Settler Dreams: Re-establishing Landed-Gentry Hierarchies in Catharine Strickland's *The Young Emigrants*

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> Mr. Collins and his family stood on the deck the greater part of the afternoon, watching the receding shore with aching eyes. . . . Poverty had not driven them forth; they had been, to the last, in the enjoyment of every comfort, and a good social position; but they had with calm reflecting judgments and self-denial, determined to become colonists for the sake of the future; to enable their children and their grandchildren to remain in the class to which they themselves belonged.
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> —W. H. G. Kingston, *How to Emigrate, or, The British Colonists*[1]

At the start of a project on early British and American settler novels written for children, I read that the majority of immigrants to Australia and Canada came from the labouring classes.[2] With this knowledge, I imagined that stories which featured the adventures of early settlers would champion egalitarian class relations, if they mentioned class at all. I assumed that settlers, and those who wrote about them, would have no wish to replicate the social hierarchies of English gentry in the colonies. As an American who came of age during the Bicentennial, and one who was brought up with the myth of the independent, hardy, and class-disdaining pioneer, as described in such works as Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* novels, the idea of a wealthy, socially prominent emigrant such as Kingston's Mr. Collins struck me as surprising, even aberrant. Yet, as I began to read the early children's settler novels themselves, Kingston's comments about Mr. Collins and his family helped me to understand a pattern central not only to English, but also to early-American,

settler narratives for children of the period—a pattern in which a genteel family re-establishes its endangered social position by successfully emigrating to the American West, to Australia, or to Canada.

The earliest novels for children about the emigrant experience were not written by emigrants themselves, but rather by authors back in England, or by Americans whose families had been long established in colonial American society. Most of these authors were from the genteel or landed classes. Intriguingly, in these early juvenile settler novels, the families who emigrate to the colonies are not typically from the labouring classes; instead, they, like their authors, are wealthy and landed—at least at the beginnings of the novels. Within a few pages, however, each family's social standing becomes imperilled due to economic loss. For example, in *Alfred Dudley, or the Australian Settlers* (1830), written by Sarah Porter, the younger sister of economist David Ricardo, a genteel family is forced to emigrate due to the loss of their family estate. A similar situation befalls the family in Frederick Marryat's *The Settlers in Canada* (1844), when a presumed-lost heir returns unexpectedly and displaces a genteel family from its land and position in the community. Two early-American novels for children, William Cardell's *The Happy Family; or Scenes of American Life* (1828) and Susan Ridley Sedgwick's *The Young Emigrants* (1830), also feature plotlines of displaced gentility, although their families move only from Massachusetts and New York to the wilds of Ohio. Shorn from their economic status because of politics, or the vagaries of the market, genteel English or American settlers easily recoup their economic losses in the outback or the backwoods of the British (or formerly British) empire. In the process, such families not only restore their fortunes, but also re-establish and reaffirm their genteel social status.

In this essay, I would like to look at the earliest example of this generic settler plotline, in what is often labelled the first novel written for children with a Canadian setting: Catherine Strickland's *The Young Emigrants; or, Pictures of Canada, Calculated to Amuse and Instruct the Minds of Youth*, published in 1826. Such an analysis can help us to see past the assumptions, based on the myth of the hardy, independent, self-sufficient, and, above all, egalitarian, settler, that later juvenile settler novels have established so firmly in the Canadian and American imagination.

Such an examination can also help us to complicate our current thinking about the class position of the intended audience for early-nineteenth-century British children's literature. In recent histories of and monographs about

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such literature, many scholars have argued that eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century works for children were written with a middle-class audience in mind. Historians and critics as diverse as Gillian Avery and Margaret Kinnell (51–53, 74), Alan Richardson, and Andrew O'Malley all assert that the texts that they describe and analyze function as part of the project of constructing a middle-class subjectivity characterized, in the words of Dennis Butts, by "modesty and moderation, prudence and self-help, respectability and thrift" (77).

Few children's-book authors of the period called themselves, or labelled their characters, "middle class." Thus, critics who argue that their works can be read as constructing a middle-class subjectivity rely on a definition that understands class not as a cohesive and active political or social group or identity, but rather as a collection of people who share similar ideological positions. As O'Malley writes, members of this ideologically constructed middle class can be identified by their rejection of the "traditional patrician-plebeian patronage arrangement that bound the upper and lower orders together," as well as by their embrace of "an egalitarian and individualistic society in which the person with the most talent and drive succeeded . . . aided by a diligent observation of such virtues as thrift, self-denial, industry, and of course, education" (3). People may have embraced different religions and political parties, experienced varying economic circumstances, and shared no common town or county affiliations, but the similarities in their values, as well as their recognition of their differences from both the upper and lower classes, linked them together as a unified entity: the "middle class."

Reading early-nineteenth-century settler narratives written for children suggests, however, that the two parts of this characterization of the middle class—middle-class virtues, and an identity constructed in opposition to both the upper and the lower classes—do not always go hand in hand. Values that historians and literary critics have labelled "middle class" can appear in texts that clearly embrace a traditional patrician-plebeian conception of society. In order to make sense of

such texts, scholars of children's literature need to start to question some of the ideas we've been taking for granted about class relations in the period.

First, the construction of an ideologically-based middle class relies on our contemporary conception of class as a tripartite system, one consisting of a lower or working class, a middle or bourgeois class, and an upper or aristocratic class (Horne 2–3). While a tripartite conception of class relations certainly existed during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in Britain, a second, older conception of social class also persisted long into the period. Rather than think in terms of lower/middle/upper, as historian Dror Wahrman argues that most political moderates did during the period, the majority of radicals and conservatives preferred to think in binary terms: in the eyes of conservatives, benevolent gentry and the dependents they cared for; in the eyes of radicals, tyrannical gentry and the workers they oppressed (87). Thinking only in terms of upper/middle/lower may lead us to misread texts that embrace a binary, rather than a tripartite, understanding of social relations.

While both the binary conception and our more familiar tripartite view of class circulated in early-nineteenth-century English discourse, according to historian Amanda Vickery, the binary view was the one most commonly embraced by daughters and wives of lesser landed gentlemen, ministers, merchants, manufacturers, attorneys, and doctors. "The polite" and "the genteel" were the only words consistently used by Vickery's subjects to describe themselves; such women, Vickery argues, "had no recourse to a vocabulary of 'upper,' 'middle' and 'lower class'" (*Gentleman's Daughter* 13). As many of the women writing literature for children during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, including Catharine Strickland, had backgrounds that were quite similar to those of the genteel women Vickery studied, it seems more than likely that many of them drew on a world view shaped by a binary, rather than a tripartite, understanding of class.

Some might argue that it matters little how authors labelled themselves; if they championed values such as the power of education, the worth of thrift and self-denial, and the need for more egalitarian social relations, then literary critics are more than justified in viewing their texts as part of the project of constructing a middle-class subjectivity. Yet recent work by historians has also begun to call into question the assumption that such values were only to be found in the newly emergent middle classes. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, in their influential 1987 history *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English*

Middle Class, 1780–1850, linked the emergence of a domestic, Evangelical "moral code" to middle-class identity, and literary critics have been quick to use their arguments to interpret literary texts. Critics have paid less attention, however, to subsequent historical research that suggests that such social practices may not be limited to the middle class, as Davidoff and Hall initially thought. As Dror Wahrman points out, beliefs and values once associated solely with the middle class "can readily be shown [by more recent historical research] not only to have encompassed large segments of the landed classes and of the working population, but—more significantly, to have been no less central to the formation of the respective identities of these groups" (379).[3] New values emerged during this period, to be sure, but such values, Wahrman argues, were not restricted to the middle class alone. A middle class based solely on ideological similarities, then, becomes a problematic construction.

I would like to muddy the historical waters even further by arguing that the place where critics tend to draw the line between the upper and middle classes—between those who owned land and those whose income stemmed from commercial interests—may also be a misreading. Amanda Vickery has pointed out that historians who espouse the idea that the middle class defined itself in opposition to both an upper and a lower class tend to lump the lesser landed gentry either in with the aristocracy/nobility or with the rural rentier bourgeoisie. Given that the landed-gentry group numbered more than ten thousand families in the period 1780–1850, as compared with the far smaller number of two to three hundred families who composed the nobility, Vickery argues that they deserve to be studied separately, as separate from both nobility and bourgeoisie. As Vickery demonstrates in *The Gentleman's Daughter*, her award-winning study of genteel Georgian women, such lesser landed gentry drew class lines not between those who owned land and those who worked in trade, but rather between those in the professional/commercial classes (including landowners) and the shopkeepers and retailers below them (Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter* 13–37). Landed gentry did not align themselves with the nobility, but neither did they align themselves with all members of what historians typically term the "middle classes." The women that Vickery studied constructed their identity in opposition not only to the "quality" (nobility) and the poor, but also in opposition to a third group, those in the common trades that required little capital. They did not, however, define themselves in opposition to those in the "genteel trades," those trades that required large outlays of capital.

The dominant group in a binary conception of class, then, could be further delineated into three sub-groups: the nobility, the landed gentry, and families whose wealth derived from professional or commercial pursuits, with the latter two groups linked socially and ideologically. The subordinate group in a binary construction of class, then, would consist of two sub-groups: those who pursued "common trades," and members of the peasantry. In this construction, the landed gentry and the professional and commercial families were not at odds, but together formed what we might call the local elite. This local elite embraced the same values that later historians would identify as "middle class," but they did not conceive of themselves as outside of the traditional patrician-plebeian patronage system. The binary view of class, P. J. Corfield argues, represented a simplification of the finer gradations of the "Great Chain of Being," a "well ordered sequence of ranks and degrees in human society [that were] deemed part of a divinely-ordained hierarchy that embraced the whole of creation" (Corfield 40). The "Great Chain of Being," and its simplification into a binary construction of social relations, was most often favoured by just such elites as Vickery studied. Thus, purportedly middle-class values could go hand in hand with a less-than-egalitarian view of social mobility.

Given the existence of not one but two contesting views of class relations, as well as the prevalence of purportedly middle-class values in other class settings, it may be reductive to label all early children's literature "middle class." Instead, it would be more useful to examine early-nineteenth-century works to see how they negotiate the tensions between an older view of class relations that was familiar to political conservatives and radicals, and a newly emergent construction being embraced by political moderates. Only with such a view in mind can we make sense of texts such as Strickland's, which simultaneously espouses "middle-class" values and seeks to reaffirm the privilege of the gentry.

If we read Catharine Strickland's *The Young Emigrants* in the context of arguments made by David Cannadine and Linda Colley that downplay the "rise of the middle class" in favour of a history characterized by the persistence of aristocratic and landed power and privilege in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, we can see that Strickland does not simply espouse a new, middle-class set of values, as the class analysis of previous children's literature critics might lead us to argue. Instead, Strickland is concerned about how the emigrant can maintain his or her gentry-class status when the demands of emigrant life often erase many of the outward signs of

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gentility. In her preface to *The Young Emigrants*, Catharine Strickland writes that the novel is based in part on actual letters written by a family who left for Canada in 1821.[4] Strickland must also have had in mind her own brother, Sam, who had emigrated to Canada the previous year. Would he be successful in his efforts to build an estate and establish himself among the landed gentry of the young land? Or would the need to engage in hard, physical labour call his class status into question? Strickland's novel attempts to spell out the path that genteel emigrants such as her brother might follow to avoid the dangers of downward mobility without giving up their binary conception of class.[5] Such a path depends, intriguingly, on adopting many of the values that would later become associated with the middle class in a tripartite conception of society, and assigning them to the gentry within a binary one. Such a reconceptualization represents and endorses forms of living in the unfamiliar Canadian world that the genteel Strickland, and an audience who, like her, still maintained a belief in a binary, rather than a tripartite, conception of class, would find acceptable.

Simultaneously, settler novels such as Strickland's enact a fantasy of denial in the face of increasing pressures on the hierarchical construction of society in early-nineteenth-century Britain. If, as the century progressed, the emergence of a middle class placed increasing pressure on a binary conception of class relations, proponents of that earlier conception were loath to give up their views. If the binary view of social class was under attack in England, then perhaps Strickland fantasized that the binary could be re-established anew in the fertile ground of Canada. Thus, Strickland's *The Young Emigrants* proves uninterested in constructing a self-sufficient independence for its emigrant family; instead, it re-establishes traditional but contested English social hierarchies, with their gentry-agrarian relationships of dependence and validation, in miniature in the colonies.

The investment of Catharine Strickland's novel in class issues becomes clearer when understood in the context of her early life. When Catharine

Strickland and her younger sister Susanna first formed the "brilliant notion of writing a novel" for children to "relieve the tedium of dull winter days," neither could have imagined that a childhood diversion would lead five of the six Strickland daughters to become published, some even famous, authors (Fitzgibbon x). Yet, during the mid-Victorian period, elder sister Agnes gained renown as the author of one of the best-selling works of non-fiction in the nineteenth-century, the *Lives of the Queens of England* (twelve volumes, 1840–48). Due to the work of contemporary scholars of women's literature and Canadian literature, the fame of the younger Strickland sisters—Susanna Strickland Moodie and Catharine Strickland, under her married name of Catharine Parr Traill—now far outshines that of the once lionized Agnes. Since the publication in 1970 of Margaret Atwood's poetry sequence, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, a re-imagined version of Moodie's life as a Canadian immigrant, the once-forgotten Strickland sisters have re-emerged as central figures in early Canadian literature. Both Catharine Parr (Strickland) Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), the earliest non-fiction depiction of settler life by a woman in Canada, and Susanna (Strickland) Moodie's less sanguine account, *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852), have been reprinted for modern audiences, and contemporary critics have rechristened the younger Strickland sisters as two of the founding mothers of Canadian literature.[6]

In the 1820's, however, none of the Strickland sisters was known far beyond the family home in Suffolk. Their father, Thomas, born in London, was the son of a respectable but poor family; his grandfather had listed himself as a "yeoman" in his will (Pope-Hennessy 7). Working for a shipping firm as a young man, Thomas Strickland eventually became the manager of the company's Greenland docks near Rotherhithe, a position that earned him enough money to purchase several properties in London. Hoping to improve his family's class position, Thomas first rented and then purchased a country estate, moving his family from the city to Suffolk in 1803. He also named his fifth daughter, born in 1802, Catharine Parr, after Henry VIII's sixth wife, who was rumoured to be a distant ancestor (Gray 4–5). But Strickland did not eschew the world of trade altogether; he entered into a partnership with a coach-maker in Norwich, an association that may have led the local landed gentry to associate him with lesser tradesmen rather than the elite commercial and professional class that he and his family yearned to join. Neighbours were slow to accept him in the role of country gentleman; as one of Agnes Strickland's biographers notes, "socially, [the Stricklands] fell

between two stools, being neither of the county nor yet connected with a business. It is evident that though their circumstances were genteel, their upbringing gentle, and their residence a Hall, they were not at this time accepted by the county families who avoided all suspicion of contact with trade or the middle class" (Pope-Hennessy 20–21).[7]

In the spring of 1818, Thomas Strickland died unexpectedly, the news of an investment failure and his subsequent near-bankruptcy aggravating a continuing bout with gout. Their father's death left the Strickland children in a precarious position, both economically and socially. The grandeur of the family seat, Reydon Hall, proclaimed their genteel status, yet Thomas Strickland's bankruptcy left his widow with little cash to maintain appearances. Maids and gardeners soon disappeared, as did the family carriage; entertaining was curtailed, and the girls tended their own vegetable plot (Gray 16). Mrs. Strickland and her three elder daughters, including Catharine, were horrified when younger sister Susanna joined a Nonconformist congregation with a membership made up primarily of farmers and labourers, for Catherine and her other sisters continued to "cling to the upper rungs of society" (Gray 25). Catherine, who had been born only a year before her family moved to Suffolk, knew no other way of life.

Unbeknownst to Catharine, an old family friend brought a collection of the sixteen-year-old's stories to a children's publisher in London; to her surprise, John Harris accepted them for publication. The five golden guineas paid to Catharine Strickland for her story collection was no small amount, and her more ambitious sisters soon realized that "scribbling trash" might in fact mean the difference between shabby gentility and true poverty. London publishers were soon inundated with stories, poems, and novels from the pens not only of Catharine, but also of Agnes, Jane Margaret, and Susanna Strickland, while the eldest Strickland sister, Elizabeth, moved to London to pursue a literary/editorial career. Many an anonymous children's book published in the 1820's by A. K. Newman, Dean and Munday, John Harris, and Harvey and Darton, as well as numerous stories and poems in the Christmas and New Year's annuals of the day, can be attributed to the Strickland sisters (Peterman and Ballstadt 4–5).

If writing for children allowed the Strickland girls the economic means to continue, albeit on a far more modest scale, at grand Reydon Hall, it did not ensure their social standing. There was little money for entertaining, and invitations from the neighbouring gentry declined as they became aware that the Stricklands could no longer return their hospitality. Living in the country

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prevented them from finding a place in the emerging urban merchant class, and opportunities for the girls to meet suitable marriage partners dried up when their two younger brothers pursued one of the few options left to gentlemen with no money—emigration. Catherine Strickland's *The Young Emigrants*, written only a year after her younger brother Sam left for Canada, emerged in the midst of this deep anxiety about the ability of her brothers, and her family as a whole, to remain on the dominant side in a binary conception of social relations.

In the actual history of Canadian immigration, European emigrants from what today we would term "working-class" backgrounds far outnumbered those from the gentry class. Such emigrants came to the New World to better themselves economically, to participate in an economic mobility unavailable in the hierarchically based societies from which they originated. Strickland's novel, however, features a family whose social and economic position is (at least initially) far higher than that of the typical New World immigrant. *The Young Emigrants* opens with a description of a family in straits similar to those of her own. Mr. Clarence, the patriarch of the family, announces that with the change of government, he has lost his (unspecified) "place," and with it "my whole income" (2); he must now sell his small estate in order to survive.[8] While the family is far from impoverished—the sale of Roselands will leave them with £600—their income no longer enables the Clarences to remain, economically, in the ranks of the genteel.[9]

Such a sum is far from enough to support Richard, Clarence's fifteen-year-old son, in his plans to study to be a doctor, one of the few professions considered compatible with gentlemanly identity in the period. Stalwart Richard asserts that he is not distressed by having to give up his plans; what does concern him, however, is how to avoid giving up his social

position: "What do you think will be the most eligible situation I can enter, to procure a genteel livelihood? I will spare no exertions, believe me" (4). One option—to enter into trade—is explored, but immediately dismissed: "I should be loath to see you descend into the lower ranks of society," says Mr. Clarence; besides, "it would take a considerable sum of money to apprentice you to any trade, even to a linen-draper or grocer, either of which would be respectable situations, though by no means agreeable to a youth who has made great progress in a classical education" (4). Here, Richard and his father give voice to the social line that Amanda Vickery argues was most relevant to the Georgian women she studied: the line between those who earn an income from the land or from the genteel trades, and those who engage in a lesser form of trade, one that involves buying and selling directly to consumers. Being a linen-draper or a grocer may be respectable, but is hardly genteel. Mr. Clarence's use of the word "ranks," rather than "classes," points to his investment in an older conception of class relations; as P. J. Corfield suggests, the older term "rank" points to a view of social position as static rather than fluid (47).

As a more palatable alternative to the respectable but ungenteel professions of linen draping and grocery selling, Mr. Clarence proposes emigration, informing Richard that their "occupation" in Canada would be "cultivat[ing] the earth." (5). Embracing such a path seems strikingly at odds with a desire to maintain a genteel identity when we envision hard work, particularly physical labour, as the province solely of the working class. But Richard, who embraces a binary rather than tripartite understanding of class, sees this option as compatible with, rather than at odds with, his identity as a gentleman. Relieved, Richard responds to his father's idea: "And what can be a more manly and independent employment, than that which God first ordained for man? . . . At any rate, it is more consonant to our habits, than engaging in any mercantile pursuits" (5–6). Reframing the binary that equates gentility with leisure and the lower classes with work, Richard asserts that the true opposition is between those whose status is grounded in land, and those whose worth is established via small amounts of capital. Physical labour, typically seen as a working-class attribute, is here recast as compatible with genteel identity. Richard implies that labouring on the land can still be seen as a gentlemanly pursuit, as long as the land one cultivates is one's own.

If Richard is satisfied with the option set before him, his two sisters are less sanguine at the prospect of emigration. "In America, what will be the use of those accomplishments, that Agnes

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and I have spent so much time in attaining? Will not our skill in music, French, and drawing, be all thrown away, among the wild woods of Canada?" Ellen asks her brother (11). As Nancy Armstrong argues, in a hierarchical system of relationships, the elite were expected to display their wealth (70); for women, such accomplishments as skills in languages, music, and drawing functioned to demonstrate performatively their genteel upbringing and status. As Richard tells his sisters, however, the same accomplishments can perform a different function:

> If you see things in their right light, you will perceive that your French will be useful to you in conversing with the Canadians, who speak that language. Music will cheer our evenings, after the toils of the day; and as to drawing, remember, Ellen, how many beautiful flowers Canada produces, which will form new and interesting studies for your pencil. You have hitherto made these accomplishments the sole employment of your life; but now a higher duty awaits you, and more active pursuits. Your more elegant attainments will still serve as a pleasing relaxation from graver studies, and more toilsome occupation; but they must no longer form the business of your life. (11–12)

Accomplishments, once for display only, must now function as useful tools in the girls' new "employment," "business," "occupation"—that of female emigrant. Armstrong suggests that idle amusements, those aimed at putting the body of the woman on public display, pointed back to an older conception of aristocratic power that was displaced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by a middle-class conception of the domestic woman, whose performances become restricted to the home (75–81). In Richard's construction, performative accomplishments become transformed into useful domestic skills;

in Strickland's text, this concept of "usefulness" becomes central not to constructing a new middle-class identity in a tripartite understanding of class, but to maintaining a genteel one in a binary construction of social relations.

Agnes decides to adapt to her new role, even spending several weeks on a farm prior to emigrating in order to learn how to care for cows and poultry. Strickland takes pains to dismiss the idea that such knowledge might call into question Agnes' genteel status, drawing once again on the middle-class trope of "usefulness," this time asserted by a female authority figure, Agnes' mother: "Mrs. Clarence had too much real sense to think that scattering corn for poultry, skimming milk, making bread, or even superintending the manufacturing of cheese or butter, could degrade the mind of her daughter. 'Why,' said she, 'should these offices be unbecoming to a lady, merely because they are useful?'" (19–20). Here, Mrs. Clarence, like her son before her, redefines gentility; answering back to the conduct books of the eighteenth century (and what would soon become the common knowledge of the nineteenth), which cordon off the genteel lady from physical labour, Mrs. Clarence asserts that "labour" must be judged in terms of its "usefulness." Richard echoes his mother's language when he reports "Nor is [Agnes] apprehensive that her fingers will lose their skill in touching a piano or guiding the pencil, because they have also learned the useful art of making bread, skimming milk, salting meat, and manufacturing butter and cheese" (23). Genteel femininity can encompass both useful work and performative display; as long as the former does not supplant the latter, Strickland asserts, a lady will never be "degraded."

If performing labouring-class work does not imperil Richard and Agnes's social status, the process by which they must acquire such skills presents another potential threat to their position as gentry. Richard and Agnes must apprentice themselves (albeit briefly) to farm labourers, turning the usual patronage relationship between gentry and dependent, one in which the higher ranked member offers aid to his or her "inferior," on its head. Strickland must again take pains to demonstrate that such a potentially class-disrupting shift of hierarchy in no way undercuts the Clarence children's social position. Learning carpentry, Richard does not "feel himself the least degraded by his new employment" (16), in part because he is learning, not from a stranger, but from a man whom his father had "assisted . . . at a time when he was in great distress" by establishing him in business (15). Even the potential taint of money is set aside, for the carpenter refuses to be paid for his instruction: "I hope you will

permit a poor man to be grateful," the carpenter exclaims when offered a "handsome recompense" by Mr. Clarence (16–17). The farmers who teach husbandry to Agnes and Richard are relatives of the carpenter, who, like their brother, feel it "quite an honour" to have the Clarence children stay with them, and treat them with the "utmost respect and hospitality" that their superior social status demands. Again, no money is exchanged for the services rendered (or at least no such exchange is mentioned in the text). Relations between the gentry and their dependents are grounded not in cash exchange, but in a relationship of patriarchal patronage and charity, a relationship that solidifies the social position of its participants to mitigate the potential class disruption the learning of working-class skills by gentry children might entail. Nancy Armstrong suggests that redefinitions of the "desirable woman" functioned to construct middle-class subjectivity, yet while Strickland's family adopts what Armstrong and others have labelled middle-class values, they do so while firmly entrenched in the older conception of a patronage-based hierarchy that such middle-class values were purportedly functioning to displace.

Sister Ellen, unable to reconcile herself so easily to a life without the luxuries that mark her class status, is rescued by a beneficent aunt and a well-timed illness, remaining behind in England after the family estate is sold and the rest of the Clarences set sail for Canada. In the preface to her novel, Strickland voices the hope common to the prefaces of children's novels in the first decades of the century: that her novel will prove both "a source of information" to her readers, and source of "pleasure" (iv). It is clear to see what is the "information" portion of the novel: Richard's post-emigration letters to Ellen detail the sights the Clarences see as they travel to their proposed settlement, then recount the various stages involved in establishing the family's new "estate." Though readers can presumably take pleasure in this information, which makes much of the text read like a travelogue rather than a novel, I found more of interest in the brief sections of the book that stop to tell stories rather than describing the sights. Such narratives, I suggest, function to reassure readers in England that although the Canadian wilderness presents the possibility of a place without clearly established and legible social markers, truly genteel settlers will always bring their social status with them.

Such reassurance is surely needed when Richard shifts from describing the Canadian landscape to depicting the Canadians around him. The most striking characteristic of the Canadians, he reports, is their hospitality. In a hierarchical "Chain of Being" conception of social relations,

. . . the only real sign of the Clarence family's gentility lies in the deference shown to it by those lower down on the social scale. In Canada, where such deference is difficult to come by, class hierarchies are dangerously destabilized, the text suggests.

hospitality was the province and the hallmark of the elite (Armstrong 71–72). In Canada, however, hospitality has moved down the social chain. In a letter to Ellen, Richard suggests that this widespread hospitality is praiseworthy by equating it with the golden rule—"To do unto others, as they would be done unto themselves"—yet by adding that "they expect to be treated in like manner," Richard indicates some ambivalence (45). This ambivalence is heightened by his comparison of Canadian hospitality to English: "In England, it is only to our friends and relations, or to the great and rich, that we are hospitable; but in Canada, every one has a claim on you" (45). Strickland makes the extent of this claim clearer in a footnote which cites *Howison's Sketches of Upper Canada*: "The most astonishing point is the hospitality and liberality which they exercise towards strangers, in admitting them to an equality with themselves. Any poor starving peasant, who comes into a settlement, will experience the same kindness and attention as is shown to the wealthiest person in it" (46). Hospitality, which in a binary construction of social relations signals elite identity, here has lost its ability to signify social position at all. Hospitality now, in fact, seems to function to erase class distinctions; when the poor are treated in the same way as the wealthiest, how are we to tell them apart?

Such inter-class hospitality might be acceptable back in England, where the "peasant" can teach the young gentlepeople trade skills while still maintaining a clear air of deference toward his or her superiors, but in Canada, this class-crossing hospitality sits side by side with a more disconcerting trend: the lack of "peasants" willing to perform the role of servant. As Richard reports to Ellen,

> The settlers have the greatest difficulty in procuring servants, either to do the work of the house or the labour of the farm, as every servant considers himself on a perfect equality with his master; and if you pay them ever so

> highly, they will hardly condescend to perform those little offices which a European servant executes for you with cheerfulness and without a murmur. . . . You are often subjected to great inconvenience from the spirit of equality and independence which subsists among the lower classes. (65)

Just prior to this passage, Richard reiterates his willingness to give up all "luxuries and superfluities" (63), once the markers of aristocratic privilege. But without such markers, the only real sign of the Clarence family's gentility lies in the deference shown to it by those lower down on the social scale. In Canada, where such deference is difficult to come by, class hierarchies are dangerously destabilized, the text suggests.

But Richard's comments about the "servant problem" serve as the introduction to a mini-drama, a story that immediately contains the potential danger posed by a working-class assertion of equality by casting the Clarences once again as patriarchal dispensers of charity and patronage. While waiting for his father outside a store in Montreal, Richard observes a boy his own age holding an emaciated infant. His first instinct is to offer the boy money, but "fearful of hurting his feelings, as there was something in his look and manner that assured me he had seen better days," Richard instead maintains control over the purse strings, purchasing food for the boy (68). Thus, Richard uses his money in a way that Kenlem Digby, in *The Broad Stones of Honour: or, Rules for the Gentlemen of England*, would find completely consonant with gentility: "It is not easy for a gentleman to become rich, being neither disposed to receive nor to keep money, but liberal, and esteeming it only as the instrument of generosity" (qtd. in Welsh 136).[10] The hungry boy immediately shows proper deference, doffing his cap and thanking his benefactor, and relating the story of his family's woes when Richard asks where his parents are and whether they are in "much distress" (69). Acting as a lord even without a manor, Richard promises to visit the boy in his home to offer advice and succour.

Mr. Clarence undergoes a similar class validation, with the role of the recipient of his munificence taken on by the indigent boy's father, Mr. Gordon. Gordon immediately recognizes Clarence's social status—"The sick man seemed surprised at seeing a gentleman of papa's appearance and address enter his humble cottage" (71)—as Clarence recognizes his, by offering the man a job as a servant on the Clarences' yet-to-be-built farm. That the patron/dependent relationship that serves as the foundation of landed gentility

in England is to be replicated here is indicated by the fact that Gordon has not emigrated out of ambition, but out of want stemming from a corrupted patron/dependent situation: the Gordons were forced to leave the land they had rented for three generations when "our good laird died and the lands fell under the guardianship of strangers" (73). Although Agnes later writes that "in Canada, my dear Ellen, it is not sufficient to give orders, and look on while the servants work: you must also lend your assistance, and help to do some of the labours of the house" (143), such labours never imperil the gentility of those engaged in useful work, in large part because their class standing is continually affirmed by the existence of the Gordon family. The Gordons, Strickland writes, prove "faithful and industrious domestics" who "seem to vie with each other in attention to our comforts, and endeavour, by every possible means, to show their gratitude for the kindness they received at our hands, when they were in sickness and distress, and without friends or any one to pity and relieve them" (138).

But dependents alone are not enough to establish a genteel class position; real equals, in education and breeding, are also required. And so Mr. Clarence decides against taking a free grant of land in the backwoods (or bush) uninhabited by European settlers; instead, he uses part of the money gained from the sale of his English estate to purchase an already-built farm, a farm with at least one set of class-comparable neighbours close at hand: the Hamiltons. As Agnes reports to Ellen, "Were it not for the society of the Hamiltons, we should find this place quite a solitude, as our other neighbours consist chiefly of mechanics or labourers, (I mean those in our immediate vicinity,) whose education has unfitted them for the pleasures of intellectual conversation, and we cannot take interest in theirs" (156). Although, as Agnes notes, the Clarences and the "other" neighbours "practice a mutual kindness towards each other," it is with the Hamiltons that they find their equals. By whiling away a winter evening demonstrating their acquisition of "accomplishments"—playing instruments, singing, reading aloud, drawing, and playing chess—with the Clarences, the Hamiltons function as a second validation of the Clarences' social position.

Once the Clarences have re-established their social position by gaining appreciative dependents and equals with whom they can perform their genteel accomplishments, the only task left to cement their class standing is to extend their patronage beyond the boundaries of their own family circle. As Dorice Williams Elliott notes, traditional aristocratic paternalism demanded that gentry landowners maintain those who lived and

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worked on their estates, offering them aid when they were ill, infirm, or economically distressed. Paternalistic acts of charity included visiting the sick and teaching in charity schools, but more importantly, they focused on direct financial support: donations of food, clothing, or bedding to specific individuals, or the founding of charity schools to teach the children of the estate (15). As Elliott argues, "By performing these charitable duties, upper-class women were supposed to reinforce the reciprocal obligations of a paternal hierarchical society by conferring obligations on the poor that would be reciprocated with gratitude and deference" (24). While charity work is often cited as a hallmark of Victorian middle-class identity, middle-class charity functioned differently. Sympathy, rather than a relationship of reciprocal obligation, was its impetus; advice and education, rather than material goods and support, its means (24).

The children's charity takes on aspects of both aristocratic and middle-class charity. They do not as of yet have the financial means to provide material goods or direct financial support. But they can create a charity school, not for labouring-class English settlers, who are too sparse (and too independent) to influence, but on racial others, or those they perceive to be racial others. As Richard informs Ellen, "Papa has given us a waste bit of land, on which we are to build a school-house, for the benefit of the children of the Irish labourers who inhabit the village, and who are almost as little acquainted with the duties of Christianity as the poor Indians themselves" (126). Agnes later reports that their school is attended by twenty-five regular scholars, both Irish and Iroquois, "and I am happy to say that a considerable alteration has already taken place in the manners and behaviour of the inhabitants of the village, which, when we first settled here, was a sad, wicked, disorderly place" (148). Religious education is often associated with middle-class identity, yet, as Patricia Thane argues, evangelicalism was strong not only among the urban middle classes, but also

among the gentry in the early-Victorian period (95). In instructing the lower orders in "their duty to God and to their parents," and, by extension, their duty to their patrons, the Clarence and Hamilton children recreate the sense of "reciprocal obligation" so vital to the construction of a older, landed-gentry conception of class relations.

Though Agnes refers to their agricultural pursuits when she writes "Every root we put into the ground flourishes, and increases in a wonderful manner, owing to the richness and fertility of the soil" (150), she could just as easily be referring to the roots of a binary vision of social hierarchy. Through her depiction of the Clarences, Strickland eagerly asserts that the genteel only need appropriate a few of the values more commonly associated with the emerging middle class to ensure that a binary construction of social relations will be easily transplantable to the apparently class-free Canadian wilderness. Such a desire may be wish fulfillment, a longing for what ought to be, rather than a depiction of anything resembling an actual emigrant experience. But given the prevalence of similar tropes and desires in both British and American novels of emigration written for children during the period, it must have been a wish shared by many other writers for children, as well as the readers of their novels. As a tripartite conception of class grew increasingly common both in England and in America during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, it attempted to link new values—the power of education, self-denial, thrift, modesty, and moderation—to a more fluid, egalitarian vision of class relations. For those who still clung to a binary conception of social relations, embracing new values might seem possible, even laudable. But when such values went hand in hand with a more mobile conception of social relations, those who envisioned society as divided between those who were "genteel" and those who were not grew troubled. Solace might be found, Strickland and other writers suggest, in the idea that the New World might offer a fresh canvas upon which to paint anew the old binary social relations that were increasingly under attack in the Old.

Historians and critics of children's literature generally read late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century children's literature as performing the cultural work of shaping an emergent middle-class subjectivity. In contrast, I have argued that settler narratives written for children in this period more often re-inscribe an older conception of class relations, a binary, rather than a tripartite, understanding of class. Are these narratives simply isolated, rare cases of an outdated ideology, with a tripartite ideology more common in books for children of the period?

In order to answer this question, more research needs to be done to examine individual titles to see whether a binary or tripartite understanding of class best characterizes their ideological underpinnings. Do characters construct identities in opposition to both an upper class and a labouring class? Or do they understand their class position as simply genteel?

In *The Making of the Modern Child: Children's Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century*, Andrew O'Malley acknowledges that not all historians agree that the emergent middle class constructed itself in opposition to upper-class identity. But he urges literary scholars to align themselves with those historians who see the middle class as an oppositional culture, arguing that

> The number of children's books warning their middle-class readers against emulation of the elite, while attacking the vices engendered by overindulgence and luxury, suggests, however, a growing discontent with the inherited privilege enjoyed by the upper classes. While the practice of deference may have lingered, representations in children's texts and elsewhere were pointing to an emerging, oppositional middle-class ideology. (3)

Yet in his chapter on how children's literature represented the poor and rich, he spends markedly less time discussing texts that denigrate the upper class than he does explicating texts concerned with the dangers of the plebian class—only four pages on the rich compared to more than twenty on the poor. Interestingly, when he turns to a discussion of the depiction of the rich, the eighteenth-century writers that he calls upon to illustrate a widespread cultural critique of "gentry and upper classes"—Catharine Macaulay and Joseph Priestly—are of a radical cast. As discussed earlier, radicals were far more likely to embrace a binary construction of class (the tyrannical gentry and the workers they oppressed) than were political moderates. Finally, while O'Malley suggests that a critique of the upper class is widespread in literature for children of the period, he discusses only three such texts, with a footnoted reference to a fourth. Thomas Day, the author of one of the novels in which he finds this pattern, also fits more comfortably under the label of "radical" than "moderate." Another novel's class politics seem to shift under O'Malley's feet: in his text, he suggests that the titular hero of *The Memoirs of Dick the Little Pony* "eventually discovers happiness with an ideal middle-class family," yet in a footnote he acknowledges "In Dick's case, it is not, in fact, a middle-class family with whom he finds his ultimate comfort, but

an upper-class family 'of distinction' who have adopted a middle-class model of domesticity" (63; 152n48).

While there certainly may be more examples of the denigration of upper-class luxury and indulgence in children's books of the late-eighteenth century than O'Malley discusses in his chapter, we may want to pause before dismissing out of hand the ways in which "deference lingered." Did texts by authors not linked with progressive or radical groups construct a middle-class subjectivity in opposition to the upper ranks? Did they typically embrace a tripartite view of social class? Or did they hold tight to a binary view of class relations as Catharine Strickland did? Could texts that rail against the luxury and indulgence of the aristocracy and nobility still envision a gentry, rather than a middle-class, identity? Might such criticisms be aimed at reforming the gentry classes, rather than at carving out a space separate from them? Might characters that we have heretofore labelled "middle class" turn out, like Dick the Pony's family, to be "upper class," albeit with slightly different manners? When we are too quick to label books and their characters "middle class," we may fail to see the ways that texts for children written during this period simultaneously espouse purportedly "middle-class" values even while they reject an egalitarian and individualistic society in which the person with the most talent and drive succeeds. Not all children's books of the period may be as "middle class" as we've been led to believe.

Notes

[1] Kingston, W. H. G., *How to Emigrate, or, The British Colonists, A Tale for All Classes* (London: Grant and Griffith, 1850) 156. Quoted in Kingsford 72.

[2] Robin F. Haines's research reveals that in 1848, for example, 86% of immigrants to Australia's Victoria province received government assistance (22). In 1857, only 1.9% of UK emigrants to British North America, and only 4.1% of UK emigrants to Australia, could be categorized as "professional: professional, gentry, merchants" (59).

[3] Wahrman cites the following historical studies to back up his claim: Mandler; Colley; Langford; Thane; Rose; Seccombe; Vickery, "Golden Age"; and Neale. See also Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*.

[4] New suggests that Traill drew upon John Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) in writing *Emigrants*

(55), although Traill herself credits Lieutenant Hall's *Travels in Canada*, in 1816–17 (*Young Emigrants* 44) and Howison's *Sketches of Upper Canada* (*Young Emigrants* 46) as her sources for the travelogue details.

[5] In *Pioneer Woman: A Character Type*, Elizabeth Thompson suggests that "The central dilemma of the book . . . is the issue of one's social status in Canada. Can a woman remain a lady in Canada, living as a Canadian pioneer, and performing what are essentially 'unladylike' tasks?" (13–14). Thompson's analysis focuses on the class status of women, but Strickland's novel is just as invested in maintaining male gentility as it is female.

[6] The other two "founding mothers" of Canadian literature are Frances Brooke and Anna Jameson. Each had established a literary career in England before her travel or emigration to Canada. Frances Brooke is credited with writing the first novel set in Canada, 1769's *The History of Emily Montague*. Jameson had been writing professionally for almost fifteen years when she came to visit her husband, the Attorney General of Upper Canada, in 1836, and published her travelogue, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, in 1838 after her return to England. See Boutelle, Dean, Fowler, Sparrow, Stanzel, Thomas, and Thompson.

[7] Given Thomas Strickland's involvement in coachmaking, Pope-Hennessy's comment that the Stricklands weren't associated with the business world is revealing. Agnes Strickland, who in later life moved in elite circles due to her fame as an author, preferred to tell friends and acquaintances (and biographers) that she was related to the Stricklands of Sizergh Castle, and through them, to Katharine Parr, Edward III, and eight of the queens whose biographies she wrote (Pope-Hennessy 7–8).

[8] The "retrenchment" in government to which Mr. Clarence attributes his downfall and the "depressed state of the times" that allow him only to net £600 in the sale of his estate suggest that the novel is set during the economic slump that followed the end of the Napoleonic wars.

[9] William St. Clair estimates that a weekly income of at least £5 was necessary in the period to maintain oneself as a gentleman (194-5).

[10] [Kenlem Digby], *The Broad Stones of Honour; or, Rules for the Gentlemen of England*, 2nd ed. (London, 1823) 492–94. Quoted in Welsh 136.

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