Working-Class Tales for Youth in Nineteenth-Century Canada

• *Jean Stringam* •

Résumé: *La courte fiction canadienne du dix-neuvième siècle en plusieurs périodiques américains et britanniques démontre comment le genre aventure, autrefois le domaine exclusif des classes aristocratiques, a été utilisée pour construire des contes sur les jeunes de la class ouvrière. Ceci est la première de trois dissertations traitant les aspects variés du sujet. Dans la première partie, une prose spécifique médiévale romantique est citée comme un modèle pour le conte aventure, dans lequel les aventuriers chevaleresques combattent l'adversaire païen et affrontent les forces de la Nature élémentale pour conquérir et retourner avec honneur. Paradoxalement, les contes trouvés dans cette collection de périodiques du dix-neuvième siècle présentent fréquemment les héros de la classe ouvrière permis le mêmes dangers, en dépit de la rigidité de la structure des classes qui permettait peu de mobilité dans les structures sociales canadiennes.*

Summary: *Canadian nineteenth-century short fiction published in several U.S. and British periodicals demonstrates how the adventure genre, once the exclusive domain of the aristocratic classes, has been used to construct tales about working-class youths. This is the first of three essays on various aspects of the topic: in this first essay, a particular medieval prose romance is cited as a model for the adventure tale, as knightly adventurers brave combat with the heathen foe and face the forces of elemental Nature to conquer and return with honour. Paradoxically, the tales found in this collection of nineteenth-century periodicals frequently foreground working-class heroes amidst many of the same perils, despite the essential rigidity of class structure that allowed for very little mobility throughout Canadian social structures.*

As Canadians look back on the nineteenth century from the turn of the twenty-first, it appears it will never be a simple matter to determine the true ethos of the times or to differentiate between stereotypes the pe-

riod actually had and those the modernists singled out to rebel against. No doubt the first preconception to dispel is the idea that there are few, if any, texts from the nineteenth century for discussion by Canadianists interested in young adult literature. A wealth of primary documents about Canadian youth and their work-a-day world in nineteenth-century Canada has been given greater accessibility through *CCL*'s publication, in 1995, of an index of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction written by and about Canada and about Canadians (Moyles). Approximately 450 short fiction adventure tales were published by the better-known nineteenth-century periodicals for youth in Great Britain (*The Boys' Own Paper*, *The Captain*, and *Young England*) and in the United States (*Youth's Companion*, *St. Nicholas*, *Harper's Round Table*, and *Golden Days for Boys and Girls*). Literary theorists who frequently focus on the twentieth century because of the rich variety of texts available can no longer claim a paucity of nineteenth-century documents.

The emergence of the periodical literature is particularly welcome since evidence for working-class views in nineteenth-century Canada is scant. Because the lower orders tended to work long hours and to have lower literacy rates, they rarely kept diaries or had written correspondence with anyone; neither did they make speeches that were recorded or write books, nor have their actions been overviewed by sympathetic newspapers, as Michael S. Cross observes (1). The common question for a working-class study becomes: "How do we ever know if the picture we draw of them is accurate or complete?" Traditionally, working-class lives must be reconstructed out of other materials: "statistical material, travellers' accounts, surviving examples of domestic architecture, government reports, the judgements of those literate members of other classes who wrote about workers" (Cross 1). Documents that describe working-class views are typically rarer than those showing how the wealthier classes view the working class. Fortunately, both views are represented in the nineteenth-century stories from the periodicals for youth, making them an invaluable source for understanding the lives of workers in this era.

My study begins with 1870, when the first Canadian story was published, and ends in 1914 with the onset of World War I, for the events of the war years were to vastly alter the material, social, and aesthetic climate in all three countries: Britain, the United States, and Canada. As I began reading the tales I observed the stereotypes, the lines of plot development, the handling of characterization, and the myriad other details characteristic of the period. I thought about what had been left out of the stories, about why there were so very few girls and women in them, about why animal stories have such appeal, and about the qualities of the adventure tale that fascinated contemporary readers — children, youth, and adults. Many themes are now well known: the cult of manliness, the idea of progress, the meaning of pluck, the myth of the angel of the house, the ideal of respectability, the concept of providence, the cult of empire, the hierarchy of race — all of

these topics are found in abundance in nineteenth-century periodical literature for adolescents.

One of the most compelling approaches to this literature is to examine it in context with its origins but with a lens to augment or decipher the codes of the era. Even within an historical and social context, many themes from the collection of nineteenth-century periodical literature may seem jarring or even repugnant. Other important themes may appear so inconsequential as to be not worthy of mention. Yet, a useful first assumption in understanding popular productions of another era is that the bulk of it made good sense to its readers, provided an important emotional or cultural service, and demonstrated, at least elliptically, a common ethics base.

In the process of reading I selected a group of approximately 100 tales featuring youthful protagonists involved in hard physical toil. Part one of this three-part essay draws parallels between early adventure literature written to reflect the value system of the nobility and the nineteenth-century periodical literature that foregrounds working-class protagonists within their historical milieu. Part two examines the ideologies of nineteenth-century periodical adventure tales with particular interest in how children fit within the social and political framework of the culture. Finally, part three compares the plebeian ethic of the nineteenth-century periodical adventure stories with traditional fantasy and folk tales popular in the era. Each paper recognizes that the writing of Canadian short fiction for youth in the nineteenth century involved conforming to a number of stringent codes — socially prescribed as well as publishers' prescriptions — for, as always, the tales must be seen as a product of their time, even when they apparently transgress these codes.

Part I: Young Adventurers and Class Paradox

When I first began reading the nineteenth-century Canadian short adventure fiction in the periodicals for youths published in the United States and Britain, I was startled to find working-class heroes as the protagonists in the tales. Again and again I found perspectives of the upper class voiced by children whose lives were spent in arduous toil, with no guarantee of basic literacy, and faced with the problem of sustaining their basic needs. The juxtaposition of the Imperial boys' adventure tale with toilers on land and sea seemed incongruous, for just as mythical heroes are of noble birth, adventure-tale heroes find their genesis in tales of the aristocratic classes. After all, adventure literature was originally the exclusive province of the upper classes, a group with enough education, leisure, and wealth to carry out the quest, to explore the exotic land, and to battle the heathen foe. The idea of a plebeian hero is thus essentially paradoxical.

Perhaps my concern about the paradox of the highest and lowest social classes found mirroring each other in adventure literature seems unneces-

sary to a twenty-first-century reader who firmly believes that Canada was not a class society and that "class lines, if they do exist, are fluid; social mobility is easy and natural"; Cross calls this ideology "the North American social myth" (2). He explains the consistent common ideology of nineteenth-century Canada in the following way:

> Workers were regarded by those above them as different, different not only in status but in outlook and capacity. They were seen as an unstable factor in the social order. And they were seen as a permanent factor. None of these assessments of the lower class were premised on easy, natural social mobility. Class lines were clear and permanent. (3)

For these reasons the juxtaposition of class values in this genre is a topic that needs to be addressed.

The adventure fiction genre, from its early beginnings in tales such as *The Odyssey*, continues through medieval romance to the tales of Britain's empire. And the medieval tales model many codes and values of the literature of subsequent ages. Though these stories were originally available only to the wealthy, later centuries saw versions of the old tales shortened to suit the pocket books of an expanded class of readers. Class devolution continued to occur as the plots of the long courtly romances of the fifteenth century were truncated over time and adapted for an increasingly middle-class mercantile audience. By the eighteenth century they had become shortened to chapbook size for sale to the plebeian class.

An example of the shift from aristocratic adventure to plebeian action tales can be seen in the tale of Valentine and Orson, which began as a French prose romance of the Charlemagne cycle in the late fifteenth century. In the early sixteenth century, Henry Watson, apprentice to Wynken de Worde of Westminster, translated it into English (1503-1505) for the delectation of the powerful and literate classes. Versions of the tale from the seventeenth century such as that published by Robert Ibbitson in 1649, drastically reduced in length, appealed to the tastes of the emerging merchant middle class by emphasizing value for the money and time expended. Continuing in its progress down the social scale, the Valentine and Orson adventure is found in a group of eighteenth-century chapbooks collected by John Ashton in 1882. Here, the plot line has been telescoped into just a few pages. Its rough wood-cut illustrations are not always consistent with the story line, and the text is replete with grammatical errors. The long, elaborate adventure tale for the courtly audience had become a short adventure story for the working class. The parodies of Valentine and Orson on the nineteenth-century London stage essentially killed off the story until the appearance of Nancy Ekholm Burkert's lavish picture book version in 1989. (Whether her version is written for children or for their highly-educated parents forms a problematic class consideration beyond the scope of this study.)

The class devolution of adventure literature occurred repeatedly

throughout favourite tales. Many plebeian chapbook stories from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England still exist, marking the genre as highly popular. Interestingly, chapbook reading seems to have recrossed class boundaries in the nineteenth century when these highly popular imitations of upper-class tales originally designed for purchase by the hoi polloi, again found their way back into the hands of youths from the upper classes, a curious circular movement.

My interest here is to examine what vestiges of the adventure tale's aristocratic origin remain endemic to the Canadian nineteenth-century working-class adventure tales. In other words, what evidence do we have in the short periodical fiction of upper-class values embroidered onto working class britches? Or is there evidence for the reverse: are lower-class values stitched to upper-class trousers? I will approach my inquiry through an examination of youthful toilers in a variety of physical occupations: sealing in the North Atlantic, bridge-building in the interior, piracy along the Eastern Coast, protecting the North-West Mounted Police, ranching and horsemanship, fighting a forest fire, and facing peril on the railway.

Despite its broad base of appeal across class divisions, the ethos of adventure carried many qualities of its upper-class origins in its assumptions about which virtues and actions were paramount in a young hero. Youth's ability to "play the game," to show courage and inventiveness in adversity, dominates the list of desirable attributes from well before Hughes' *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857). As Martin Green observes, "Children's literature became boys' literature; it focused its attention on the Empire and the Frontier; and the virtues it taught were dash, pluck, and lion-heartedness, not obedience, duty, and piety" (220).

Take as a prototypical example of the Imperial boy hero "Stout Hearts and Red Decks," written by one of the most talented and enduringly popular Canadian authors of the period, Norman Duncan. The boy-hero, Archie Armstrong, fourteen-year-old son of a sealing ship's owner from St. John's, Newfoundland, embodies the admired personal attributes of pluck, courage, and valour. Published simultaneously in *Youth's Companion* in the United States and *The Captain* in England during the summer of 1906, "Stout Hearts and Red Decks" furnishes the reader with detailed information about the boat, the sea, the ice, the sailors, the different kinds of seals encountered, and the ways in which they are slaughtered and prepared for market. The adventures proceed from event to event, linearly. The boy-hero is noble, worthy of admiration, and always the foe (be it a seal, an iceberg, or a snowstorm) is cast in noble tones, thus worthy of combat.

Archie's birthright is not left to subtle conjecture. The text states, "So Archie Armstrong, son of a colonial knight, bred to comfort and nice manners, which, as it may appear, are not incompatible with strength and fortitude, was on the bridge, with old Captain Hand, through an hour of crucial moments" (335). This boy-hero is one with the aristo-military adven-

turing class and, as such, he must have a most able mentor. As Archie and the Captain watch and wait for the disaster to come — the capsizing of the iceberg — the narrator enters the action not only to construct the terms of the events themselve but also to comment directly on the Captain's acuity of leadership.

> The skipper walked over to [Archie] and slapped him heartily on the back. "Well, b'y" he cried, "how d'ye like the sealin'?" That was a clever thought of the skipper! Here was a man in peril who could await the issue in light patience. The boy took heart.
>
> "I knew what it was when I started," he said, with a gulp.
>
> "Will she make it, think you?" Another ruse of this great heart! Let the boy have part in the action. Archie felt the blood stirring in his veins.

In this scene we see the mentor's knowledge and intuition of both the sea and the young man combine to prove his worthiness in being assigned as guide to one of the privileged class.

The foil to the protagonist generally provides insightful contrasts, but Duncan's working-class stowaway Jonathan ("Jack") Bow duplicates the social values of the hero. "They were Newfoundlanders both — the same in strength, feeling, spirit, and, indeed, experience. The one was of the remote outports, where children are reared to toil and peril. The other was of the city, son of the well-to-do, who, following sport with a boy's eager enthusiasm, had become used to the same toil and peril" (344). The protagonist and foil are also matched physically: Archie is "robust, alert, tawny-haired, and fearless in wind and high sea" (335); similarly, Jack is "a tow-headed, blue-eyed, muscular boy of Archie's age, or less." But in the matters of dress and language we see the foil's working-class roots. Jack wears "goatskin boots, a jacket of deerskin, and a flaring red scarf" and speaks a local dialect spelled out on the page. The boys also have different purposes for the adventures, and these are class based: the working-class boy faces danger in order to make his living, while the affluent boy faces danger as a matter of sport. This distinction places Norman Duncan's notions of sport squarely within the ethos of the British upper classes.

Readers today may not fully recognize the dual class markers in the title, "Stout Hearts and Red Decks." The word "stout," of course, refers to courage, so the image is one of brave heroes (an upper-class characterization) standing on decks reddened with seals' blood as in a slaughterhouse (a lower-class occupation). The idea of a ship's deck covered with seal blood may have somewhat limited appeal these days in an age of conservationist and animal rights activism, but both then and now the title suggests intrepid conqueror, manly exploits, and derring-do. To the adolescent reader of the late nineteenth century, the paired adventure motifs of a brave young hero who stands victorious on a deck covered with the blood of the van-

quished foe were highly positive cultural icons.

Honour as a matter of primacy is established from the very first scene in which the ship's captain, Archie's mentor, refuses to leave harbour in the race for the sealing ice a second before it is legal. The ice jam blocking the harbour cracks of its own weight just minutes before midnight, the start time, becoming the captain's providential reward for impeccable honesty. Similarly, the story ends with a scene to underline the privileges and obligations of class when Archie's father assumes it an unspoken matter of honour to reward the sailors for the safe return of his son. The shipping, the sealing, and the friendships go on into plans for the future in the style of noble adventurers from ages past. Duncan's plot and characterization expose mimicry of the centre by the colonial, a classic device in colonial literature. The tale succeeds as literature, enriched by the realism of the working-class setting in which an otherwise stereotypical hero and his foil act out their class-based roles based on the ideology of Imperialist England, whose stratified class perspectives had endured for many centuries.

The codes to live by for the Imperial boy hero were established in the nineteenth century in part by the prolific British novelist of boy's adventure fiction, G.A. Henty (1832-1902). *With Wolfe in Canada: Or, the Winning of a Continent* (ca. 1895) tells of a young protagonist who joins the British troops against the French in the 1750s battle over who would own Canada. The boy fights on the side of the conqueror, Wolfe, in his battle against the French General, Montcalm, when they face off at the Plains of Abraham near Quebec City. The advantage of having joined the winning side is meted out in honors and rewards: the youth meets Wolfe in person and receives financial remuneration from him. This becomes the pattern.

When telling his tale of class conflict, Canadian author Charles G.D. Roberts does not draw his tale from the perspective of any of the upper-classes as do Duncan and Henty. Instead, he tells "Left on the Isle of Sands: A Story of Acadia," historical fiction set in 1598, from the point of view of a youthful working-class protagonist, Jules, whose father has been jailed after killing a man in a drunken brawl. When the Viceroy comes to the seaside village in France to levy a crew of convicts for exploration in the New World, the boy's father sees it as an opportunity to redeem his name and volunteers. The child stows away aboard ship to be with his father, leaving his destitute mother behind. A tragic story unfolds detailing the child's efforts to survive amidst the degradation of the criminal crew when the French aristocrat who brought them to the New World leaves them stranded on tiny Sable Island, a.k.a. "the Charnel-House of North America," over a five-year period. The dehumanized deaths of scores of men is not accounted to the nobleman's discredit — he could do no other than what he did — but the eventual financial reward bestowed by the King of France on the twelve survivors has a hollow ring because of the carnage it follows. The pattern whereby an aristocrat offers an underling enough money and a

promise of future employment to erase an injury is active in this tale; the rewards can take a survivor into the middle-class where physical privation is kept at bay. The above tales by Norman Duncan and Charles G.D. Roberts, however, are not indicative of the whole of working-class-protagonist tales in this collection. Instead of social mobility and economic gain, for many workers the prize is to live another day.

While critics of U.S.-spawned adventure literature tend to appropriate as indigenous many of the qualities of the British aristocratic adventure tradition, in reality "Yankee independence," "American individualism," and "Western grit" are merely different labels for an already centuries-long aristocratic tradition. We must also remain cognizant of the romantic tradition celebrating the common man that has continued unabated since the eighteenth century and that has helped to shape the great fictions of Yankee individualism and British pluck, furnishing both nations with their muscular heroes and manly protagonists. Caution is advised in transferring these terms directly to Canadian adventure tales, however. Certainly, literature from both Canada and the United States exemplifies a particularly North American sense of egalitarianism; however, tales from the United States tend to deny that class structure exists in that part of the New World, whereas Canadian adolescent periodical literature assumes these classes to exist as perforated layers of influence with upper-class values percolating throughout.

The Canadian propensity in the nineteenth century to recognize and stratify society according to class helped determine which of the many labour movements would receive popular backing. The prevailing interest in social gospel throughout nineteenth-century North America combined with the concept of the dignity of work seem to have been predisposing factors in the rise of the Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labor among the working classes of Canada. Essentially, the KOL espoused a unique combination of ideology and practice as they sought to celebrate the dignity of toil and to protect and enhance the nobility of labour and the common man. Canadian working-class culture seems to have been particularly ready to accept the lofty cultural values advised by the KOL as their own.

If ever there were written a hymn to the working man, it would be that penned by A.E. McFarlane in "Haskery's Gang." Part Two of the tale opens with a tribute to the caisson workers who died setting piers for a bridge:

> They went as men ought to be proud to go, for they died fighting, carrying on the battle of mankind against all the fierce resisting power of nature.
>
> And I say, too, that compared with such battling, slaying your fellow men and being slain by them is the silly, senseless warring of savages.
>
> For whether it's putting a fifteen-thousand-ton pier a hundred feet down on a river-bottom, or driving a tunnel through a mile of mountain, or setting up a lighthouse in the surf of a raging sea, I take it it's all a part of

the pioneer work in the same great campaign.

If this old earth is going to be kept moving steadily onward, it's only the unflinching spirits and shoulders of men that can keep it moving. And if a man dies in his work, I say he dies at the post of honor.

Don't let yourself get the idea that because a man takes his pay by the week, and works with his hands instead of his head, he doesn't know what the meaning of his work is. (566)

This is the adventure hero writ large: we see archetypal parallels in the combat of man versus nature; we see the heroic struggle of Atlas in recalling the working man's duty. We can also see a middle-class author praising the lower classes for doing life's perilous work so their "betters" won't have to. Either way, we have co-option of upper-class values by the working class.

The most powerful theme in the tale is the brotherhood and nobility of heart amongst the older workers, who have young Jimmie jailed on bogus charges rather than see him die in the compression chamber beneath the river (552). The author's characterization of the working men seems to be strongly influenced by the creeds of the Knights of Labor. The sense of power and honour among male members of the working class has been moved from the lips of the romantic poets to the workers themselves. Class sensibilities in "Haskery's Gang," a piece of historical fiction published in 1904, were no doubt heightened by the decades of KOL activism prior to publication, but there is also the implication that such working-class dignity was true for the 1870s as well.

Early in the tale, middle-class sensibilities that require the protection of women are sounded. Significantly, the KOL, as the first labour organization to include women and blacks in their ranks, promoted social cohesion and cooperation among all workers. The protagonist is an erstwhile rebellious lad who reconsiders having run away from home when he learns of his father's death. As the nineteenth-century reader would expect, the lad vows to support his widowed mother and little sister, but the consequence of this resolve is that he cannot afford to quit the dangerous bridge-building job. Really, it comes as no surprise that the happy ending has Jimmie employed in an office job, thus maintaining his family's class position.

The KOL preached that "productive labour should be properly rewarded and respected, and industrial society should have democracy and cooperation as its more human organizing principles" (Heron 23). The enemy was anyone "who lived off the labour of others, or who blocked productive labour" such as monopolists and land speculators (Heron 23). Incidentally, the only groups actually barred from membership were bankers, lawyers, gamblers, and saloon-keepers. In order to promote camaraderie, the KOL conducted meetings similar to those of the fraternal lodges with secret handshakes, passwords, and symbols, all with the aim of binding the members together. In addition, they created all sorts of social gath-

erings: picnics, balls, musicals, parades, and public celebrations (24).

Employers responded by firing and blacklisting KOL members and brought in strike-breakers. Other circumstances rose against them as well: the Canadian economy suffered a down-turn, rather severe by the early 1890s; the leadership of the KOL was weak and divided; and the Knights tended to focus on the grand long-term goals rather than addressing immediate needs. The Knights of Labor sounded a call for pure choices in life, and while they had some impressive successes, their revolution was more ethical than economic (24). By the end of the 1890s, industrial capitalism was entrenched and workers saw the need to find a secure place within the system (22-29). In short, the KOL as a labour movement folded as quickly as it rose. Similarly, at the end of MacFarlane's tale, Haskery's gang simply goes its way; the men vanish into the great mass of indistinguishable faces of the working class. Nevertheless, the tale of "Haskery's Gang" proves that as a corollary to the ubiquitous social gospel preached by the middle and upper classes, the KOL's influence continued beyond its formal presence.

Unions were organized in the Atlantic maritime provinces with varying amounts of success in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but no civil engagement of the working-class touched those outlaws of the seacoast — the wreckers and scavengers. The modern reader tends to associate the romance of the outlaw with rugged cowboys of the wild west and swashbuckling pirates on the high seas, but, in fact, this collection of nineteenth-century periodical literature contains very few of that genre.

Historically, piracy was seen as an act of necessity whose moral dimensions were a subjective notion. Three kinds of commerce-raiders can be recognized as being supported by all the European empires as they grasped for power. There is the pirate who acts beyond the law, having no authority for plundering; the privateer who is hired by a state to attack specific targets, but who is subject to law; and the state navy who conducts a particular government's seizures of certain goods (Starkey 1). All classes participated in piracy to some degree, so that "piracy and privateering shared a continuum from completely illegal to entirely authorized attacks on private property" (Ritchie 10). The shared interest in such acts created a growing respectability among the upper levels of activity as the English gained the reputation as being the "nation of pirates." As the empire grew, it worked to the advantage of the Royal Navy to pirate the pirates (Ritchie 12). Perhaps surprising to us, the middle classes supported piracy when it suited them. When North American port towns wanted any kind of trade goods, buying them from pirates was just fine. As soon as the merchants got set up and prosperous, they didn't need the pirates, stopped supporting them, and joined the anti-piracy forces (17).

Many sea-going peoples continued to practice piracy throughout the nineteenth century as a traditional activity of the labouring class. Piracy

was viewed by the lower classes as a way to at least approach equalizing the differences in income between them and the ship owners. As Rediker describes the practise, "It was a volatile, serpentine tradition of opposition — now latent, now mobilized — within both maritime and working-class culture. Within the history of early modern Atlantic radicalism it reared its head again and again, emerging as a distinctly proletarian form of republicanism" (29). This thinking can be seen in Norman Duncan's "A Lad O'Wits": when a major storm blows a schooner into harbour and strands her on a big rock, the local wreckers arrive like swarms of black flies to pillage. The skipper in the tale describes their reasoning with understanding tolerance, a tolerance rooted in a very middle-class social-gospel perspective:

> They're an honest, good-hearted, God-fearin' folk in the main; but they believe that what the sea casts up belongs to men who can get it, and neither judge nor preacher can teach them any better. Here lies the Wigwam, stranded, with a wonderful list to starboard. They'll think it no sin to wreck her. I know them well. 'Twill be hard to keep them off, once they see that she's high and dry.

Seen as their right to accept gifts from the sea, the lower-class participants nevertheless observe certain rules of the game: it's illegal to board so long as one crew member is alive and on board. The wreckers try to trick young Andy to leave the boat, but he meets their tricks in a contest of wits. Drowsiness gradually overcomes him; when he goes below, the wreckers board. Only when he puts a lighted candle into a power keg and threatens to blow them all up do they leave.

Readers accustomed to the healthy good looks of the stereotypical Imperial boy hero must adjust their conceptual lenses here, for Duncan describes his young hero in antithetical terms: "He was pallid and thin, ill-grown, with that look of frailty which a tendency toward the lung trouble imparts." In short, he is the class inversion of the hero of noble birth. Duncan's characterization continues: "But there lay a light in his eyes which spoke better words of the spirit within. For quick, indomitable nerve, for readiness of resource in an emergency, there was not a lad in Ruddy Cove, where emergencies are frequent, not a lad of them all who could compare with him." Here we have the theme of egalitarianism of spirit that was part of the social gospel, if not of the economic or class stratifications of nineteenth-century Canada.

In a fascinating non-fiction piece published in 1889 by J. Macdonald Oxley entitled "The Wreckers of Anticosti," we read of the ghoulish and horrid traditions of shipwreck and starvation on the ugly Anticosti Island located in the mouth of the beautiful St. Lawrence River. The article culminates in a sketch about the pirate Louis Olivier Gamache, the Wizard of Anticosti as he was called, a particularly flamboyant and successful wrecker

who attempted to stay within socially acceptable limits, thus conforming in many ways with the types we have come to recognize in the romance of the outlaw.

Perhaps there is also a romance of weather and terrain, for the idea that Canadian fiction treats climate and topography as another character impinging fully on both plot and conflict resolution holds true for this collection of nineteenth-century periodical literature. Life in the wilderness, whether by land or by sea, involves danger, unending toil, hardships resulting from lack of food and skills, and often outright privation because of the enormous expanses of uninhabited land between cities and even towns. To an increasingly urban readership in England and the United States, the Canadian wilderness settings and the extremities of weather were viewed as attributes of an exotic setting, on a par with tales of India or Africa.

Exoticism of setting is an identifiable pattern for adventure fiction of the medieval prose romances, right down to the adventure tales produced about working-class Canadian protagonists. "Among the Labrador Eggers," published in 1885, is structured on a remarkably episodic plot. Event after event grow from each other, their plots increasingly unconventional until the story seems to stop only because of publication requirements. The tale involves bizarre and even horrific events that tie these plots to the exoticism of the early romances of knightly valour in foreign lands. The events and characters in Wiswall's tale are as strange as if they, too, had occurred in a distant, imaginary land in the Medieval romance tales where giants, ogres, Saracens, and exotic races plot mayhem and murder against the traveling knights. The setting of the tale, an out-of-the-way Newfoundland out-port and Labrador's coastal islands, becomes an exotic locale in the sense that it is far from the reader's typically urban experience. Wiswall superimposes on the conventions of the Imperial boy-hero a *joie de vivre* of the rough-and-ready adventurer accustomed to affecting his own destiny. Life and death realities create a poignancy often missing from tales structured according to the principles of the society at large which privileges personal safety, a core value of the middle and upper classes.

The heroes in this tale are two young "Newfies" who are caught in a small boat taking fish off the trawls as a fog rolls in. Since they have no compass in the dory, they become lost at sea. The subsequent storm drives the boat to the southern coast of Labrador where they go ashore and spend the night in a tilt with ashes falling deep around them from burning moss beds, while the local wolves run to and fro, their jaws snapping. The next morning the boys sight a curious old craft skippered by an old woman in a red petticoat, wearing a blue drilling short frock, a fox fur hood, and shoes shined with egg yolks. Mere Violette "had a straggling gray beard, and her hands surpassed a railroad navvy's for size and roughness" (39). Her crew of three men includes her two sons and a French-Canadian boy they had kidnapped from another egger. They spoke "a curious, mixed dialect of

Canadian-French and provincial English. It was neither one nor the other; and they used words of which no one but themselves knew the meaning. The cursing, in which they were ingenious and proficient, was done in a language having English for its basis." Here we have a description of the exotic Other, as strange and monstrous as the creatures and heathens who people the sixteenth-century version of the Valentine and Orson tale.

The boys exhibit their pluck and ingenuity by learning from their captors how to collect the eggs of wild birds from cliffs and crannies without breakage. This relatively bucolic activity is interrupted by Mere Violette's bad dream which later unfolds in reality with highly gothic twists and turns, in which humans are equally as violent as Nature. Shipwrecked a second time on an uninhabited island, the boys beat off savage wild geese, compete with local bears in scavenging food from wrecks, and somehow save themselves from freezing and starving through a long Canadian winter.

After each success by the protagonists, Wiswall succumbs to the spirit of the genre and the tale spins on with the adventures literally coming to the boys. When an ice floe pounds the island, the boys first discover a Squawpee Indian and squaw frozen to death, the tattooed lines showing on their cheeks, and still wearing their seal-skin jackets. Next comes a live moose which the boys tie up, only to have it escape in the night. The evil crew of the egger schooner turn up again, load up the boys' provisions and steal their dory. Once more the heroes look forward to starvation. In a sudden twist, the boys overpower the crew. Just when the reader thinks the adventures over, a white whale of the Arctic hits their boat, causing a leak. Before they sink, a steamer from Quebec bound for Liverpool stops for them despite the Captain's irritation about the delay. In England the boys part. The French-Canadian boy goes out with a sealing steamer and, supposedly, on to new adventures. The two "Newfies" at long last return to Canada in the manner of the early Valentine and Orson tales in which the twins finally return home at the end of their knightly adventuring among exotic peoples and lands. Stories such as Wiswall's clearly co-opt the structure and inventive exoticism of medieval romance and transpose it to the late nineteenth-century working class of Canada.

To this point in my paper I have identified groups of tales according to the kind of toil that constitutes the setting. From this point on I will also connect work-settings with several groups of British gentlemen adventurers who left their early imprint on Canada beginning in the seventeenth century, an impression that would last through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The first was the Hudson's Bay Company, a group of noblemen brought together by trade and exploration in the New World. Despite their dominance, when the periodical fiction under investigation here does take up a Hudson's Bay Company story it is primarily as historical fiction. Consequently, the effects of this group of noblemen adventurers on working-class culture will be discussed in a later essay.

A second group to bring aristocratic class values to the colony, British North America, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the military, comprising first French and then British officers and troops stationed in Canada. As members of a well-educated, socially adept, aristo-military class, the officers brought their upper-class affiliations to bear upon the cultural affairs of colonial Canada. Certainly the founding of the North-West Mounted Police in 1873 and their deployment to the West to combat liquour, lawlessness, and First Nations/Métis unrest follows patterns brought to Canada by the aristo-military classes of these two nations. NWMP uniforms, for example, were copied from those of the British in the Crimean War era, and their motto is one consistent with the knightly codes of chivalry: *Maintiens le droit* / Uphold the Right. The periodical literature, however, contains very few Mountie stories; instead, the glorification of the Canadian Mountie came about through cinema productions in the United States from the 1920s onward.

Marjorie Pickthall's "Blizzardy Bill," published in 1910, describes a young Peigan boy's devotion to a particular Mountie. After bringing a group of NWMP back to the fort through a blinding blizzard and finding his hero missing, he returns to the freezing gale to find him. The young fellow is successful — he saves his hero's life — but at the sake of his own eyesight. The narrator extols the Native's courage and heroism and mourns the tragic loss of sight but without ever examining why the powerless worship those with power. Both in plot and characterization, the tale proceeds against the twenty-first-century appreciation of multicultural values. Repeatedly, the narrator denies comprehension of the boy's act of self-sacrifice and, by so doing, in the end has valorized aristo-military dignity of the Mounties in contrast to the helpless squalor and degradation of the young blinded Indian (a term routinely associated with First Nations people in the periodical literature of the nineteenth century).

Such values reflect a sense of latent racism and class prejudice redolent throughout the Imperial literature of the British Empire. The same racial intolerance can be found in medieval prose romances as the knight leaves for wars against members of all other races, religions, colours, and creeds. This aspect of Imperial adventure literature stands out to modern readers as morally repulsive in any age, yet it was thought fit for publication for youths in one of the more popular and prestigious journals of the nineteenth century.

A third group from Britain who brought their social élan and capital to Western Canada late in the nineteenth century were the rancher barons. They leased immense tracts of land in the West from the government, constructed homes on the purchasable sections, built up good quality herds of cattle, and established the top echelon of the Western Canadian ranching culture as a rebirth of the English landed gentry. Lewis Gwynne Thomas (*Ranchers' Legacy*) and David H. Breen (*Canadian Prairie*) create in their his-

tories of cattle ranching in the West a legacy of high culture transplanted from Eastern Canada and England to the Canadian west via the rancher barons. This view goes essentially unchallenged by historians, despite Warren H. Elofson's claim, in *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves* (2000), that the contribution of the working-class cowhands needs to be told in addition to and as a reality check for that of the ranch owners.

Out of this mix another paradoxical pairing appears in the short adventure fiction: the unskilled aristocrat who engages in the lower-class occupation of cow hand. The British author of boy's adventure stories Argyll Saxby, despite an obvious lack of accurate first-hand experience, in 1901 published an account of ranch life in western Canada in "Chums Again: A Story of Modern Ranche Life." Ted and Dick, teenage products of the British public schools, vie for superiority in horse riding skills. Ted demonstrates all the codes of gentlemanly sportsmanlike conduct: modesty, pluck, loyalty, daring, skill, and common sense. Dick's error is in not quite living up to the standard of the true boy of Empire; the author's error is in assuming that the accustomed velocity of the adventure tale will ameliorate his use of bald, classist stereotype.

The difference in name and temperament of the boys' horses tips us off to likely patterns of conflict. As it happens, Ted's approach one day so startles Dick's high-spirited horse "Dandy" that it runs away with him; Ted gives chase on his own solid, trustworthy horse "Bess." Dick turns around on his runaway horse to show Ted his terrified face while headed directly for the edge of a river bank. Fifty yards from the brink, Ted lassos the head of the runaway horse from a position directly behind. Practically speaking, even if the heights of the two horses were significantly different so as to allow such a rescue, the distance would be too short for this to actually occur. In any event, Saxby has it that Dandy is killed by the roping — just retribution for lawlessness, of course — yet the rider catapulted from Dandy's back suffers no serious injury. Dick dusts himself off, thanks Ted, who modestly defers all credit to his trusty horse "Bess," whereupon the quarrel is mended and the boys swear to be chums for life.

The tale's narrative failure arises from the author's refusal to infuse the aristocratic ethos with enough realistic detail from the working-class experience of ranching to make it vibrant. No literature could be less realistic than the adventure tale's progenitor, the medieval romance; however, one of the strengths of the adventure genre over the ages has been its capacity to adapt to the prevailing literary climate. In the late nineteenth century some degree of literary realism was absolutely required. This tale leaves us only with a tenuous affirmation of upper-class solidarity between the boys.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, a fourth group of wealthy, educated British gentlemen brought their class influence to Canada as Britain experienced an acute problem over what to do with the second and subsequent sons of the family. Patrick A. Dunae's *Gentlemen Emigrants* (1981)

discusses this stereotype in depth. Raised in gentry surroundings with an education in the classics, the same as the oldest son who would inherit the estate, the younger son(s) would inherit no lands, perhaps a dower of some sort as did his sisters, but otherwise he would be penniless. Traditionally, they took a position in either the military or the clergy. These "extra" young men were very literally supernumerary to Britain's economy, and as Britain's empire grew, they immigrated to various colonies. Canada received a generous share of "remittance men," so-called by the locals because of the stipend they often received from their families in England. This group of émigrés brought with them to the community an influx of cash, an impractical public-school education, and an appreciation for the finer aspects of culture.

For several reasons, the British "remittance man" often becomes the butt of humour in Canadian adult literature: his classical education has left him unsuited for any practical work, his income has precluded his need for gainful employment, and his snobbery in a country driven by the working class renders him a myopic fool. H. Mortimer Batten's 1913 tale "Over Lonely Bridge" features a remittance man who outlives his allowance, but in this story it is not a matter for humour. Argos Joe lives in a mining camp in Alberta. The narrator finds personal qualities to encourage, despite his laziness, and observes that sometimes the opportunity to prove one's mettle through a noble action doesn't come up in a person's life: "Chance is a fine thing.... There's many a poor chap starves for the want of it" (1110). (Here "starves" is used in the sense of the spirit going without sustenance.) The following tale is how Joe rises to his "chance": a forest fire has destroyed a mountain village, so Argos Joe and the narrator attempt taking supplies via train to alleviate the suffering. Meanwhile, the tracks are being engulfed by flame. With the odds greatly against him, Joe outruns the fire, delivers the supplies, and becomes a hero to the neighbouring townspeople, who raise a purse in his honour. He says, "Money!... I don't want the money. It's been my curse all my life, and I want to get away from it" (1117). Instead, Argos Joe directs his lawyer to use the money in the reconstruction of the homes destroyed by the fire.

Patrick Dunae's work is a useful study in conjunction with the young adult fiction of the British periodicals because of the way it shows the Canadian side of the problem. The British authors for young adults explored Canada (sometimes from their armchairs it seems) according to the stereotypes in which the young man survives amidst heroics, achieves with ease, and prevails despite the odds against him. Dunae's history takes up the story as a working-class Canadian would tell it: young Britons situated against the harsh realities of life with no training to prepare them for work of any kind in a new land. This is Argos Joe's world.

The last half of the nineteenth century was a time of railway building to connect outlying farming and lumbering districts with major waterways

in order to move Canadian goods, largely raw materials, to more lucrative markets in the United States and overseas. Essentially, the railways were constructed with privately-owned funds from corporations and financial subsidies from the federal government, but British investors — the fifth group of Englishmen to effect large-scale influence in Canada — provided the seed money.

During these years Canada continued to grow in physical size. In 1871 at the Treaty of Washington, Canada and the United States agreed on the forty-ninth parallel as the boundary between the two nations. Then, in 1880, Canada expanded into the northlands when Britain transferred her claim to the Arctic Archipelago to Canada. Finally, Canada grew in size as railroads opened up the interior. By 1885, the Canadian Pacific Railway had connected East to West across the enormous expanse of the prairies and through the massive heights of the Rocky Mountains. Rail transport remained costly and had to be subsidised by the government, but the cost was borne in order to increase trade and manufacturing throughout the country. Thus, railroads conveyed an aura of dynamism and exclusivity that captured authors' imaginations. Ironically, the most gigantic physical efforts in Canada's history — the building of the railways — is never written about from the point of view of those whose labour actually created it. Largely Chinese, East Indian, and Southern European, the workers were invisible to the middle-class authors who wrote the periodical fiction. Instead, we read about the passengers of the railway — the financiers and the middle- to upper-class businessmen who could afford the price of a ticket. Several of the better Canadian writers for young adults reflect a fascination with the railroads and write stories of compelling adventure with locomotives as key features in the action.

Many of the tales I have examined employ a narrative frame. One such popular frame is redolent of campfire yarns, for it is a group of men sitting in the heightened camaraderie of a smoking car on a Canadian train telling their adventures. These alleged narrators are never working-class men who built the tracks, for railway prices tended to limit fares to management-level employees, but the characters of their tales often are. One might also expect authors to incorporate railroad tales into the cult of manliness as happened with the cowboy stories of the western plains, but such is not the case in E.W. Thomson's tale about a disastrous ride on the Canadian Pacific Railway published in 1886. "The Story of a Scar: A Tale of the Far West" contains no bravado for noble deeds done for the sake of honour; in fact, it even reverses the customary cues that clothing type and bone structure stereotypically contribute to class distinction. In the story, there is no correspondence between physical appearance and positive personal qualities such as good judgement. Further, the story makes no connection between venerable age and wisdom, nor does it set up rewards for good choices or punishment for wrongdoing. Stark in its realism, the story ap-

proaches cold, terrifying naturalism. In short, there is no warmth in the universe it creates. And make no mistake: it is a working-class universe that it describes.

The frame for the story is the accident report of a young man working as a section engineer for the CPR. Essentially, the "walking-boss" (the foreman) at the gravel pit bullies his men, who finally rise in revolt against him. Management learns of the disturbance via the telegraph and they send Jack Nicolson to negotiate on-site. Speed, therefore, is a necessity. The old driver, Ditson, is described in terms which make him appear to be the hero: "Clad in sober grey tweed, with snow-white long hair, close-shaven face, skin of a clear healthy pallor, bright blue eyes, big hooked nose, and square jaw, the old man had much more the appearance of a well-to-do, venerable business man, than of the desperate character that his title of 'Demon driver' would seem to declare" (7).

The action focuses on the dangerous manner in which Ditson conducts the train. In fact, Ditson's every motion alarms Charley, the stoker, as the train smashes through wild birds, a herd of sheep, and a lone cow. Finally, thoroughly irrational from fear of the immense speed of the engine, the stoker jumps out of the runaway train to his death. The young section engineer is knocked unconscious, and when he regains his senses, the train is derailed in a ploughed strip close to the track and Ditson is lying dead beside him without a wound showing. The last line of the tale states that the bully at the pits, Toler the foreman, "got clear away and is still highly prized as a walking-boss" (8). This ending suggests that purported working-class violence toward the antagonism of a remote management tended to be ineffectual. From a working-class perspective, justice was not a customary outcome.

The editors of *Youth's Companion* followed strict moral codes in the selection of stories, as did the other periodicals, and they advertised them as a list of rules for writers intending to submit manuscripts to follow. Egregious violence was expressly rejected, yet "The Story of a Scar" was republished three times in both the United States and Great Britain in the space of fifteen years. Why did the editors allow such deviations from their codes? I maintain that because the violence was not gratuitously inserted as in the "bloods," but a direct result of specific actions or causes and told without gory or sentimental elaboration, tales of this sort evaded the censors. The editors knew well that the heart-pumping thrill of action sold their paper. Class differences spell conflict and conflict is exciting.

While the adventure tale originated in the social, ideological, and political needs of the ruling class from medieval times, over centuries it has been co-opted by the working-class and fused to their value system. Agents of this devolution have generally come from the middle class. The Sunday Schools of both England and Canada cheaply produced stories extolling literacy and education, the Knights of Labor trade union (itself based on images of nobility)

translated upper-class imperatives into workers' lives, and middle-class authors taught Imperial values in working-class settings to generations of young readers. As we have seen, many of the stories are rather grim narratives of plucky teenagers who must act on their own, without access to advice or help from adults. So, too, the aristocratic knight adventurer must also leave home, often alone, with his mettle and manhood, even his life, at stake in the inevitable fight against formidable foes.

Gillian Avery observes that in the 1870s the gulf between the classes began to close in the children's literature of England, and by the 1890s the working-class boy's ethic had changed to that of the gentlemen class because England was by then almost completely urban (27). What Avery implies but does not say directly — and what I believe in fact happened — was that the aristocratic upper-class ethic had percolated through the class stratum until the lower classes adopted it unwittingly in their efforts toward survival. A similar movement can be found in Canadian adventure fiction, for the values of the upper classes everywhere inform the ethic behind working-class protagonists.

In the tales of adventurous youths who live lives of hard work, either by choice or by necessity, the success of the protagonist tends to be based on a combination of individual competence and personal worth rather than solely on class lines. Given the very limited upward mobility possible as late as the turn of the twentieth century, the class indicators in this collection of periodical literature demonstrate how effectively the ideology of the upper class works, for it is spread like a leavening agent throughout the tales.

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Jean Stringam *is an assistant professor in the Children's Literature Division of the English Department at Southwest Missouri State University. Her publications focus on Canadian short fiction in nineteenth-century periodicals for youth.*