A "Boy's Own" view of Canada

R.G. Moyles

"Men are but children of a larger growth."
— John Dryden, *All for love*

"Bah Jove, Fathaw! I'm going to Canadaw to shoot Indians — make my fawtune and all that sort of thing, don't cher know."
— A.G. Racey cartoon, *Montreal Star, 1901*

The epigraphs above illustrate two important propositions which, when examined as a complementary pair, reveal a great deal about how Canada was (and perhaps still is) viewed by people outside its shores and about why that should have been so. The first is that the foundations of the most men's philosophies are laid in childhood — family beliefs, educational systems and children's reading all leave their indelible impression. Such foundations may not only determine the destinies of individuals but the destinies of nations as well. One does not need to be reminded of the "playing fields of Eton", or the influence of Isaac Watts, or even of the many Americans who could — for so many years — only visualize Japanese people as comic-book "Nips" to be convinced of the truth of that statement. It would, therefore, be a mistake to underestimate the powerful impact of children's stories — their books and magazines — on their later social attitudes and moral behaviour.

The second proposition is this: for much of its history Canada has been pictured, viewed or imagined, by Englishmen in particular, as either a land of snowy wastes or a vast "billowy prairie", filled with wolves and bears (both grizzly and polar), peopled by "redskins" and mounties, where adventure lay beyond every muskeg and mountain. It was variously labelled "the great lone land", "the wild north land", "the wild and wooly West" or something of a similarly intriguing nature. And certainly more than a few of the many hundreds of thousands of Englishmen who emigrated to its shores, most of whom had read Ballantyne or Kingston or *Chums* or *The Boy's Own Paper,* had just such a picture in their minds — some of them so sure of its accuracy that they arrived in Canada, like the fictional Clarence de Brown-Jones, "brandishing snowshoes, bowie knives and revolvers."[1]

Though that example is perhaps far-fetched and originally intended to ridicule the real-life emigrant, it nevertheless shows that this stereotypical picture of Canada was not fiction even though it was based on fiction. It is more straightforwardly put by Roy Carmichael, writing to English boys in 1903: "What British boy, nurtured on the thrilling tales of Cooper and Ballantyne, has not felt an almost irresistible longing to visit the scenes depicted in such glowing colours by these talented authors? Visions of an immense billowy prairie, with here and there on the horizon the peaked tepees or lodges of the noble red men, and herds of 'buffalo' browsing peacefully or stampeding in alarm as the Indian horseman, whirling his lariat, swoops down upon them — all this, and more, is conjured up at the mere mention of the magic word — 'prairie.' "[2]

Such explicit statements about attitudes and their indebtedness to romantic fiction are, of course, fairly scarce. One finds not so much clear assertions but general indications implicit in reactions to Canada (when it was finally seen) or in occasional remarks about it. One finds, for example, in Lovat Dickson's *Wilderness man* a picture of Archie Belaney — alias Grey Owl — as a boy that must have been typical of many boys, though most never espoused the myth to the extreme that Archie did.[3] "It was an age," writes Dickson, "in which children's magazines proliferated and adventure stories in weekly serial form were followed with fascinated interest." And those which Belaney followed to the point of devotion were about Red Indians. He loved camping out and tracking, and seemed, so his school history claimed, "more like a Red Indian than a respectable Grammar School Boy." It comes as little surprise, then, to find that when Dickson visited the home of Archie's maiden aunts in an effort to solve the mystery of this enigmatic man, he saw in their library, side by side with Grey Owl's own books, some "touching souvenirs of the past in the shape of a number of boys' novels and the paper-covered penny dreadfuls of the day, these being chiefly stories about Red Indians which had had a great success with boys in the early part of this century. Nearly all these much-used books were inscribed with his name in writing, and some had in the margins ink drawings he had made of Indians fighting against the white man."[4]

In other sources the references to influential reading are even less specific than that. Most writers, like Ralph Stock, take it for granted that the romantic view was the prevalent one: "For the benefit of those — and their name is Legion — who go to the Canadian North-West with the idea that cattle-ranching consists of riding over the plains in a red shirt and a Baden-Powell hat, with a revolver, a cartridge belt and lasso, let me briefly describe the work on a typical hard winter's day." Some writers merely confirm the existence of such prevalence: "Rupert Brooke had the common European fantasy about North American Indians based on the 'Red Indians' of the *Boy's own* adventure stories of his youth. Like Archie Belaney, the Englishman who later conned the world as Grey Owl, Rupert had a fascination and an empathy for what he

thought was the simple natural life of the 'noble savage'." And not a few, like S. McNaughton and Roy Carmichael simply offer vague hints (often hints of disappointment): "The traveller journeys away from Western Canada with a sense of regret at not having discovered why it should be called the 'wild and wooly west' " [states McNaughton] and "At first sight the prairie is disappointing. There are no Indians or buffaloes 'on the horizon', and the horizon itself is much nearer than is generally imagined by those of us who gained our ideas from the books of adventure in vogue in our boyhood's day" [writes Carmichael].[5]

All in all, even though such general assertions do not constitute irrefutable proof, I think we can assume, without feeling that we have cheated, that there was a widespread stereotypical view of Canada as that land of romantic adventure described earlier. It can no doubt be argued (indeed, in the case of some stereotypes such as the fictional Mountie, it has been argued) that this view owed its allegiance to such well-read books as Ballantyne's *Hudson's Bay,* or Egerton Young's *Winter adventures* or to the lesser-known but equally popular works of Robert Pocock, John Mackie, Argyll Saxby or Harold Bindloss. But, without trying to disprove that argument at all, I intend to propose here that this stereotypical image of Canada — with its omnipresent wolves and grizzlies, the cowboys with their six-shooters ever ready for marauding Indians, Mounties tirelessly tracking through snowbound wastes — was as popularly promulgated by the boys' magazines as by the juvenile novels; that the sheer pervasiveness of those magazines — like the *Boy's Own Paper* which had a lifespan of eighty-eight years (1879-1967) and a peak circulation of one million copies an issue — must have had a considerable impact on the minds and imaginations of several generations of English school-boys. What kind of impact that was, in terms of their "Canadian content", and how far-reaching it was, I will now attempt to describe by looking primarily at the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Chums* in the decades immediately preceding and following 1900.

I

To a modern reader, who knows just how little attention Canada now gets in foreign publications or who believes that this country is not as exciting to live in as other exotic places, it may come as a surprise to learn that, in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth, "Canadian" stories commanded as much space, and seemed every bit as exciting, as those set in the jungles of Africa, the Australian bush or even in the English middle ages. From almost the very first issue of the *Boy's Own Paper* (January 13, 1879), adventure stories set in the "wilds of Canada" enjoyed an immense and steady popularity: among the first of many long serials which soon made that weekly paper the proud possession of more than a million boys, was R.M. Ballantyne's "The Red Man's revenge" which appeared in twenty-six consecutive issues from October 4, 1879

to March 27, 1880. It was followed by such sustained adventures as W.H.G. Kingston's "Coals of fire: or, Palefaces and Redskins" (June 2-12, 1880), Ballantyne's "The Prairie Chief" (March 6-May 22, 1886), J. Macdonald Oxley's "Archie McKenzie: the young Nor'Wester" (May 28-Sept. 24, 1892), Argyll and Jessie Saxby's "Rough-and-Ready chums; or, tales of a Western ranch" (Feb. 20-July 10, 1897), Oxley's "Norman's nugget" (Oct. 6, 1900-Feb. 2, 1901), Argyll Saxby's "Last of the horse-thieves" (Dec. 29, 1906-Jan. 12, 1907) and his "The fiery totem: a tale of adventure in the Canadian North-West" (Oct. 5, 1912-Jan. 18, 1913).

Interspersed among these were many single-issue adventures and pseudo-factual reports, along with isolated illustrations of Indians (always in full ceremonial headdress), wolves (often attacking settlers), and buffalo (often being attacked by and sometimes attacking grizzlies). There was, to cite a few examples, Rev. Withrow's "An adventure with the wolves: a Canadian story" (1880), W.H. Williams' "The silk-robed cow: a story of life in the Canadian North-West" (1886), a dramatic full-page picture of bisons attacking a grizzly (1887), a news item about a band of Indians near Winnipeg being attacked by wolves (1891), Edward Roper's "Two young Nimrods" (1895), W.A. Buchanan's "Old Sol's tomahawk" (1901), Roy Carmichael's "A greenhorn in Prairie-Land" (1903), Harold Bindloss' "The cutting of the dam" (1904), Ralph Stock's "My first bunch: a cow-punching experience in Western Canada" (1905), Lincoln Wilbar's "The crazy trapper" (1909), St. Michael-Podmore's "An adventure with the Redskins" (1909) and A.L. Haydon's "The lost patrol: How the RNWMP carried the King's mail" (1912).

Similarly, in reading most other magazines of the period, British boys would have become as familiar with Canada (or at least a distorted picture of Canada) as they would have been with their own country, and the less staid the paper (for *Boy's Own* was after all founded by the Religious Tract Society), the more flamboyant the titles and dramatic the stories. Those in *Chums*, for example, which was founded in 1892 (and lasted until 1934), went like this: "Pursued by Red Indians: a rescue from an awful fate" (March 1897), "Chased by Scalp-hunters: a tussle with Iroquois braves" (Nov. 1890), "The Redskin's sentence: a rescue from death's brink" (Sept. 1905) and so forth. Whether it was to some "lonely valley of the Bow River at Blackfoot Crossing" or to some wild rapids on the Athabasca River or merely to some undefined but mysteriously "remote part of Canada", English boys (and perhaps even a few girls) were weekly transported across the ocean, in an imaginative leap as daring as that proposed by the chorus in *Henry V*, and became the heroes of adventures always resolved in their favour but not soon forgotten.

The Canada to which they were imaginatively transported was a montonously restricted area: it was, to use one of its most popular definitions, the "great North-West." More than ninety percent of the stories in English juvenile magazines were set in this ill-defined or variously-defined region, and the

assumption must have been that the whole of Canada (if, indeed, there was any more) was exactly similar in both terrain and inhabitants. There is an occasional story set in Ontario (but always in the 'bush') and less occasionally one — such as George Ethelbert Walsh's "The mysterious beacon light" (Oct. 17, 1905-April 28, 1906) — set in Newfoundland and Labrador; but by and large it is the "western prairies" or the "northern wilds," with some specific locations such as the Qu'Appelle Valley, the Athabasca or Keewatin district, the Foothills of the Rockies, the Klondike, the Red River area or the US-Canadian border in Saskatchewan or Alberta. One could have read *Boy's Own* for almost fifty years and never have known that there were large cities like Montreal and Toronto, although one spoil-sport did try to point out that even Winnipeg had grocery stores and modern conveniences: "Steeped in the thrilling lore of Fenimore Cooper, a boy setting foot to-day in the prairie province of Manitoba rubs his eyes in some disappointment and surprise as he lands, say, in Winnipeg, the capital of the West, and finds a city full grown and up to date, with electric lights and telephones, and motor-driven tramcars everywhere."[6]

Most readers, however, would hardly have believed it. Not that the descriptions of the "north-west" were ever accurate, concrete or even vivid — on the contrary, they were vague and imprecise — but they contained, instead of cities or contemporary conveniences or civilized people, plenty of rivers with dangerous waterfalls which, more often than not, capsized canoes (a common means of conveyance); they contained thick forests, not infrequently covered with deep snow, or perhaps wide prairies with treacherous sloughs, or sometimes mountains with inevitable avalanches. There nearly always was, of course, a police outpost, or a trapper's shack, or perhaps a fort or ranch, but they were usually "isolated" or "solitary" or "remote," and were reached only after considerable hardship had been endured and tortuous trails trekked. Those, then, were the hallmarks of romantic primitivism: one recognized the "north-west" (and therefore Canada) not by the typical signs of progress — which the emigration pamphlets glowingly described — but by the very opposite — the primitive and remote. While the missionaries and politicians may have gauged progress by the number of new farms, schools and churches they could count — and equated progress with civilization — the storywriters achieved success only by ignoring those things: for them the unspoiled wilderness was all and its challenges were what identified its appeal — the rapids, the wolves, the grizzlies, the buffalo and the Indians. And any story might begin this way: " 'You must keep a bright look-out, boys, for them Injuns, if you wish to find your scalps on your heads when you wake in the morning,' said Bryan Driscoll, as he came into our tent, pitched on the banks of the Clatsup River, which, descending from the snow-capped Rocky Mountains, makes its way westward to the Pacific."[7]

To have told readers of such stories that, by 1890, "around Fort Qu'Appelle, native people had prosperous farms and their children were learning carpen-

try and harness making," or that native parents "were proud of their children's accomplishments in school which included a student brass band at High River" would have been a futile exercise.[8] For not only did the *Boy's Own* usual practice of blending fact and fiction lend a degree of definitiveness to the fictional descriptions, but quite obviously topographical truth and accuracy were not expected or even wanted. It little mattered if the intrepid heroes could actualy hunt buffalo on horseback in thick northern forests (as they could on the plains), or that the Rocky Mountains sometimes penetrated into Saskatchewan, or that the foothills did not exist for some writers: "by turning to the right-hand |the hunter could, as if he were on a narrow path| seek the rugged haunts of the grizzly bear and the Rocky Mountain goat; or, by turning to the left, ride after the buffalo on his own undulating plain."[9] Such compression and distortion were of little concern to early youthful readers: it was the adventure — the vicarious thrill — they sought. It was therefore essential that the setting not be too specific; that it be an *impression* only — an impression based on a composite depiction of that "great wilderness. . . where the red man and the buffalo roamed at will, and the conventionalities of civilized life troubled them not."[10] And for that very reason — because the total picture was an impression with little actual detail, no distinctive variety or regional differences — it was the more forcefully imprinted on the naive imagination.

The only variety in this otherwise simplistic impression might have come from changes in reader demand over a long period of time. Looking at the *Boy's Own Paper*, for example, one finds that in its early period, from about 1879 to 1890, the emphasis in the Canadian stories is on the "far north" — on explorers, or trappers, or Company (HBC and Northwest) apprentices primarily battling the elements but always pitted against one or two unscrupulous bosses, unethical rivals or "bad" Indians. A transition began to occur with the introduction of the Mounted Police as heroes or assistant heroes, some of whom were at home in the "snowy wastes" but many of whom were more adept at capturing whiskey traders and horse thieves, whose notorious occupations were pursued much farther south on the prairies; stories of Indians and buffalo hunts therefore altered the picture of the "northwest" and eventually led to the domination of the "cowboy" story which, with the exception of an occasional story about Eskimoes or trapping, seemed to be the readers' favourites after 1910.

The "vast wilderness" was therefore less likely to be covered with snow — although it often was — and could even be quite inviting: "The mellow radiance of a warm September afternoon poured down into the lovely valley of the Bow River at Blackfoot Crossing, till it seemed overflowing with rich golden-brown sunshine. It was one of those early autumn days that would glorify even the most common-place scene with a rich halo of gold and orange and fiery bronze, but here was a scene that would be glorious in any light."[11] But the light could be deceptive, as it nearly always was in such stories, for hidden in the shade

of the poplars might be Blackfeet and Cree, and the ear might descry what the eye could not — the sound of distant hooves (a buffalo stampede?) or the hiss of a rattlesnake. No matter how picturesque the setting, eventually the story would reveal the *wild* Canadian northwest.

II

What of the people who populated those stories — the inhabitants of the "great north-west?" Who were they and what were their attitudes to the land in which they lived or travelled? By and large, there were four more-or-less distinct groups: first, the heroes; second, the hero accomplices — kind factors, policemen (when not heroes) sweethearts, mothers and wives, devoted male companions, and an occasional "good" Indian; third, the Indians themselves (some of whom were scoundrels and some not); and fourth, a myriad of rogues and scoundrels.

The heroes, of course, were nearly always English (or, close enough, Scottish), what Argyll Saxby would call "healthy, well-knit Saxons" — young adventurers, a few even on holiday, most of whom would return to their homeland after having improved the quality of life in the "north-west." Their omnipresence makes these stories, even though I have called them "Canadian," really "British" stories with a "Canadian" setting. For the heroes (and the writers) were, unashamedly, imperialists — propagandists for the British way-of-life which espoused a firm belief in "wholesome adventure, cold baths and Christianity."[12] And they proved that the British public school education, with its primary insistence on "manly sports," produced just the right sort of person to be a hero in any foreign part of the Empire:

> Many a lad who leaves an English public school disgracefully ignorant of the rudiments of useful knowledge. . . and who has devoted a great part of his time and nearly all his thoughts to athletic sports, yet brings away with him something beyond all price — a manly, straightforward character, a scorn of lying and meanness, habits of obedience and command, and fearless courage. Thus equipped, he goes out into the world and bears a man's part in subduing the earth, ruling its wild folk, and building up the Empire.[13]

In the fictional Canadian "north-west" there seemed to be many young men of that kind: all being fine examples of British manliness and muscular Christianity. The hero is first of all "handsome" and though he has "an unmistakably youthful look" his "well-knit figure and squarely-set shoulders," and his ability to ride with "easy, nonchalant grace" show that he is "not a man to be thought slightingly of." Archie McKenzie, "the Young Nor'Wester," was

> in the first flush of that precious pleasure which comes from the sense of being considered something more than a mere boy. He did not cherish the ideal of manhood. But to send a bullet or an arrow straight to its mark, to paddle a canoe hour after hour without missing

a stroke, to tramp on snowshoes four miles an hour for half a day without sitting down to rest, to bestride a half-broken horse and stick there until the creature, panting and exhausted, confessed defeat, to set a trap so cunningly that even the wary wolverine would fall a victim: these were some of the attributes of manhood according to his way of thinking, and all these he possessed in a degree which rendered the pretty high opinion he held of himself at least excusable, if not altogether admirable.

Oxley may have thought it wise to adopt a half-apologetic tone, but others did not: Argyll Saxby, for one, unequivocally stated that if one did not have that kind of stamina and sense of enjoyment in testing one's muscles against the challenges of nature — i.e. did not have the "backwoods spirit" — "it must be that you are a weakling boy who lacks the real boy's love for out-of-door freedom."[14]

Shakespeare Johnson, in Oxley's "Norman's nugget," "one of the warmest hearted, brave-spirited, genial fellows that ever sought elusive fortune in the wilds of British Columbia," sets the ethical tone for all the other heroes: "despite the temptations that beset him he would have nothing to do with tobacco, liquor, or cards. Others might be able to use them with impunity, he argued, but that was no warrant of his doing so, and he had come to British Columbia to seek his fortune, not for diversion or dissipation." Victor Ravenshaw, in Ballantyne's "The Red Man's revenge," gains more experience in the art of sinning, but comes to the same conclusion: "|He| was too honest and manly to deny the fact that he had not yet acquired a liking for tobacco, and admitted to himself that, in very truth, his object in smoking was to appear, as he imagined, more like a man, forgetful or ignorant of the fact that men (even smokers) regard beardless consumers of tobacco as poor imitative monkeys. He soon came to see the habit in its true light, and gave it up, luckily, before he became its slave." Clearly, to be the hero in such stories, only muscular Christians should apply.

In one amusing story, in fact, Argyll Saxby's "The last of the horse-thieves" (1907), we are offered a portrait of the kind of sissified Englishman who was not needed — the kind, indeed, who would turn up as "gentlemen" emigrants or "remittance men" and be then parodied in the cartoons of A.G. Racey. The hero of the story, Wilfred Gilbert, decides he must, to catch the horse-thieves at their game, trick Jake Binnings and his gang into criminal action. He therefore disguises himself as a "tenderfoot" — a newly-arrived Englishman "straight from West Kensington" whose name is William Algernon Marmaduke. When not even the reader knows who the tenderfoot really is, Saxby relishes the moment: "The bronchoe |sic| on which he rode was one that looked as if it were all the time longing to lean up against the nearest tree and dream of its childhood in the distant past; whilst the youth who rode it looked too young to have any past to dream about. . . His whole aspect betokened one who had arrayed himself in the attire of one of the bold bad cowboys peculiar to the 'penny dreadfuls'!"

As expected, the greenhorn is greeted by raucous laughter when he says: "Excuse me, gentlemen, if I intrude, but do you know of any restaurant where I could have a little lunch? I have ridden quite three miles today and my horse and I feel quite exhausted." And by just as much laughter when Jake replies: "There ain't no rest-your-aunts nor rest-your-uncles in these parts, but if you care to rest your Royal Highness in our humble mansion, I guess we can raise a tub of hog-feed for both you and that thoroughbred of yours." Eventually, however, the disguised Gilbert turns the tables on his hosts and, having lured them into carrying out their crime, soon has his evidence and the gang in jail in Regina. Saxby is clearly having fun, and the story is delightful even if predictable, but just as clearly he means to inform all young readers that only "real," not "weakling boys," can hope to become heroes or "Empire men."

Though the ideas of Christian manliness and empire-building are more subtly conveyed in *Boy's Own* than they are in other juvenile magazines (because the stories here are better written), and even though in *Boy's Own* they eventually give way to mere patriotism during the First World War, in the period of the magazine's greatest impact they are unmistakably the *raison d'être* of the many Empire adventures. Most writers could be described in the way which Eric Quayle summarizes the work of R.M. Ballantyne:

> It is true that he portrayed a world in which the good were terribly good, and the bad were terribly bad, and the British were terribly British — and worth ten of any foreigners alive, by Jingo! But in the age in which he lived it was not only the young who believed that a benevolent God had arranged things thus, so that Her Imperial Majesty, The Queen, could, with the aid of His occasional intervention (and that of her Army and Navy), more easily hold sway over the coloured masses which peopled her vast dominions. Ballantyne, G.A. Henty and the rest of the boys' authors of the period never for one moment doubted the innate benevolence of British imperialism, coupled, as it always was, with the blessings of Cristianity which sooner or later were visited on the conquered.[15]

Conquered or not, most of the other inhabitants of the "north-west" were clearly inferior to the hero and treated with considerable condescension, in a proportion directly equivalent to their place on an established hierarchal scale — the hero accomplices taking precedence over ordinary folk (settlers) who ranked higher than the Indians, while the scoundrels, lowest on the totem pole, were given the usual taste of British justice. What characterized the difference — and defined the hierarchy — apart from the primary attribute of "Christian manliness," was a decreasing scale of gentility, defined variously as "manners" or "gentlemanly behaviour" or "polish." Thus it was, for example, that even a white scoundrel could be less harshly treated — in a fictional way — than a native character: Miles McDougall (in "Archie McKenzie") might be merely a "brute" while an Eskimo might be a "Mongol-faced savage." Women, of course, were low on the scale, partly because the "north-west" was just not a place where "well-bred" women could (or should) be found and mainly because

those were "manly" stories: most females were, like Ravenshaw's wife, Maggie (in "The Red Man's revenge"), "well-favoured" ladies, but "with an insufficient intellect," who, though "of considerable intrinsic value," were "highly unpolished." And even when an Indian girl becomes a hero accomplice she is of a special sort, a Christian with above-average intelligence: Softswan, therefore, (in "The prairie chief"), "unlike many girls of her class, had at one period been brought, for a short time, under the influence of men who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and esteemed it equally a duty and a privilege to urge others to flee from the wrath to come and accept the gospel of salvation."

As far as Indian men were concerned, though the white man's condescension is evident from the beginning, it is only much later in its publishing history that *Boy's Own* stories begin to depict them as "war-whooping, bloodthirsty scalp-hunters." Unlike *Chums* and most other "penny dreadfuls" which did not hesitate to deny Cooper's "noble red man" view, *Boy's Own* was unwilling to label all Indians "savages" and to cast them as villains. As the Governor-General of Canada, the Marquis of Lorne, noted in an 1885 issue, though "Cooper in his novels exaggerated the stateliness and virtues of the red man," his picture was in the main "a true one."[16] The early stories of Ballantyne and Oxley, therefore, still exhibited vestiges of the myth of the "noble savage" (though they advocated a civilizing infusion of Christianity) and they were inclined to be more anthropological in their approaches, attempting to describe the Indian way of life and the buffalo hunt in realistic detail (not merely as a matter of dramatic moment), and to be sympathetic to their problems. Though the term "Redskin" is common in Ballantyne's stories, the term "Injun" rarely occurs, and it, along with "savage" and "Nitchie," only becomes common in stories after the turn of the century when the "Cowboy-Indian" story was becoming popular (and, indeed, when interest began to turn away from the Canadian to the American West).

In *Chums*, however, which certainly rivalled *Boy's Own* in popularity and which was overtly dedicated to the so-called "adventure" story (without moral interpolation), the Indian had always been a "Redskin" and a "scalp-hunter." *Chums* rarely described native customs, or even pretended that Indians were complex human beings; they were mere expedients — albeit essential ones — in creating thrills and thereby gaining an audience. For, as Samuel Walkey made quite clear in the opening paragraph to one of his stories, the magazine was without a conscience:

> If you will listen to the tale of a forest ranger I can promise those of you who love adventure some breathless hours. You shall hear the war-whoop ring through woodland glades. You shall see the Redskins on the warpath. Scalping knives shall flash; tomahawks shall glitter. English scouts and French coureurs-de-bois shall pass through the forests on their perilous missions. . . And you shall watch the great drama of the border warfare in those stirring days when England fought with France for the fair realm of Canada, and when the red man, with scalping-knife and tomahawk, went out upon the warpath.[17]

Gradually, *Boy's Own* too became more dogmatic, more categorical, catering to the demand for quick action and pat descriptions. In Saxby's "Rough-and-ready chums" (1897), for example, the Sun Dance is referred to as "a rite as revolting to the civilized mind as it is admirable to the savage" and the story has its conflict in the unwillingness of an Indian boy, Sequa, to undergo the test of manhood. When the Chief is about to kill his cowardly son, the hero, Bertie Caryll, intervenes: "As the wild beast of the forest is often cowed by the unflinching gaze of a hunter, so is the savage often overawed by the imperious voice. . . of the white man." Later, of course, Sequa proves his bravery, enhanced by his association with the white man's way-of-life, and gives his own life to save that of his father. Such a simplistic treatment is typical of the majority of later stories, and leads to such ostensibly factual, though obviously distorted, reports as this:

> Redskins of today may be divided into two classes — namely, the wood Indian and the reservation Indian. Between these two there is as much difference as between a Chinese and a negro. The former is the only living representative of Fenimore Cooper's heroes. He still wears deer or moose-skin moccasions; binds his long hair with a narrow fillet, and his waist with a red sash, carries a scalping-knife and decks his clothes with a variety of ornamentation. These redskins never enter the settlements, and are never seen except by bold fur-traders and pioneer explorers. The reservation Indian dresses like a European, and is generally very degraded and disgusting in his habits and character.[18]

Scalping-knives indeed! Clearly, this is not an attempt to restore the myth of the "noble savage" but merely an attempt to maintain a potential for adventure and fictional violence. Perhaps in fact, it was an attempt to counter the growing view that the Indians in Canada were (and always had been) less warlike than their American counterparts. For some writers, like the Saxbys, though very simplistic in their treatment, felt it was false to over-glamorize (even in a savage way) the Canadian Indian. In their story, "Rough-and-ready chums," they have a character called Old Sam, a Yankee, who represents the American view: "A brave thing to do [he says, when the hero has brought back Sequa]; but I wish you had left a bullet or two in their hides, jest to mind them that you had called. That's the way *we* leave our cards when we call on them folks down in Texas. But, boss, you've done no wise deed in bringing a Nitchie into your shak [sic]. Don't be surprised if someday you find your scalp or your watch amissing. Powder and shot is all that will teach a redskin to give over his bloodthirsty ways." The Yankee is, of course, proven wrong, and the authors make it quite clear that "the Indians in the States are not treated so kindly and justly as they are in Canada, and consequently they are more treacherous and revengeful."

But "treacherous and revengeful" is just the way readers of juvenile magazines wanted the Indians to be: after all, Deadeye Dick and Buffalo Bill Cody, whose dime-novel careers were well- known to English readers, had

created just those expectations. The "penny dreadfuls" were not reluctant to comply, and their stories of scalpings and bloody ambushes (quite vividly portrayed) were weekly devoured. There seemed little *Boy's Own* could do except to follow their example, although it never allowed a full imitation of their excessive violence. In addition, readers were beginning to dislike the long-winded tales imitative of Ballantyne and Oxley, with their frequent interpolations on religion and culture, and began to demand the kind of streamlined tales (with plenty of action and pithy dialogue) that they could read in *Chums*. It was a case of being "quick on the draw," of introducing oneself with a gun ("Put 'em up, Injun," rapped out one man, "guess your name's Whitey, eh?"), and speaking the lingo of the West.

Language and dialect had, of course, always been the primary means of identifying the sub-hero category: the hero's English was impeccable (as were his manners), the hero accomplices often spoke less polished English and sometimes with a foreign accent (half-breed French), but the scoundrels had developed a dialect all their own. And it is in this area, along with the "savage" depiction of Indians, that the "Canadian" stories begin to become confused with the American stories: one just cannot tell at times whether one is reading a "Canadian" or "American" western thriller — they all soon become "western thrillers." Sometimes, when the scoundrel is a stereotype Métis or French-Canadian (a kind of Black Jacques Cholock of the Bugs Bunny cartoons), one knows that the story must be set in Canada:

> "You beat me, garcon!" he gasped, "But you would not 'ave done so but for dat — dat moose you ride. Hein? Even Planchet do not t'ink of dat tame moose. *Sacre.* You win, and Planchet lost all dat beautiful gold!"

But when, as became increasingly the case, the dialect was supposed to be "ginuwine" cowboy or rancher or adventurer (nearly all of whom spoke the same dialect), one begins to lose track of locale and suspects that it is the American dime novel dialect which is being imitated:

> "Yes pardner — treach'ry," growled Pete with a curse. "Sor'l," he continued, "yer remember that night we slid out an' tried ter steal a march on the Reds?" His companion consented laconically. "It war' kept close 'mongst our little party, and no one but thet same little party knew what was in the wind. Wal, d'yer remember what happened? Did we ketch the Injuns nappin'? Nary! They were wide wake an' waitin' fer us whites, and we walked slick into their ambush like beavers; aye, but we kim out, what was left of us, like wildcats."
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> . . . . . .
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> "Mornin'," said he in a husky voice. "You don't happen to have sot eyes on sech a thing as the corpse of a drowned Injun anywhars roun' hyar lately, hey?" "A drowned Indian!" echoed Ronald, in surprise. "That's what I'm after," was the reply. "Thar's a

hundred dollars on the head of the varmint, dead or alive; an' I'm figurin' to earn it. He killed old Jude Crawley, over in Troyville, two nights ago — druv a knife clean into his back — and then lit out for his skin 'fore the 'boys' heard the news. Some of us struck his trail yesterday an'sighted him on the other side of the creek yonder."[19]

Thus, when horses became "cayuses", robbers "vamoosed", faithful companions became "pardners", and jolly fellows became merely "fellers", and when the Indians (the "Injuns" or "Nitchies") all wear ceremonial headdress, whether hunting down the buffalo or "paleface", we know we are not far from the formula fiction of *The Wild West Weekly*. It was then that the "Wild West" expanded its fictional boundaries, when writers who had never been near the place of their fictional crimes (and couldn't care less) gave everyone a six-gun, had Dacotah Indians and rattlesnakes on the banks of the Athabasca River, and generally made no distinction between Canada and the United States. The age of imperialism had certainly died.

III

"I was a cowboy for eighteen months after emigrating to Canada. . . and it's the jolliest, wildest, freest and most exciting life a man can lead."[20] So boasted an ex-cowboy to a *Boy's Own* correspondent in 1903. Immediately, into the minds of its young readers must have flashed a picture, vivified for them so many times, of that ubiquitous rider with his six-gun blazing, tearing across the open prairie at breakneck speed in pursuit of some barely discernible horse-thief, whiskey-smuggler or renegade Indian. And so reluctant were such writers to dispel the myth that, even in their 'factual' accounts, they hedged and played at half-truths: "The cowboys are very handy with their guns, but I doubt there is much killing nowadays. At any rate, I never saw it. Of course everybody carries a shooter, for one never knows when one may need it, and they are always very quick to draw, but as a rule one of the boys steps between them and prevents bloodshed."[21]

It would be a long time, therefore, before the nervousness of the new young emigrant would disappear; on arrival in Winnipeg, "recalling to mind the shooting prowess of the Westerners," he might take most of the furniture "in the little room and pile it against the door to serve in place of a lock." Imagine the disappointment (or perhaps relief?) which resulted from an uninterrupted night's sleep — or a night's sleep interrupted only by an attack of unromantic mosquitoes. Such disappointment was likely to continue, if the young man was not soon diverted from his romantic notions by the reality of more pleasant prospects offered by a new life in Canada. For, by the time most young settlers arrived the buffalo had disappeared, the natives lived quietly (if reluctantly) on reservations, and the opportunity to be a cowboy had been lessened by the more urgent need for strong young farmers.

There were, of course, many voices ready to set a young man straight —

to re-color the romantic picture, to deny it entirely or to offer what they thought to be a more accurate one. The "settlement propaganda" — those thousands of advertisements, and tracts and booklets aimed at prospective emigrants — perhaps went to the other extreme but was always available. The juvenile novelists who thought they knew Canada better than the non-resident writers and who resented their purely imaginative depictions, sometimes made an effort to disabuse youthful readers of their far-fetched views. One reviewer of *Three boys in the wild north land* thought it strange, wrote Egerton R. Young, "that boys could have such jolly fun with a lot of Christian Indians as we had described. He rightly stated that boys' ideas of Indians were associated with the tomahawk and the scalping-knife, and that they had the impression that the only good time they could have among them was when the blood-curdling war-whoops were heard and redskins were being shot down by adventurous lads led on by cowboys. There has been altogether too many of these false and erroneous ideas about the Indians circulated. Such things are now impossible."[22]

Boy's Own, too, perhaps as a reaction against the excesses of *Chums* and other sensational magazines, was willing to counter fiction with fact. "There are two sorts of Red Indians," wrote H. Mortimer Batten, a respected naturalist, "the Red Indians of fiction and those of real life: and to the man who really knows and has lived among the latter — those shy, retiring people of the northern plains and forests — the contrast is truly ludicrous."[23] But, as Batten must have known, most of his readers had lived their lives only among the former — "the Red Indians of fiction" — and that made all the difference. It is quite understandable, given the wide gap in imaginative impact between Batten's fact and Walkey's fiction or between an emigration pamphlet and *Chums*, that many boys who emigrated would have ignored the seeming truth and the practical advice in favour of more exciting prospects.

But where, one might ask, was the harm in all this? Perhaps none, if one merely considers the young emigrant soon disabused of his fantasy, for disappointment of that kind dies easily. And perhaps little, if one is concerned about the factual and geographical distortions, for it is not as if no fiction, other than this, ever distorted the truth. One might not, therefore, do more than smile at the geographical blunders — a willing suspension of disbelief could tolerate rattlesnakes in the sub-arctic. But, without wishing to moralize unnecessarily, it does seem that what was affected most were attitudes, and those are hardest to change. The acceptance of the superiority of the British way of life, especially of its system of justice as applied to natives, and the stereotypical view of natives as "Injuns" or "Huskies" were particularly damaging and hard to erase. How long would it take us to get rid of that picture of Eskimoes as "mongol-faced savages, their frosted hoods pulled about their faces, ivory stabbing spears grasped in the mittened hands?" Have we even now rid ourselves of that notion of the native Indian as an "ignorant savage?" And how long will it take

us to recognize the distinctiveness of our country — to be free of any possibility of being confused with the United States?

It would be preposterous, of course, to lay the burden of blame, even by implication, on the juvenile magazines or on early writers of juvenile fiction. Writers of history, too, who should have known better, were responsible for the "romantic" deception. A case in point is Beckles Willson whose history of Canada (1907) is tellingly entitled *Romance of empire: Canada,* in which he sets out to recount "the doings of the valiant heroes, the blodthirsty villains, the virtuous ladies who played their part in the Canadian drama." On the cover is an illustration depicting Indians with (bloodstained?) tomahawks hiding in ambush behind trees, and between the covers are the stories of "war and butchery |by| deluded half-breeds and redskins |until| gradually the ferocious redman with his musket and tomahawk has been driven from his lodges and wigwams in the east, to make way for bustling cities and thriving towns and villages. . . Canada was not easy in the making; much blood flowed and many loyal hearts were broken before the Great Dominion rose."

One cannot, therefore, insist or even suggest that the romantic view of Canada espoused by the writers of juvenile fiction, and accepted by so many of their readers, was restricted to the juvenile magazines; nor can one claim that it originated in that source. It was the product of many other more-complicated issues. But, by the same token, it would be unwise to underestimate the prolonged influence of youthful reading. Many years later leading statesmen, among them Stanley Baldwin and Ramsay Macdonald, would acknowledge their indebtedness to values instilled by the *Boy's Own Paper.* Quite clearly, many children who become adults do not "put away childish things."

NOTES

[1]Patrick A. Dunae, *Gentlemen emigrants* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981), p. 126. Dunae offers a fascinating account of the variety of English emigrants — from Mudpups to Remittance Men — and, briefly, of the satirical pictures of them from the pens of such people as A.G. Racey. Dunae is also an authority on early boys' magazines, but has only mentioned their influence on attitudes to Canada briefly in one: 'Boy's literature and the idea of race," *Wascana review,* (September 1981), 84-104.

[2]Roy Carmichael, "A greenhorn in prairie-land," *Boy's Own Paper,* May 9, 1903.

[3]See 2 Wilderness man: the strange story of Grey Owl (London: Macmillan, 1974), chapter 3.

[4]*Wilderness man.* p. 8.

[5]*The confessions of a tenderfoot* (London: Grant Richards, 1913), p. 57. Sandra Martin and Roger Hall, *Rupert Brooke in Canada* (Toronto: PMA, 1978), p. 111. S. MacNaughton, *My Canadian memories* (London, 1920), p. 25 Roy Carmichael, "A greenhorn in prairie-land," *vide supra.*

[6]F.H. Williams, "The prairie and the buffalo," *Boy's Own,* December 29, 1900.

[7]W.H.G. Kingston, "Coals of fire," *Boy's Own,* June 5, 1880.

[8]June Callwood, *The naughty nineties: 1800-1900* (Toronto: Natural Sciences of Canada Ltd., 1977), p. 93.

[9]R.M. Ballantyne, "The Red Man's revenge," *Boy's Own,* October 4, 1879.

[10]*Ibid.*
[11]W.H. Williams, "The silk-robed cow," *Boy's Own,* Oct. 2, 1886.
[12]Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, *You're a brick, Angela* (London: Gollancz, 1976), p. 73.
[13]Bernard Darwin, *The English public school* (London, 1929), p. 21.
[14]Argyll Saxby, "The fiery totem," *Boy's Own,* October 5, 1912.
[15]*Ballantyne the brave* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967), pp. 302-3.
[16]"With the Indians of the North-West," *Boy's Own,* January 24, 1885.
[17]"Wolf-on-the-trail," *Chums,*Nov. 30, 1910.
[18]St. Michael-Podmore, "An adventure with the Redskins," *Boy's Own,* June 5, 1909.
[19]*Chums,* Nov. 11, 1896 and Oct. 1, 1902.
[20]"A talk in the train: an ex-cowboy tells of life in the Canadian North West," *Boy's Own,* October 10, 1908.
[21]Roy Carmichael, "A greenhorn in prairie-land."
[22]"Explanatory" in *Winter adventures of three boys in the great lone land* (London, 1899), p. 6.
[23]"The red man of the northland: Canada's Indians of today," *Boy's Own,* New Volume 36, part 10, 1913-14.

R.G. Moyles *is a professor in the Department of English at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.*