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Jerome K. Jerome, Masculinity and the Parody of Urban Escape: 'Sunday-School Slops'.

by David A. Ibitson

Jerome K. Jerome's novel *Three Men in a Boat* (1889) sees three friends, Harris, George, and J., who, becoming concerned about their health, decide that the only remedy is to take a boating trip out of London and up the Thames. At the start of their journey, they find themselves surrounded by a "small crowd" of shop-boys, led by Biggs's boy (Biggs being the local greengrocer), an individual "more than usually villainous in the boy-line".¹ Prompted by the suggestion from another youth that the Three Men are clearly "a-going to cross the Atlantic in a small boat", Biggs's boy announces that "they ain't a going to cross the Atlantic [...] they're a-going to find Stanley".² At the time of *Three Men in a Boat's* publication, Henry Morton Stanley was once again the focus of national attention, having led an expedition to the Congo in 1887 to find Emin Pasha. This evocation of Stanley, and by association David Livingstone, signposts how the up-river journey of *Three Men in a Boat*, beset with problems of packing, camping and encounters with unruly natives, functions as a parody of late-Victorian models of adventure narratives.³

However, the mock-imperial journey of the Three Men, also acts upon a more domestic parodic target: the growing number of programmes which aimed to get British youths out of the city and into the countryside for the good of their health.⁴ George's suggestion of a river journey is entirely in keeping with this contemporary enthusiasm for urban escape: "He said we should have fresh air, exercise and quiet; the constant change of scene would occupy our minds (including what there was of Harris's)".⁵ It is through this desire for "fresh air" that *Three Men in a Boat* signifies an expansion of its parody to disassemble the importance placed on conditioning a particularly vital national resource: the

English Boy. *Three Men in a Boat* together with Jerome's following two novels, *Diary of a Pilgrimage* (1891) and *Novel Notes* (1893), work as a critique of concerns of domestic masculine development. Indeed, these themes would continue to be prominent in his works: *Paul Kever* (1902) also attacks unrealistic expectations of masculine adventure, while the return of the Three Men in *Three Men on the Bummel* (1900) would parody ideas of imperial heroism and the generic youthful pluck of "boys' own" romance.

However, it is at the beginning of the 1890s that these themes find their strongest expression, and viewing Jerome's early novels in the light of each other strengthens their parodic action. This examination reveals the extent to which Jerome's parodies mimic and undermine both colonial and domestic imperial narratives, complicating and re-defining conceptions of Victorian masculinity. They provide a greater and more nuanced understanding of the interaction of these late nineteenth-century concerns and the extent to which imperial adventure tropes were interrogated by popular culture.

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On 19th September 1864, Livingstone addressed the British Association in Bath, giving an account of his African explorations. However, when discussing the topic of "civilizing and Christianizing the African" his speech turned to matters much closer to home:

The best way of treating these degraded people must always be very much like that which is pursued in Ragged Schools. Their bodily wants must be attended to as the basis of all efforts at their salvation.⁶

Imperialism, heroism, the Church and adventurous travel are all united with a necessity to rectify the body. Of course, the sickly body in question was not just the physical body, but also a body of people, which the Ragged School Union, founded in 1844, was intended to cure.⁷

In the years immediately leading up to *Three Men in a Boat*, its own *Quarterly Record* informs us that the Union was helping children to “see the green fields and to breathe the fresh air”, and to move from the “close atmosphere of the London court to the health-giving air of the country”;⁸ that they were providing “Fresh Air and Change for the Poor”;⁹ and of their role in “giving ailing and weakly children a fortnight’s country air”.¹⁰ The Ragged Schools were, however, part of a much wider trend. Pamela Horn notes the founding in 1884 of the Country Holiday Fund, by the Charity Organisation society, to “provide fresh air” for children;¹¹ while on 25th June 1881 *The Times* made an appeal “for funds to give a day in the country to the children and others” of thirteen schools and institutions.¹² By the time the Fresh Air Fund began in 1892, it was merely the latest expression of an already established social trope. Occurring before the Fresh Air Fund’s foundation, but referencing the concerns that would result in it, George’s desire for “fresh air” and exercise situates *Three Men in a Boat* in this ongoing concern.

This is signalled by the narrative prominence of youths. It is, after all, shop boys who terrorize the men at the outset of the journey, and who explicitly refer to the idea of heroic adventure with the mocking evocation of Stanley. Later, a similar allusion resurfaces on the Thames where “small boys on the bank” harass a man being towed by two oblivious companions.¹³ When, later, a “rude boy” and his “lagging chum” compare a stranded punter to “a real monkey on a stick”, it is yet another taunt with exotic and colonial connotations.¹⁴ Such encounters serve to highlight the extent to which J., as the narrator, dwells on childhood anecdotes, essentially spending significant amounts of the novel as a child.

He mentions that his current disinclination for work is merely a continuation of a malaise that has afflicted him since childhood, that “as a boy, the disease hardly left me”.¹⁵ He reminisces about doing “a good deal of rafting in various suburban brickfields”, and “as a boy” sailing in Yarmouth with a friend, emulating “pirates and other seafaring people” only

to subsequently crash their boat.¹⁶ The association of the Three Men with such activities is a suggestive one. Since such anecdotes are intended to cast light on or critique events on the river, itself shorthand for an arena of imperial heroism, the implication is that the Three Men are in effect nothing but overgrown schoolboys.

Attention must be paid at this point to the professional status of the Three Men. George, we are told, “goes to sleep at a bank from ten to four each day, except Saturdays, when they wake him up and put him outside at two”.¹⁷ Although the jobs of the other two are not revealed, one can assume that they are office or shop workers; J. and George actually share lodgings, presumably because their jobs are not well-paying enough to allow them to live on their own. Indeed, Jerome himself had been a railway clerk and a solicitor’s clerk. Jonathan Wild judges the Three Men to be clear clerk figures (albeit ones benefiting from relative “embourgeoisment”), and is of the view that the lack of detail about Jerome and Harris’s jobs is “evidently designed to avoid the impression that his characters were in fact ‘cockney’ clerks aping their betters”.¹⁸ If so, it did not work. In its review of *Three Men in a Boat*, the *Saturday Review* fully delineates the perceived offensiveness of Jerome’s novel. Harris, George and J. are “without any other mission”, according to the anonymous critic, “than that of enjoying themselves innocently, vaguely, lazily, ignorantly, like other clerks from banks and lawyer’s offices”.¹⁹ Its fidelity to real life is judged to be the book’s only merit: “if we do not consider it as ‘documents’ we shall not consider it at all”.²⁰

In Wild’s documenting of caricatures of the “hopeless clerk” one can easily see a pretention to an unachieved manhood.²¹ As Wild shows, such representations do pose questions about the status of the clerk’s masculinity, and there is left the definite impression that clerks are not exactly “men”.²² Rather than the domesticated, feminized masculinity that Arlene Young detects in the mocking portrayal of clerks in the mid-nineteenth century, *Three Men in a Boat* highlights a perceived stymied maturation; not necessarily a lack of manliness,

but a lack of adult manliness.²³ Here we find the Three Men a variation on Wild's unmanly clerks. After all, the *Saturday Review* criticized *Three Men in a Boat* for its re-creation of "the world of idle youth", with its obvious connotations of a vulgar perpetual immaturity.²⁴ Whereas Stanley sought an idealized man in David Livingstone, the Three Men are in search of an idealized manhood on the river. By associating them with an inherently juvenile activity, their mimicry of urban escape programs confers upon them suspicions of arrested development.

Such infantilization has been noted by William J. Scheick who observes that the Three Men are "derisively compared to children throughout the satire", "childish Thames explorers" who fail to meet "Stanley's manly standards" and whose "childish notion" of a romantic idea of nature is "utterly crushed" in the course of their journey.²⁵ Furthermore, I would argue, when the character of J. expresses such childish notions it works to facilitate *Three Men in a Boat's* wry and interrogatory treatment of nature and its uses. As Scheick points out, the passage in which J. eulogizes at length about the world "sweet as she was in those bygone days" illustrates this naivety. However, this is interrupted by Harris, who punctures J.'s sentimental reverie with the more prosaic "how about when it rained".²⁶ The punch-line only works with the recognition that what precedes it is ridiculously romanticized, set up purely to be dismantled by Harris's interjection. J. may be naive, but *Three Men in a Boat* is not, and it is the knowingness of J.'s naivety with which the novel's utilization of youths and childhood escape programs must be viewed. Simultaneously referencing juvenile imaginative escape and the work of youth organisations, the comic construction of the Three Men as schoolboys is used for comedic effect in reducing such efforts. They are ostensibly the butt of the joke, but the porous and democratic nature of parody inevitably means that these source texts are also subjected to subversive critique.

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However bound up with concepts of imperial vigorousness these escape programs already were, this connection would be emphasized even more with the arrival of the Boys' Brigade which combined escape with overt militaristic enthusiasm. Founded in 1883 in Glasgow by businessman William Alexander Smith, the initial aim of the Boys' Brigade was to provide occupation and discipline for boys who were too old for Sunday school but too young for the YMCA. The promotion and strengthening of Christian faith in the boys was a key concern, to be achieved by emphasizing its masculinity and "presenting that view of Christianity to which we knew their natures would most readily respond".²⁷ By the year of *Three Men in a Boat's* publication, there were 85 Boys' Brigade companies in England and Wales, with a total of 3,714 members (in Scotland the figures were much higher, with 10,613 boys dispersed among 232 companies).²⁸

It was not just spiritual and moral health which the Brigade sought to shore up, however, and expressions of the familiar urban escape trope would soon surface in its promotional rhetoric. In an 1897 article on a Plymouth company of the Boys' Brigade much is made by the *Boy's Own Paper* of the fact that "all boys, especially those who live in the courts and alleys and narrow streets of crowded towns" should have country excursions "where there are no high buildings to shut out the sky, and no smoky atmosphere for the sun to filter through".²⁹ Importantly, it is not only the boys who are to benefit, but the nation itself. Such is evident when the *Boy's Own Paper* notes that "the boys like the sea, and it is a fortunate thing for England that this is so, for she needs many sailors".³⁰

The escape of the Boys' Brigade bridges the gap between mere countryside excursion and the energetic manliness of the imperial hero. It is not merely escape, but muscular exercise which was to provide England with a magic bullet for urban decadence. Camping trips offered by the Boys' Brigade, and which started in 1886, were seen to provide something vital. Springhall records the importance placed by the leaders of early Edwardian

camps on the idea of countryside travel for its own beneficial sake.³¹ Similarly, in 1891 a letter printed in *The Times* called attention to the work of the Diocesan Council for the Welfare of Young Men in running a camp at Deal. Their aim was to form a brigade “on lines somewhat similar to those on which the ‘Boys’ Brigade’ was founded”; namely “discipline”, “self-respect” and “manliness”.³²

The necessity of masculinizing action is signalled almost immediately in *Three Men in a Boat*, with a doctor’s prescribing of beefsteak and bitter for a bout of hypochondria that J. suffers from after the reading of a medical text convinces him that “the only malady I could conclude I had not got was housemaid’s knee”.³³ This scene acts to confirm Peter Bailey’s assessment of ale and roast beef as “sacraments in a continuing mythology of national superiority and class identity”.³⁴ Perhaps Bailey had in mind, as an historic example, Henry Fielding’s ballad “The Roast Beef of Old England”, with its claims of national and bodily improvement: “When mighty roast beef was the Englishman’s food, It ennobled our hearts, and enriched our blood”.³⁵ But despite J.’s culinary concession to manly nationalism, the parodic displacement of these social concerns ensures that the Three Men’s journey does not stay a mere reverent recreation of a Boys’ Brigade holiday.

This is not the only impact food has on Jerome’s Brigade burlesque. In Chapter Seven, before he and J. have picked up George, Harris expresses a desire to see “Mrs Thomas’s tomb” at Hampton Church; “Who is Mrs Thomas?”, J. asks, to which Harris replies “how should I know? [...] She’s a lady that’s got a funny tomb, and I want to see it”.³⁶

J., who does not share Harris’s interest, objects to the proposed visit. Harris, however revels in tombs, and graves, and epitaphs, and monumental inscriptions, and the thought of not seeing Mrs Thomas’s grave made him crazy, He said he had looked forward to seeing Mrs Thomas’s grave from the first moment that the trip was proposed – said he wouldn’t have joined if it hadn’t been for the idea of seeing Mrs Thomas’s tomb.³⁷

Harris's mausolean enthusiasm evokes what Carolyn Burdett notes as "the appearance of archaeological themes in popular fiction", an example being the works of H. Rider Haggard, who was "especially fascinated by the excavation of ancient burial sites".³⁸ One can plainly see this expressed in "The Place of Death" of *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), or the caves of Kor in *She* (1886). Expressing a desire to visit an historical site, yet simultaneously ignorant as to its significance, professing a longstanding enthusiasm for the tomb, but never having mentioned it before, Harris's inconsistencies portray an automatic compliance with adventure conventions devoid of any reasoning. The adherence to such imperial standards is undermined as being purely formal, having no greater significance than the meaningless fulfilment of empty pretention.

After J. vetoes his proposed visit to Mrs Thomas's tomb, Harris becomes the means by which the novel's parodic mimicry is able to further focus on the ideals of masculinising travel. Towards the end of an ensuing rant against George and his job at the bank, Harris declares his intent to "get out, and have a drink".³⁹ J.'s suggestion that as their hamper contains concentrated lemonade and a gallon of water "the two only wanted mixing to make a cool and refreshing beverage" only further raises Harris's ire, thirsting as he is for stronger refreshment.⁴⁰ The result is a tirade against "such-like Sunday-school slops" as

ginger-beer, raspberry syrup, etc., etc. He said they all produced dyspepsia, and ruined body and soul alike, and were the cause of half the crime in England.⁴¹

While his interest in tombs can be seen as compatible with imperial adventure, this endorsement of alcohol over "Sunday-school slops" necessitates an oblique rejection of both the muscular Christianity of the Boys' Brigade, and of the temperant missionary Livingstone. Aptly enough, "The Roast Beef of Old England" is again evoked, this time R. Leveridge's version, which recalls "When good queen Elizabeth sat on the throne, Ere coffee and tea and such slip-slops were known".⁴² One cannot help but feel that the singer would sympathize

with Harris's penchant for spirits over the Holy Spirit, and these two versions of masculinity are pitted against each other.

In fact, urban escape was inseparable from temperance, and even more so from Sunday Schools, which had long been the providers of countryside outings.⁴³ Indeed, the whole Victorian escape phenomenon seems to have been almost entirely Church affiliated in its practice; William Smith himself was a Sunday School teacher. Of course, just as the Church was an ever-present element of organized excursions, so too was it inseparable from the idea of heroic masculinity. In his interview in the *Boy's Own Paper*, it is "manliness" that is the watchword as far as Smith is concerned, but one which is overtly Christian in nature. The officers are "Christian men of a healthy and manly type", the boys are "smart and manly", and the Brigade provides an occupation "which should be manly and robust in its constitution [...] and all that tend towards a true Christian Manliness".⁴⁴ Clearly, Harris's targeting of Sunday Schools, amidst a context of muscularly Christian ideals, is particularly loaded. This overtly Christian framework allows the Westward journey of the Three Men to act as a parodic echoing and reduction of that of the Biblical Three Wise Men, lending Harris's critique of Church-affiliated travel a rather satirical edge, and firmly setting Jerome's men in direct opposition to Sunday School standards.

With Harris's railing against 'Sunday-school slops', *Three Men in a Boat* again acts upon its adventurous source text. Stanley stresses that Livingstone's ability to survive the African climate, and by analogy his masculine status, is "due not only to the happy constitution with which he was born, but to the strictly temperate life he has ever led".⁴⁵ Livingstone in turn impresses upon Stanley that "men who have been habitual drunkards cannot live in this country, any more than men who have become slaves to other vices".⁴⁶ What these ominous "other vices" are exactly Livingstone leaves to our imagination.

Harris contests this New Testament brawn, accusing it of causing both crime and dyspepsia. They are two comically unlikely and disparate results, until one realizes that they are the very things that the Boys' Brigade was intended to rectify: physical and moral health. Despite J.'s sarcastic pretence of temperance, the conspicuous alcohol consumption of the Three Men, which would be noted by an unimpressed *Punch*, sets them at odds with the ideals of the manliness they mimic.⁴⁷ Harris's inability to articulate why he wants to visit the tomb suggests that he is driven primarily by a generic necessity of adventure fiction, and exposes the irrationality of following imperial convention. That this should also be the scene where the muscularly Christian ideology of the Boys' Brigade should be explicitly alluded to only strengthens the extent to which the Three Men's journey is a parodic recreation of escape programs. It is a process which casts the Three Men in opposition to its ideals of heroism and masculinity.

Shortly before they abandon their expedition Harris tells the others of his friend who had, on "just such another night as this" in Aldershot, slept under a canvas and had woken up the next morning "a cripple for life".⁴⁸ Significantly, the unfortunate man in question was "in the Volunteers"; such militaristic behaviour, it seems, is best left to the professionals.⁴⁹ William Smith had been a Lieutenant in the Volunteer Movement, founded in 1859; so too was Walter Mallock Gee, founder of the Church Lads' Brigade. Springhall even cites the view of *The Thames Valley Times* that the Boys' Brigade was essentially "a juvenile citizen army" facilitating "the engrafting of a religious shoot upon the military trunk" of the Volunteer Force.⁵⁰ That this was written in the same year as the publication of *Three Men in a Boat* hints at the timeliness of Jerome's parody. Importantly, the seemingly superfluous detail of Aldershot being the location of the Volunteer's fate subtly belittles these institutions. The men of the Volunteers, and thus the boys of the Brigades, may be aspirant Stanleys and

Livingstones, but their efforts are rendered bathetic by the comically mundane setting of Aldershot as an adventurous location.

With the Three Men terrorized by boys in London and on the river, the unease concerning the role of the boy in such a journey is a conspicuous one. One cannot help but think that the policy of “saving the rising generation rather than doctoring the old one”, which Springhall sees as having “arisen more acutely in the 1900s than in any other period”, is foreshadowed by *Three Men in a Boat*.⁵¹ So, if the boys of the Boys’ Brigade, with their potential harnessed by implicitly imperial ideology are manly, then what does that make the Three Men? They are left behind, part of a social group that are not catered for, worth less to imperial Britain than a malleable younger generation; one that is, paradoxically, more manly. Of course, the complementary part of this process is that as the boys increase in manliness, the Three Men inevitably decrease and become more boyish, reduced to following a program of improvement meant for schoolboys. From concerns about public health, to standards of masculinity, to nationalism, its concomitant imperialism and the health of empire this is the nexus of ideology within which the Three Men find themselves manoeuvring, amongst boys who are seen as the future protectors of the nation.

Robert Baden-Powell would provide the most explicit expression of the imperial importance of youth organisations, with *Scouting for Boys* (1908) telling his young readers “don’t be disgraced like the young Romans who lost the Empire of their forefathers by being wishy-washy slackers without any go or patriotism in them”.⁵² But with so many aspects of Baden-Powell’s social imperialism evident in his forerunners *Three Men in a Boat* reveals itself to be a prescient parody of social concerns that would only become more acute.⁵³ Jerome highlights their Victorian, fin-de-siècle origins and anxiogenic persistence.

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In *Diary of a Pilgrimage* we are presented with an escape from England that is overtly Christian in conception, with J. and his friend B. travelling to see the passion play at Oberammergau. Yet despite its Christian framework, and a clear admiration for the depiction and power of Christ's life, expressed in the chapter "Tuesday, 27th – continued", the motivation for the journey is conspicuous for its lack of pilgrimic purpose. When J. (again), the diarist, agrees to the journey, posited by B., he admits that the destination is not what appeals to him:

To tell the truth, it was the journey more than the play that tempted me. To be a great traveller has always been one of my cherished ambitions. I yearn to be able to write in this sort of strain:

"I have smoked my fragrant Havana in the sunny street of old Madrid, and I have puffed the rude and not sweet-smelling calumet of peace in the draughty wigwam of the Wild West; I have sipped my evening coffee in the silent tent, while the tethered camel browsed without upon the desert grass; [...] I have lain, wrapped in my blanket, a thousand miles beyond the shores of human life."⁵⁴

Once again, we are presented with a craving for the improving power of the journey for journey's sake of the boys' escape programs, peppered with the settings typical of boy's own adventure which facilitated imaginative travel.

Inevitably though, this fantasy is arrested and undermined by B. (Harris evidently being unavailable):

"I could go on like that without having been outside England at all. I should say:

" 'I have smoked my fourpenny shag in the sanded bars of Fleet Street, and I have puffed my twopenny Manilla in the gilded halls of the Criterion; [...] my wild career across the sandy heaths of Hampstead, an my canoe has startled the screaming wild-fowl from the sub-tropical regions of Battersea [...] I have sat in lonely grandeur in the front

row of the gallery, and wished that I had spent my shilling instead in the Oriental halls of the Alhambra.⁵⁵

Stereotypical romantic travel rhetoric is burlesqued beyond redemption, its pretensions laid bare by particularly clerkish mockery, culminating, as does *Three Men in a Boat*, at the Alhambra Music Hall. This clerkishness did not go unnoticed, with *Punch* dismissing *Diary of a Pilgrimage* as “‘Arry abroad”, and so the *Three Men*’s theme of clerkish adventure undermining ideas of heroic escape are sustained (with the inevitable association of the title with *Punch*’s own, and recently published, *Diary of a Nobody*).⁵⁶ By the time J. and B. enact comic shock at finding a footprint on the beach of a deserted Ostend, the knowing reference to the Robinsonade cements the novel’s irreverent treatment of escape.

Complaining that people exaggerate to him because “I look young and innocent”, the infantilization of clerks is again carried out by *Diary of a Pilgrimage*’s J.⁵⁷ With the comic depiction of “very young soldiers [...] they each looked about twelve years old, but may have been thirteen” and the preface’s declaration that the book aims to “secure the attention of the young and the frivolous” so that they might be “instructed” without them realizing, the attempted improvement of youths is alluded to.⁵⁸ B. even chastises J. that he is “not writing for cultured schoolboys. You are writing for mere simple men and women”; the sense of inferiority to the boy is present, as it is in *Three Men in a Boat*.⁵⁹ Combined with the inherently militaristic context of Germany itself, the rise of which as an imperial power was a source of concern at the end of the century, the militarization of youth movements is imaginatively reconstructed in the travels of J. and B.⁶⁰ When, assessing the hypnotic appeal of the German military band, J. surmises that “your mind has to follow it as the feet of the little children followed the playing of the pied piper”, the attempted militarization of youth, or the infantilization of mimetic militarism, is overt.⁶¹

Again, a Harris-like distrust of “Sunday-School slops” adds to the reductive re-creation of escape. Any burgeoning discussion of the theology of the passion play is promptly jettisoned for a purely artistic criticism. Mary is even rhetorically transformed in to “Mother Nature herself”, excising the Sunday School from the theatre, whilst also gesturing towards the fetishization of the natural world by countryside excursion programmes.⁶² J., baffled by B.’s obsession with Cathedrals, pleads with him to relinquish his ecclesiastical zeal, lest they miss out on “the places that we really ought to go to – to all the cafes and theatres and music-halls and beer-gardens and dancing-saloons that we want to visit”; after all, when it comes to churches, “one is very much like another”.⁶³ Here one can see the same abandonment of an allusory Sunday School institution in favour of the entertainments of the city that defines *Three Men in a Boat*.⁶⁴

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The parodic animation of urban escape would continue in Jerome’s *Novel Notes*. Looking at the diary which records his attempt to write a novel with three friends many years previously, the narrator sees that they had debated the character of their story’s hero. The diary reveals the narrator’s suggestion of “a Charley Buswell type”, referring to an old school friend of his: “Poor Charley, I wonder what could have made me think of him in connection with heroes; his loveliness, I suppose—certainly not his heroic qualities”.⁶⁵ Found guilty of keeping white mice and a tame rat, and later rabbits at school, he is punished. In the first case he is made to drown them, and in the second they are confiscated, shortly before rabbit pie gruesomely appears on the school menu. After each youthful transgression he swears to reform, and after the rabbit pie dinner he “performed another solemn oath-taking” after which

He read tracts, sent his spare pocket-money to assist in annoying the heathen, and subscribed to *The Young Christian* and *The Weekly Rambler*, an Evangelical Miscellany (whatever that may mean). An undiluted course of this pernicious literature naturally created in him a desire towards the opposite extreme. He suddenly dropped *The Young*

Christian and *The Weekly Rambler*, and purchased penny dreadfuls; and taking no further interest in the welfare of the heathen, saved up and bought a second-hand revolver and a hundred cartridges. His ambition, he confided to me, was to become “a dead shot,” and the marvel of it is that he did not succeed.⁶⁶

Inevitably, he is discovered and duly repents. It is a trend that continues throughout his life, vowing to do better after perceived failures: “‘Tidying up, and starting afresh’ he always called it”.⁶⁷ His sins are ambiguous, although drink and women feature among them.

Yet it is the narrator’s view that Charlie was “better than most of us”, and that “it never occurred to him that he was as other men”, while he regarded himself as “a monster of depravity”.⁶⁸ Indeed, this seems to be a preoccupation of *Novel Notes*, when the narrator recalls a boy he knew when he was living “in the East End of London [...] not quite so clean as are the good boys in the religious magazines”.⁶⁹ The implication is that no boys are. After a final “transgression”, as ambiguous as Livingstone’s talk of “other vices”, Charlie performs one last act of “tidying up” and shoots himself through the heart.

Buswell’s faults negate any possibility of heroic manliness, while *The Young Christian* and *The Weekly Rambler* carry with them more than a hint of the youth organizations of the time. In addition, they also allude to loosely associated boy’s journals such as the *Boy’s Own Paper*, which Springhall essentially casts as an inseparable wing of the muscular Christianity that defined the Boys’ Brigade.⁷⁰ The Sunday School antagonism of Harris is also present; in a wry aside during another characteristic digressive reminiscence, the narrator recalls a “God-fearing man” who “ran off about a twelvemonth ago with one of the young women who used to teach in the Sunday School”: a taboo perversion of church-prescribed escape.⁷¹

As an adult, Buswell kills himself with his revolver, the instrument of rebellion in his school days, and an object which represents his failure to live up to its enforced ideals. The revolver’s connotations of military masculinity confuse the matter more. Caught between missionary idealism and gun-toting masculinity, he fails to meet the standards of the former,

and is killed by the accoutrement of the latter. There is no escape for him, despite the narrator's view that he is no worse than anyone else. With the ineffectual bothering of "the heathen", twinned with the inefficacy of *The Weekly Rambler*, the muscular Christianity of urban escape movements, as well as a social ideal of heroic youth, is conspicuous. That he is even considered to be a fit hero for the narrator's aborted novel is significant; it is as though this is as close as an average boy or man can get to such ideals of heroism.

These ideals are consistently referenced and undermined. Another tale about a "junior partner in a large firm of tea brokers in the City" sees him move to India, since "such a life, demanding thought and action would afford his strong nature greater interest and enjoyment than [...] the cramped surroundings of civilization".⁷² The move, through his own faults, results in the death of his wife, and the reduction of himself from "a young fellow of twenty-six" to "an old man of twenty-nine".⁷³ The escape from the city has the opposite of the intended effect. Nevertheless, the aspirant authors in *Novel Notes*, while displaying an insecurity regarding their own masculinity in a refusal to make their hero a soldier, are forced to enact their own form of beneficial excursion. Failing to assemble a coherent novel, they decamp to the river, presumably hoping the driving narrative of the adventure novel will come to them more readily in such a setting.

Their sojourn proves as ineffective as that of the Three Men, with no appreciable increase in inspiration. They find, however, a reprise of *Three Men in a Boat's* infantilization: the narrator twice calls his co-authors "the boys", while he is concerned that their maid makes him and his wife "feel that we were a couple of children playing at being grown up".⁷⁴ The boat was purchased when the narrator and his wife were "ridiculously young", and, most importantly, when the four men of *Novel Notes* arrive they are harassed by the "ferry-boy" repeatedly crashing his punt into the houseboat, causing those inside to injure their heads.⁷⁵ They are, like the Three Men, subjected to a symbolic attack by a problematic youth.

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With the conflation of the boys of Jerome's novels with a collection of loosely aligned social concerns which cluster around ideas of empire and masculinity, the interpretive flexibility offered by the parodic form allows for two concomitant semantic possibilities. The antagonistic boys of *Three Men in a Boat* represent both the youthful militarism of the Boys' Brigade and, by proxy, the image of imperial masculinity that they ape. Jerome shows us a river where defenceless holiday makers are attacked by boys on the bank: an analogy for the attack on their masculinity. After all, the boys of Smith's brigade apparently have potential careers of heroism and adventure ahead of them, whereas, as the *Saturday Review* was keen to point out, the three men are "without any other mission" than their own vague and lazy trivialities.⁷⁶

The second semantic possibility is one that gestures towards a far more satirical effect. Springhall records with anecdotal evidence that a common hazard faced by the Boys' Brigade companies was verbal and physical attacks from local boys.⁷⁷ He cites Roger Peacock's, perhaps rather romanticized, testimony of "a highly organised underground movement whose purpose was to conduct a continuous guerrilla campaign against the Boys' Brigade [...] often was a drill parade conducted under a fusillade of stones and bricks".⁷⁸ Also cited is Dr. Leslie Ridge's account of the travails of the 1st Enfield Boys' Brigade company in 1888, in which "few drills went by without attacks from 'discontents'".⁷⁹ Their reports suggest that brawls with such hostile forces were common. It is not the "discontents" with whom the Three Men are aligned in this second interpretation, but rather the Brigade. Just as the Brigade boys are attacked, taunted and pelted with stones by the local youths, so too are men on Jerome's river while they are participating in the same sort of masculinizing excursion performed by the Brigade. The Three Men are symbolically equated with the Brigade, an association fortified by their own conspicuous middle-class status: despite the claims of the Brigade to reform

rough street youths, its members were more likely to be the children of a skilled and white collar middle class.⁸⁰

Crucially, the parody of the Three Men encompasses both the lower and the middle-class efforts at bodily salvation, as they themselves are both urban and suburban, both middle class and something slightly lower. They frequent the West End Alhambra theatre, yet they simultaneously portray a type that could be tarred by critics with the dropped aitch of the 'Arry, synonymous with the East End of London where the Ragged Schools and Fresh Air Fund were active. J.'s revelation that he used to play in suburban brickfields as a boy adds to this ambiguous class status. They run the gamut from lower to upper-middle class. The relativism and reluctance to acquiesce to easily defined types affects the function of the Three Men as well as their behaviour within the narrative. It allows all forms of youth programme, from East End slum youth and white-collar West-ENDER, to be the focus of their parodic gaze. But it is their clear middle-class office-worker status that highlights the Brigade's disingenuousness.

Jerome's Three Man Brigade is a burlesque complete with attacks from tribes of hostile natives who question whether they are examples of more robust masculinity than the Brigade boys themselves. By equating the Three Men with the Brigade, their imperial parody works to reveal that their secondary social hypotext, the urban escape of the Boys' Brigade, is itself an imperial parody.⁸¹ By revealing this, *Three Men in a Boat* not only has the primary disfiguring effect on the hypotext, but also inflicts a further dismantling of the very conceptual legitimacy of the target. Its own referential nature fills and illustrates the distance between the Brigade and its own source text of imperial manliness. It strips the organised escape ideal of its stable identity, rendering it nothing more than callow mimicry with borrowed ideals. Biggs's boy can be seen as mocking not necessarily the men for their own sake, but rather the perceived need to blindly follow an urban escape pattern, and so become

parodies of an image of imperial heroism. *Three Men in a Boat* ironically aligns itself with the view of Biggs's boy in mocking the pursuit of a re-creation of beneficial excursionary exertion.

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The return of the Three Men in *Three Men on the Bummel*, serves to complicate their previous rejection of urban escape. At the end of the novel, having fled domesticity to cycle around Germany's black forest, they are loath to return home. In this instance their escape is ostensibly a more positive experience than the first, and so potentially a tacit endorsement of the recreational escape philosophies of which *Three Men in a Boat* was critical. Indeed, "bummel" itself, "a journey long or short, without an end", encapsulates the idea of the efficacy of travel for its own sake.⁸² Their final reluctance to return to their families pointedly takes place next to the Rhine, which serves as a representation of the alternative masculinity endorsed by their earlier river journey. It is not geographical escape that the Three Men look for, but a temporal escape to the clerkish masculinity of their youth.

Throughout the "bummel" they undergo a process of rebellious infantilization, indulging in boyish pranks such as stealing apples, the incongruity of which still parodies ideas of adventurous heroism. This juvenilizing that they undergo, at home and on the journey, although different from that of *Three Men in a Boat*, results in the same ends. As I have argued elsewhere, the interaction of *Three Men on the Bummel* (and *Paul Kever*) with these concerns is significant in itself.⁸³ In their second appearance, the Three Men seek out the same affirmation of clerkish masculinity of their first, one just as opposed to domesticity as Livingstonian masculinity was.

The actions of all Jerome's men highlight the difference between the supposed heroism of the Brigade and the models on which it bases itself, in the same way that Biggs's boy highlights the gap between the Three Men and Stanley. Jerome's parodies subject not

only the expectations of the adventure genre to erasure, but also the social hypotext of the idea of outdoor heroism as a facilitator of imperial manliness and health; such was the latter indebted and bound up with the acceptance of the former. The escape of the Three Men, while mimicking that of the Brigade, essentially opposes it by depicting an escape not from the city, but from the Brigade's imperial model and back to London, in their eventual abandonment of the journey.

The accompanying acknowledgement of the importance of the imperial boy as an ideal figure is coupled with a touch of *schadenfreude* in that it implicitly poses the question of what is to become of such boys as Biggs's and his associates. The irony of their predicament is that they are destined for perhaps the same marginal status opposed by the Three Men. It takes the pejorative view of perpetual clerkish immaturity and utilizes its potential damaging connotations to undermine the ideal of adventurous boyhood or manly travel. If the Three Men are nothing more than comic schoolboys, then the two-way nature of parody means that it is as much a satirical assault on schoolboy movements as a comic condemnation of clerks. In *Three Men in a Boat*, *Diary of a Pilgrimage* and *Novel Notes*, urban escape is revealed to be incompatible with Jerome's conception of clerkly life, and so these novels function as a parodic lens, subjecting contemporary ideas of masculinity and nation to a comic critical enquiry and interrogation. Engaging with dialogues about imperial narratives, both fictional and real, and social concerns, Jerome's popular comic works, rather than being merely "documents", as the *Saturday Review* would have us believe, are revealed to be far more active and discursive.

Jerome is revealed as an important parodist, participating in a sophisticated proposal of, and engagement with, relativizing ideas of masculinities, rather than a monolithic national masculinity. Jerome irreverently re-shapes and defaces these concerns, adding to our critical understanding of Victorian conceptions of heroism and domestic manliness and shows them

all to be vulnerable hypotexts animated and encompassed by ideas of imperial adventure.

This allows us to re-evaluate our critical view of the function of late nineteenth-century

popular literature, providing us with a new parodic paradigm with which to study late

Victorian masculinities.

¹ Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1889), 72.

² *Ibid.*, 73, 73-4.

³ This has been noted by both William J. Scheick, "Going to Find Stanley: Imperial Narratives, Shilling Shockers, and *Three Men in a Boat*," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 50.4 (2007): 403-414, and Geoffrey Harvey, introduction to *Three Men in a Boat, Three Men on the Bummel*, by Jerome K. Jerome (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), vii-xxvi. I have also used this argument in "'A Burlesque of Art': *Three Men in a Boat*, Music Hall and the Imperial Mimicry of the Victorian Urban Explorer," in *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music*, Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen, ed. (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 35-47.

⁴ With these programmes being motivated by a perceived need for youths to escape the damaging effects of urban environments, I will be using the term 'urban escape' to refer to the movement from the city to the country.

⁵ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 16.

⁶ "Dr. Livingstone's Opinion of Ragged Schools," *Ragged School Union Quarterly Record* (October 1864), 227. Livingstone would also extol the healthy benefits of African travel in his *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857).

⁷ For details of founding and attendance figures see Pamela Horn, *The Victorian Town Child* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997).

⁸ "Children's Holidays," *Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, 11.44 (October 1886), 190, 193.

⁹ Pearl Fisher, "Fresh Air and Change for the Poor," *Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, 11.44 (October 1886), 201.

¹⁰ R. J. C., "To Our Readers," *Ragged School Union Quarterly Record*, 12 (December 1887), [202].

¹¹ Horn, *Victorian Town Child*, 172.

¹² "A Day in the Country," *The Times* (25 June 1881), 7.

¹³ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 134.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 257. The 'monkey on a stick' was a variety of children's toy, compounding the infantilization of the river traveller.

¹⁵ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 7.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 249, 261, 264.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁸ Jonathan Wild, *The Rise of the Office Clerk in Literary Culture 1880-1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 67.

¹⁹ "Three Men in a Boat," *Saturday Review* (5 October 1889), 387.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Wild, *Rise of the Office Clerk*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 87.

²³ Arlene Young, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 61.

²⁴ "Three Men in a Boat," 388.

²⁵ Scheick, "Going to Find Stanley," 408, 412, 412, 409, 409.

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- ²⁶ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 21, 22.
- ²⁷ T. C. Collings "A Chat With Major W. A. Smith," *Boy's Own Paper* (10 December 1898), 174.
- ²⁸ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 27.
- ²⁹ Archibald S. Hurd, "A Boys' Brigade Camp," *Boy's Own Paper* (27 November 1897), 140.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, 99.
- ³² F. Londin, "The Welfare of London Boys," *The Times* (2 December 1891), 8.
- ³³ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 3.
- ³⁴ Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 89.
- ³⁵ Henry Fielding, "The Roast Beef of Old England," *Popular Music of the Olden Time; A Collection of Ancient Songs, Ballads, and Dance Tunes, Illustrative of the National Music of England*, William Chappell, ed., vol. 1 (London: Cramer, Beale, and Chappell, [1859]), 636.
- ³⁶ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 102.
- ³⁷ Ibid, 107.
- ³⁸ Carolyn Burdett, "Romance, Reincarnation and Rider Haggard," in *The Victorian Supernatural*, Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 217.
- ³⁹ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 108.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 108-9.
- ⁴² R. Leveridge, "The Roast Beef of Old England," *Popular Music of the Olden Time; A Collection of Ancient Songs, Ballads, and Dance Tunes, Illustrative of the National Music of England*, William Chappell, ed., vol. 1 (London: Cramer, Beale, and Chappell, [1859]), 637.
- ⁴³ See Horn, *Victorian Town Child*, 171-2, and Ginger S. Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (London: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 108.
- ⁴⁴ Collings "A Chat With Major W. A. Smith," 174.
- ⁴⁵ Henry Morton Stanley, *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 435.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., 598.
- ⁴⁷ *Punch's* 'Baron de Book-Worms' would criticize *Three Men in a Boat's* use of slang, 'interspersed with plentiful allusions to whiskey-drinking'. See Baron de Book-Worms, "Our Booking Office," *Punch* (1 February 1890), 57.
- ⁴⁸ Jerome, *Three Men in a Boat*, 307.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, 17.
- ⁵¹ The former quote is from Baden-Powell to Town Clerks and YMCA Secretaries, 28 October 1907, qtd. in Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, 56.
- ⁵² Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, Elleke Boehmer, ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 278.
- ⁵³ Arthur Pearson, founder of the Fresh Air Fund, was consulted by Baden-Powell before he set up the Scouts, and also organized a publicity campaign for it.
- ⁵⁴ Jerome K. Jerome, *Diary of a Pilgrimage* (New York: Henry Holt, 1891), 3-5.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 5-7.
- ⁵⁶ Baron de Book-Worms, "Our Booking Office," *Punch* (16 May 1891), 239.
- 'Arry was a pejorative slang term for lower-middle class office and shop workers, young men with money to spend on bank holiday sprees; it affects the dropped aitch of the east end cockney. See Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122.
- ⁵⁷ Jerome, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, 146.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 74, v, vi.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 150.

⁶⁰ See Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 3, and Stephen Arata, "The Occidental Tourist: Dracula and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization," *Victorian Studies*, 33.4 (1990), 623-4.

⁶¹ Jerome, *Diary of a Pilgrimage*, 184.

⁶² Ibid., 156.

⁶³ Ibid., 77-8, 79.

⁶⁴ The Three Men ultimately abandon their journey before its completion, to go to the Alhambra Music Hall and a cheap French restaurant.

⁶⁵ Jerome K. Jerome, *Novel Notes* (London: Leadenhall Press, 1893), 277.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 278.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 279.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁰ John Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880-1914," in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, ed. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987), 65.

⁷¹ Jerome, *Novel Notes*, 21.

⁷² Ibid., 170, 170-1.

⁷³ Ibid., 169, 170.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁶ "Three Men in a Boat," 387.

⁷⁷ Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy," 59-60.

⁷⁸ Roger S. Peacock, *Pioneer of Boyhood* (Glasgow: Boys Brigade, [1954]), 58.

⁷⁹ Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy," 59, 60.

⁸⁰ See Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, 25-6, and Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy," 57-9

⁸¹ Simon Dentith suggests 'the usefulness of these terms 'hypotext' and 'hypertext', the former denoting the preceding or original text upon which the latter, the hypertext, performs its parodic transformation'. Dentith takes this terminology from Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality. See Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 13.

⁸² Jerome K. Jerome, *Three Men on the Bummel* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, [1900]), 327.

⁸³ D. A. Ibitson, "Authorship, Imperial Masculinity, and Parody in the Works of Jerome K. Jerome, 1886-1902" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2013), 158-165.