Carline 1971:81; Holt & Holt 1971:91).

Holt and Holt (1971:93) label the above-mentioned humorous postcard as "sophisticated", as it 'lies between McGill and the satire of the political postcard, and dwelt on the humour of everyday life and fashionable topics.' This category included the more refined humour of the American illustrator Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944) that appealed to and dealt with the upper-middle-class consumer, often featuring his popular female type, the Gibson Girl, dating from 1898. Gibson's 'characteristic pen and ink sketches of the emancipated American girl made their impression on the more sophisticated section of the community, depicting the upper middle class and creating the characteristic Edwardian female type' (Carline 1971:84) (Figures 9, 10).

FIGURE **Nº 9**

A typical Gibson Girl's appearance.

FIGURE **Nº 10**

A typical Gibson Girl's appearance.

The Gibson Girl was a 'tall and graceful young woman with the bouffant hairstyle, [a] trim waist and flowing skirts … [engaged in activities such as] golfing, motoring and courting' (Hill 1987:14). The Gibson Girls' bouffant hairstyles were necessary to support the fashionably large, elaborate hats. Gibson Girls had full bosoms and a characteristic S-curve achieved by wearing a S-bend corset. She was generally witty and aloof, with a cupid-bow mouth and dreamy eyes, but whilst appearing demure, she sought independence and embraced 'physical activity like cycling and hiking, playing tennis and golf' (Scarbrough 2015:51). Although the Edwardian Gibson Girl clothing style appears restrictive, it did, in fact, allow more physical activity because skirts were flared. As I suggest later, there are parallels between Santry's "Cape Girls" and the Gibson Girl, both in the stories they tell and their styles.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, 'the postcard, which was intended to convey the beauty of a landscape, whether by painting, photography or a mixture of both, was considered … to be an example of art' (Carline 1971:18), but eventually its aspirations to "art" were confounded by its links to commercialism. Nonetheless, the visual possibilities, format, and accessibility of the postcard continued

to beguile many Belle Époque artists at the end of the nineteenth century. Many of the coloured lithograph posters of Jules Cheret, Toulouse-Lautrec, Theophile Steinlen, and Alphonse Mucha were reproduced on postcards, and Mucha also designed with the postcard format in mind with series such as 'The months', 'The seasons', and The four arts' (Carline 1971:72-74).[7] Many Belle Époque posters depicted women reminiscent of Gibson's feminine ideal riding bicycles, smoking,[8] and often behaving in unconventional ways (Figure 11). I think hints of the whimsical light-heartedness of the escapist Belle Époque period are evident in Santry's postcards, although this levity was at odds with a country still reeling from the effects of the South Africa War.[9]

FIGURE **Nº 11**

Francisco Tamango, poster for Terrot & Cie Bicyles c. 1905. (Vintage Bicycle Poster [sa]).

It is important to examine Santry's postcards against the background of his career as a satirical political cartoonist. Santry's "Cape Girls" series consists of six lithographic postcards showing the Adderley Street, Kenilworth, Muizenberg, Newlands, Sea Point, and Wynberg Girls, respectively.[10] They were printed and published by Darter Bros. and Co. Fine Art Gallery, Adderley Street, Cape Town, in 1904, and were very 'popular at the turn of the century' (Walker 2009:128). All the postcards are signed by Santry, and the caption or title is printed in a block letter type, usually at the top of the postcard. All the postcards give the impression of hasty sketches, with minimal attention to the background, and they focus on the "Girl".

The same female type is seen in each postcard. She is dressed in the Edwardian fashion of the early 1900s, inspired by Art Nouveau art, that contorted the female body into a backwards sloping S-curve with a tightly corseted waist; large quantities of lace, dainty boots, and big hats completed the fashionable appearance (Holt & Holt 1971:61-62; Joyce 2000:19). Although ostrich feathers became a popular ornament for Edwardian hats (Joyce 2000:21), none of the "Cape Girls" is seen with this, although two wear feather boas. This visual type is reminiscent of the Gibson Girls' appearance and the activities in which she engages. Although the women in Santry's postcards are not shown in overtly humorous situations, the cards are reminiscent of Gibson's sophistication and 'gently amusing mockery' in terms of both style and content (Willoughby 1992:101). In particular, the excesses of early twentieth-century dress and its demands on the female figure are coded here to signify a stylish female type with a specific class and ethnic subject position.

Santry's "Cape Girls" are shown in a variety of settings where an affluent, middle-class female could have spent her time. That fact that she is shown unaccompanied is interesting – perhaps Santry was alluding here to the so-called independent New Woman, who was depicted repeatedly by Gibson.[11] As Rogan (2005:3) points out, postcards reflected modernity and rising consumer culture, but also responded to the new leisure habits of affluent, middle-class women.

From the middle nineteenth century, middle-class women in Cape Town were confined to the suburban domestic sphere (Worden *et al* 1998:96, 202), echoing the conventional binary oppositions of western society – masculine/feminine, public/private, and culture/nature (Aitchison 1999:30). Four of the postcards are set in suburbs of southern Cape Town, which became popular with the white middle-classes from the 1860s onwards to escape the harsher climate of Table Bay (Worden *et al* 1998:200). What makes Santry's postcards remarkable is that they depict an apparent change in mores in the early twentieth century that allowed women greater mobility, although Pollock (1988:79) points out that '[w]omen could enter and represent selected locations in the public sphere – those of entertainment and display.' To what extent Santry was representing real women or "types", or whether they were the product of his imagination, is open to speculation, but given his career as a satirical cartoonist, they are probably a combination of fact and fabrication.

The Adderley Street Girl[12] (Figure 12)

The Adderley Street Girl is posed against the recognisable backdrop of the Standard Bank Building in Adderley Street (Figure 13). After the discovery of diamonds and

gold in the Transvaal in 1867 and 1886, respectively, greater wealth trickled to Cape Town. This was discernible in upgrades to Adderley Street in the later nineteenth century that 'reincarnated … the city [into one] of rational British commerce', and gradually the city took on the character of an English rather than a Dutch city (quoted by Worden *et al* 1998:168). The Stuttafords department store was opened in 1858 by Samson Rickard Stuttaford 'with the vision of creating a Harrods-like department store in what was then Britain's Cape Colony' (Kumwenda-Mtambo & Strydom 2017). The Garlicks department store was opened by John Garlick in 1875, and in 1892, a new imposing 'building of redbrick and cement facings' was built on Adderley Street (Figure 14) with lifts and electric lights (Walker 2012:84-85). Adderley Street, and especially Stuttafords, Garlicks and Juta's bookstore, were 'a riot of ornament' (Worden *et al* 1998:216). By the late 1800s, there were around 150 retail shops in Adderley Street, as well as the General Post Office (Figure 15), a railway station, hotels, and banks. In 1896, double-decker electric trams, imported from the United States, operated in Adderley Street (Joyce 2000:14), adding to the narrative of modernity Cape Town was striving to cultivate.

FIGURE **Nº 12**

Denis Santry, *The Adderley Street Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

FIGURE **Nº 13**

Postcard of Adderley Street, 1904 (Collection of author).

FIGURE **Nº 14**

Postcard of Garlick's, Adderley Street. (Walker 2012:85). The illegible text at the bottom reads 'South Africa's greatest store, Garlicks, Cape Town.'

FIGURE **Nº 15**

Postcard of General Post Office, Adderley Street. (Walker 2012:29).

The consumerist space in which the Girl is placed reflects the gendering of space and activities. Internationally, since the 1860s, shopping was gendered as a female pursuit: 'woman's entry into the public sphere was associated with consumption and not production [which was located] in the new department stores that allowed women to become browsers and to engage in light sociability in a semi-public domain' (Van Eeden 2006:46, 47). The department store was not a private space; it was effectively an extension of the street, and this troubled gendered coding that relegated women to the domestic sphere (Lee 2019:27-28).

The Adderley Street Girl[13] is shown in the most exaggerated Edwardian S-pose of all the postcards. She is dressed in the typical fashion of the times with an enlarged bust line, cinched-in waist, and wide skirt worn over frilled petticoats. She also wears dainty-heeled shoes, a feather boa – one of the essential accessories for fashionable Edwardian women (Joyce 2000:19) – gloves, and an elaborate hat over her piled-up hair. The fact that she is holding on to her hat suggests the force of the notorious South Easter wind in Cape Town. The setting indicates that she is on her way to one of the modern department stores. Everything in this image signifies that she is an affluent middle-class woman participating in consumer culture – she has time and money to amuse herself. George Pilkington's postcard from 1904 titled "A playful South Easter" in his "Our Capetown" [sic] series refers to the same wind that knocks the shopping parcels from a woman's arms (Figure 16).

FIGURE **Nº 16**

GW Pilkington, postcard *A Playful South Easter,* 1904. (Collection of author).

The Kenilworth Girl (Figure 17)

Santry's The Kenilworth Girl is shown as a spectator at the Kenilworth Racecourse, which was established in 1882 and is the oldest racecourse in the country (Worden et al 1998:191). The South African Turf Club made Kenilworth its main venue for horse racing and charged an entry fee (Worden *et al* 1998:241). The racecourse became accessible with the opening of the train station in 1882, and the suburb itself became popular, with a number of middle-class mansions built west of the racecourse, as well as the Palace Hotel.

Compared with The Adderley Street Girl, this one is dressed more sedately, with a short jacket over her less ostentatious dress and a scarf around her neck. She still wears gloves and an elaborate hat. Her binoculars and racing card indicate her active participation in watching the sport, but she nonetheless gazes out of the

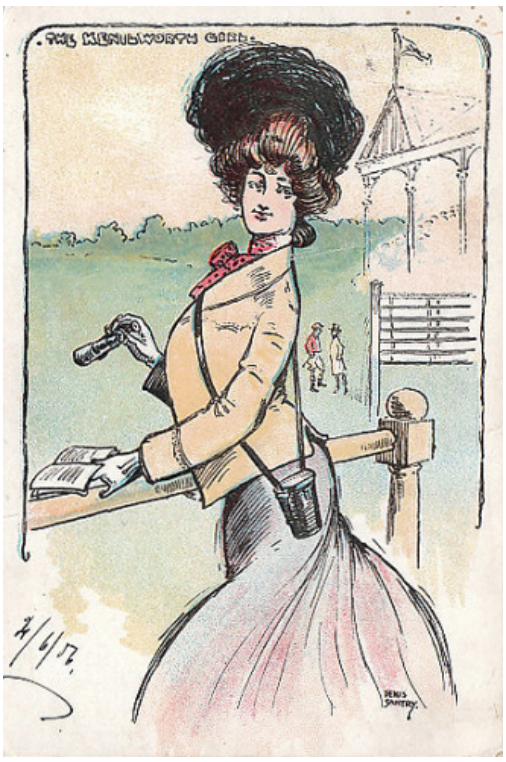

FIGURE **Nº 17**

Denis Santry, *The Kenilworth Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

image at the spectator of the postcard. In the background, the presumably original Kenilworth Racecourse pavilion is depicted, together with two male figures, one dressed as a jockey. Considering that an entry fee was payable, this postcard again underlines the middle-class, leisured position of the woman.

The Muizenberg Girl (Figure 18)

This postcard shows the Girl in a newly-constructed social leisure space. The seaside had not always been the space for recreation – this social formation dates from about the 1730s in England, when sea bathing became fashionable for the wealthy as a medical regimen (Shields 1990:41). By the early 1800s, medicalisation had constructed the beach as a pleasure zone, and bathing machines were the first product of the therapeutic consumption of the seaside (Gray 2006:22; Shields 1990:44-45). From the 1840s onwards, British seaside resorts were linked to large metropoles by train lines (Shields 1990:48). As Shields (1990:40-41) remarks, the beach was a 'socially defined zone appropriate for specific behaviours and patterns of interaction outside of the norms of everyday behaviour, dress and activity. "Beach"

became a metaphor for a wider circle of connected discourses on pleasure and pleasurable activities'. The comic postcards of Donald McGill and others, referred to previously, flourished in the early twentieth century, and depicted the amusing behaviour of (working-class) people at the beach.

FIGURE **Nº 18a**

Denis Santry, *The Muizenberg Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

THE MUIZENBERG GIRL: Original postcard printed and published in Cape Town, as part of the "Cape Girl" series, by Darter Bros. & Co., Fine Art Gallery, Cape Town, c. 1904

FIGURE **Nº 18b**

Denis Santry, *The Muizenberg Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author). A detail from the back indicates that it is a reproduction of the original.

Muizenberg Beach, south of Cape Town, was already established in the 1870s when a number of private bathing boxes were erected; by 1899, there were 64 that were replaced by a neat row of standardised municipal bathing boxes in 1910 (Walker 2009:28-29). Muizenberg owes its status as a popular holiday resort to the opening of the railway that linked it with Cape Town in December 1882. Despite the economic recession after the South Africa War, it became popular with 'rich diamond and gold magnates and up-country businessmen from the Rand and Kimberley who patronised it as their holiday and health resort', with Herbert Baker as a sought-after architect for their homes (Walker 2009:11; Worden *et al* 1998:241). Following British examples, '[s]eparate, screened bathing areas were set aside for men and women visitors, while bathing machines were available for the use of hotel and boarding house as well as some local residents' (Worden *et al* 1998:251-252).

The Muizenberg Girl is an interesting image in terms of its representation of the putative emerging social freedom of women. In the mid-nineteenth century, Capetonian middle-class women could swim at Green Point beach in an area designated for their exclusive use (Worden *et al* 1998:199). By the early twentieth century, so-called "mixed bathing" was permissible, but females still had to be discreet because of its perceived "dangers" to their respectability (Bickford-Smith *et al* 1999:41).

The Muizenberg Girl shows the bathing huts dating from 1899 in the background and Muizenberg Mountain. She is poised on the steps of the wooden bathing hut as she enters the water, dressed in a less restrictive costume than Victorian bathing wear. Although this beachwear offered more freedom, it still encased the legs in stockings, her waist is cinched in, and the bust is fully covered, recalling images by Gibson. As with the other postcards, there is no overt story in this image; we merely glimpse a moment in time as she steps into the water. This image is evocative of similar depictions of the Gibson Girl at the beach, where virtually the same pose is used. The photographed or illustrated 'bathing beauty' became an Edwardian fascination that originated in France and found its way onto European postcards (Bridgeman & Drury 1977:99, 101). In particular, Santry's visual device of one upraised arm behind the head is reminiscent of more sexualised imagery, as this pose drew attention to the woman's uplifted breasts. Internationally, images of women were increasingly used to market seaside resorts by means of posters and postcards; as the seaside girl became associated with the beach, it became feminised and sexualised as a leisure space (Gray 2006:66), representing the amalgamation of nature with culture.

The Newlands Girl (Figure 19)

The Newlands Girl is shown in a similar composition to *The Kenilworth Girl*. She is depicted as a stylish spectator at the Newlands Stadium, which was established in 1888; the first match took place on 31 May 1890. Cricket and football had been inaugurated in Cape Town by the British Army in the early nineteenth century (Worden *et al* 1998:197), and the Newlands Stadium was the first permanent home for cricket, football, and rugby. The suburb of Newlands was also served by the newly built railway line in the 1880s (Worden *et al* 1998:241). The stadium is shown on the right of the image, and in the background, Table Mountain hovers over Newlands.

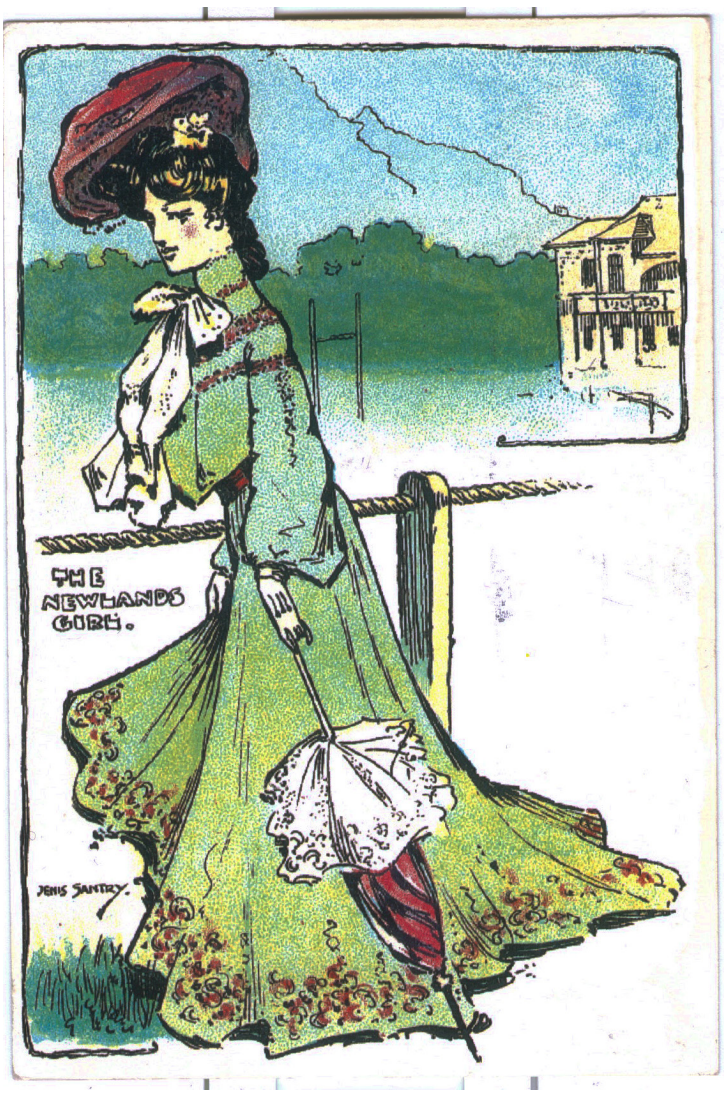

FIGURE **Nº 19**

Denis Santry, *The Newlands Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

The Newlands Girl is dressed in a very extravagant manner in accordance with the fashions of the time. Her wide skirt is decorated at the hem, and the length of the dress signifies that she is a woman of leisure who does not have to be concerned about being hampered by her skirt length. Apart from the requisite hat and gloves, she carries a parasol to protect her skin from the sun. What makes this image interesting is that in the middle nineteenth century, women's sports such as croquet, archery, and lawn tennis had restricted them to the home, befitting their gender (Worden *et al* 1998:199); yet here, *The Newlands Girl* is an avid spectator of "masculine" sports.

The Sea Point Girl (Figure 20)

The Sea Point Girl is shown riding a bicycle along the iconic Victoria Road in Cape Town, which was the brainchild of the esteemed road engineer Thomas Bain. Construction was completed in 1887, and it was named to honour Queen Victoria's jubilee in 1888. The road connected Cape Town with Camps Bay across the neck between Table Mountain and Signal Hill. Although there was a tram and bus service to Camps Bay, this road made it possible for people to cycle from Sea Point to Camps Bay. Sea Point, like Muizenberg, became a fashionable resort in the late nineteenth century (Worden *et al* 1998:252). Camps Bay was a popular picnic spot that was more accessible than Muizenberg and attracted Edwardian families 'sporting their weekend finery' as they strolled on the beach (Joyce 1981:94).

The view depicted in Santry's postcard was very popular on contemporary postcards. A photo postcard of Victoria Road sent from Cape Town at Christmas 1902 shows two cyclists from virtually the same vantage point as Santry, and the sender of the postcard wrote: 'This is one the most magnificent drives and cycle rides in the world' (Figure 21).

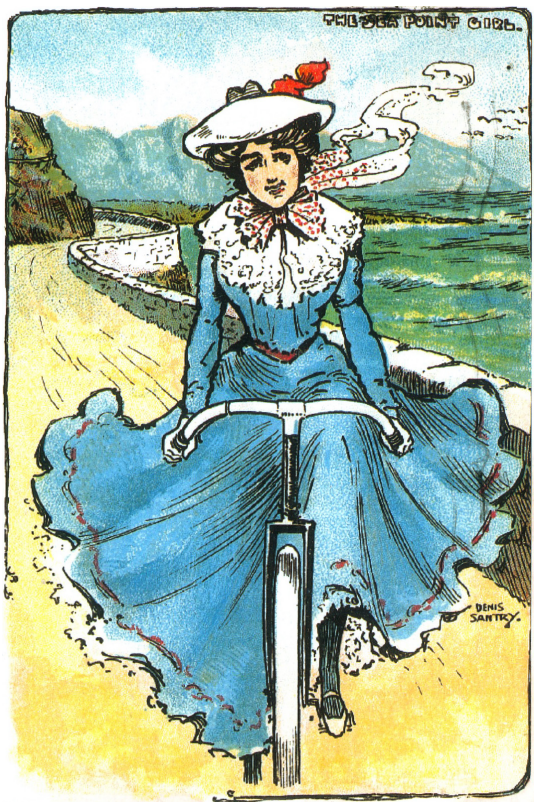

FIGURE **Nº 20**

Denis Santry, *The Sea Point Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

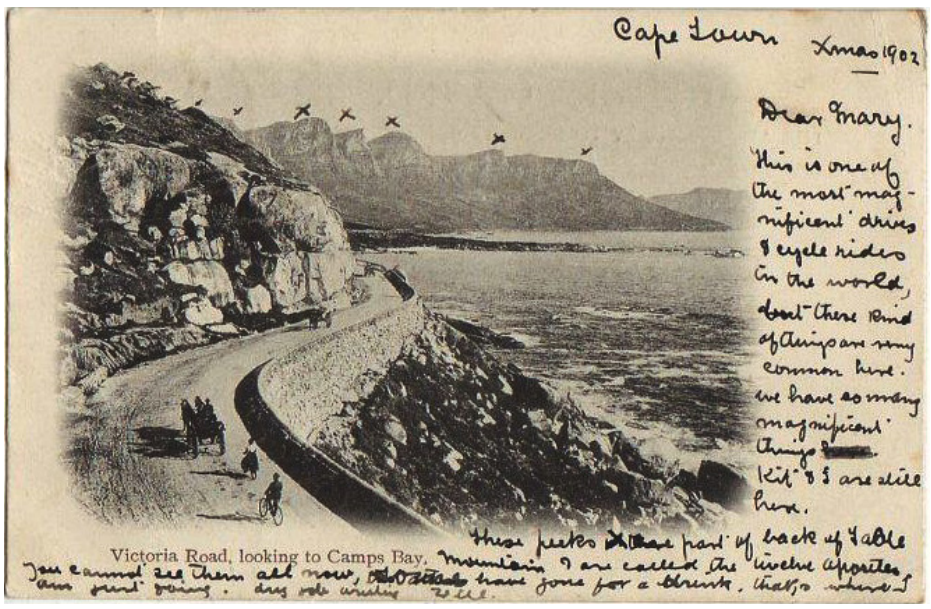

FIGURE **Nº 21**

Postcard of Victoria Road, Cape Town, 1902. (Collection of author).

Kemp Starley (1854-1901) invented the Safety Rover bicycle in 1885, which was intended for male users, but towards the end of the 1880s, a low-frame design was invented 'specifically for lady cyclists' wearing wide skirts (Lee 2019:16-17). Bicycles were in vogue in the *fin-de-siècle* era, especially in France, and they were depicted with female riders in numerous posters by Belle Époque artists (Figure 10).[14] Cycling for women became more socially acceptable when it was associated with physical well-being, making it possible for women to enter public spaces previously gendered as male (Lee 2019:11, 35).

The Sea Point Girl is wearing a dress with a wide skirt over a frilly petticoat, again with the requisite hat and thick stockings, although it appears she may not be wearing gloves. The wind whips her decorative scarf, and she speeds directly at the viewer of the postcard on her low-frame bicycle. There are many similar depictions by Gibson, although his female figures tend to wear divided skirts. This suggests that Santry's postcards were based on his observation of the leisure habits of young, modern Capetonian women. Internationally, postcards were quick to respond to changes in social habits – and often helped to stimulate them, as noted at the beginning of this article. The rise of a new, more affluent middle class in Europe (and Cape Town), with new patterns of consumption, was mirrored in the expanded leisure habits of women (Rogan 2005:3).

The Wynberg Girl (Figure 22)

Wynberg, a southern suburb of Cape Town, had developed as a distinct community by the 1830s (Worden *et al* 1998:117). *The Wynberg Girl* shows her handling a horse-drawn carriage, probably in Wynberg Park, which was established by the Mayor of Wynberg, James Bisset, in the early 1890s. Wynberg and Kenilworth became havens for the middle-class population of Cape Town, and numerous grand and substantial "villas" were designed by Herbert Baker (Worden *et al* 1998:252-253) that reflected the inhabitants' upward social and economic mobility.

The Wynberg Girl is again dressed in the sumptuous fashion of the era, including a feather boa. She gazes ahead of her, with the trees visible behind her head. She holds the horse reins and brandishes a whip confidentally; in terms of the gendering of space and activities, this is a telling image – she is once again depicted outdoors, unaccompanied, and takes an active role customarily assigned to a male partner or servant. Accordingly, she challenges gender stereotypes and assumes agency in her pursuit of leisure.

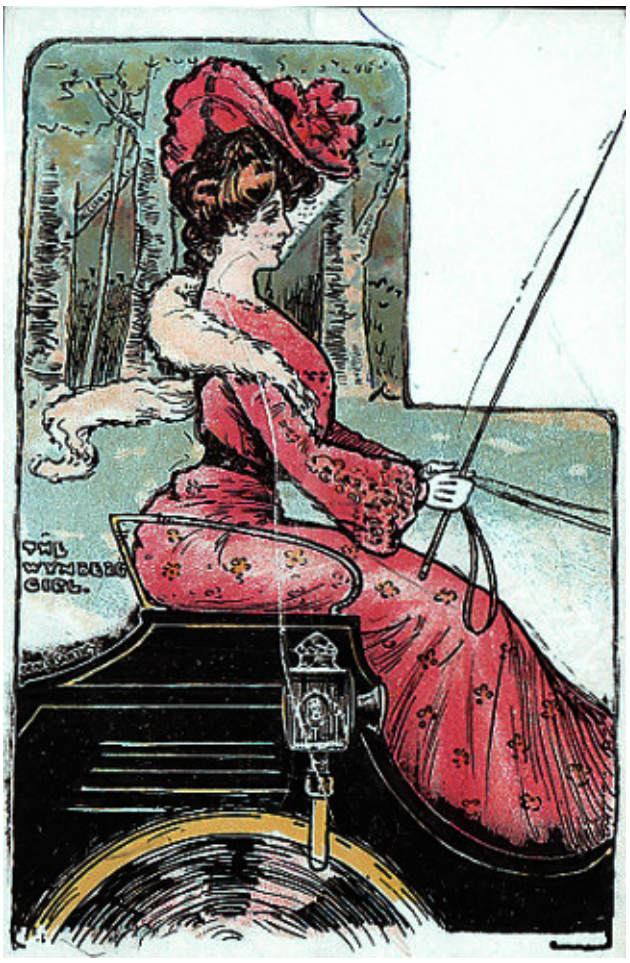

FIGURE **Nº 22**

Denis Santry, *The Wynberg Girl*, 1904. (Collection of author).

Conclusion

To conclude, what is the story that unfolds in Santry's postcards, and is it a story worth telling? My interpretation is admittedly subjective and speculative; nonetheless, the *context* within which Santry drew these images shaped what they signify. Given his wide training, Santry was an educated and visually literate man, and he was able to use his skill to create images that convey succinct stories about class, race, gender, modernity, and colonial mentality in Cape Town. The nonchalance of the images belies the fact that they may contain a more serious narrative, one that excludes all the others that do not fit into the worldview of a white, English-speaking, middle-class audience – in this instance, possibly Afrikaans-speaking people in particular. The very subtle subtext of humour also has an important function – it creates a solidarity and social bond between likeminded people; it 'draws boundaries

between those who share it' (Dubin 1987:132) and disregards those who do not. The postcards emanated from Cape Town, where British culture and ties with Britain were strong; therefore, we can surmise there was a receptive audience, and the topics must have been popular enough to warrant their publication. It could equally be argued that Santry's depiction of the Capetonian women was mildly satirical, based on his obvious skill as a political cartoonist. Either way, it is important to understand that postcards, as already mentioned, 'have an implicit power of gaze and perspective' (Pyne 2021:139).

A number of issues need to be highlighted to support my reading of the postcards. First, the Girls are all shown alone and outside, not indoors, pursuing leisure activities. They are not represented as part of the male sphere of industry or business – they are merely the consumers of a more affluent way of life. The postcards conceivably reproduce (or prompt?) 'changing attitude[s] towards female autonomy, consumerism, and their access to public space' (Lee 2019:55), thereby illustrating visual culture's ability to engage with the struggle for social meanings. It could also be argued that the manner in which Cape Town is represented – as a pleasant colonial centre of "civilised" life – serves the complex ideology of colony and the British Empire. Not only do the Girls showcase the putative healthy climate and outdoor life, but they also demonstrate the prevalence of activities like horse racing, rugby, football, cricket, bathing, cycling, and shopping, which were then primarily *British* pursuits that inscribed the colony as an undeniably imperial domain.

Also important in the postcards is the obvious class position of the women, which, according to Pierre Bourdieu (1984:258), is related to taste; he claims that 'the dominant class distinguish themselves precisely through that which makes them members of the class as a whole, namely the type of capital which is the source of their privilege and the different manners of asserting their distinction which are linked to it'. The (cultural) capital demonstrated by the white Cape Girls is linked to their social position of privilege based on wealth and the mobility and freedom it conferred. This advantaged position was very limited in South Africa in 1904, which was still recovering from the trauma of the South African War, although Cape Town's English-speaking inhabitants, that represented the values of the imperial metropole, were far less affected.

One of the prevalent discourses in South Africa in the early twentieth century centred on modernity, which was driven by imperialism. South Africa post-1902 was still largely pre-industrial, and the population was divided between a few urban centres such as Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg, and Pretoria, and the rural, working-class farming communities. The urban and metropolitan is generally the

seat of modernity and culture (Pritchard & Morgan 2003:121), and in South Africa, modernity was propelled from the urban centres by the imperatives of British imperialism, and was essentially class-driven (Foster 2008:242). Modernity and the urgent need to modernise the country, specifically economically, subverted the codes through which South Africa had been represented predominantly as "primitive" for many years. Thus, the representation of Cape Town as a modern city with all the amenities associated with civilisation as defined by British precepts was an important strategy found in promotional material and, of course, on postcards. Schor (1992:209, 211) has remarked that postcards themselves are one of the indices of modernity, along with the rise of mass transportation and communication, growing literacy, tourism, and mechanical means of reproduction, and were, therefore, appropriate to work as instruments of empire. Santry's postcards were produced in the "colony", and, in my opinion, they inscribed imperial values and attitudes as the norm.

Notes

1. Because postcards 'operate across boundaries of class, gender, nationality, and race, [they] bring into question notions of authority, originality, and power' (Prochaska & Mendelson 2010:xi).

2. For more on the history of South African postcards, see Archie Atkinson (2007).

3. I use the word "type" in this article to designate a category of people who have common characteristics and not to allude to type/typography.

4. Unless otherwise specified, the biographical information for Santry is derived from these internet sites: http://www.artefacts.co.za/main/Buildings/archframes.php?archid=1478; http://www.publicart.sg/?q=node/46; http://irishcomics.wikia.com/wiki/Denis_Santry_(1879-1960); ESAT https://esat.sun.ac.za/index.php/Denis_Santry

5. See examples of Santry's political cartoons in Tiaan Conradie (2016), Murray Schoonraad and Elsabe Schoonraad (1983), and Ken Vernon (2000).

6. Postcards were gendered in terms of taste, audience, and consumption. They were feminised as 'the feminine collectable' (Schor 1992:211-212), and were assumed to be a more "feminine" mode of correspondence. Nonetheless, men did collect certain types of postcards, specifically humorous cards and those showing actresses, 'posed beauties', ships, locomotives, and tourist topics (Carline 1971:61, 66; Rogan 2005:4-5); the postcard industry as such was exclusively male (Green 1976:124).

7. In South Africa, artworks by contemporary fine artists such as Ruth Prowse, Hugo Naudé, James Smith Morland, and Constance Penstone Robinson were reproduced as postcards by Dennis Edwards and Company in Cape Town in 1911 (Atkinson 2007:135). None of these were in the Belle Époque style prevalent in Europe.

8. The growing freedom of women in Cape Town was reflected in the number of them who smoked publicly (Bickford-Smith *et al* 1999:27).

9. See Bickford-Smith *et al* (199:12-38) about Cape Town after the South Africa War.

10. My analysis is based on the visual image and caption only, as I have not been able to secure Santry postcards from 1904 that were used. My examples were reprinted by the Philatelic Services in Pretoria around 2004 (see Figure 18). Thus I have not been able to establish who sent the postcards or to whom, so my analysis is based on the story I was able to construct based on my knowledge of postcard discourse.

11. The New Woman in early twentieth century visual culture took initiative and exercised choices, thereby subverting entrenched gender roles.

12. Adderley Street was originally called *Heerengracht* by the Dutch settlers, but was renamed in 1850 by the British.

13. Ironically, during the First World War, the "Adderley Street girl" was code for a prostitute (Bickford-Smith *et al* 1999:55).

14. See illustrations in Lee (2019).

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