



DRS CARLA & MELVIN PASTERNAK AWARD
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UNIQUE TITLE

Performing Manhood

Performing Manhood: Robert W. Service's "The Shooting of Dan McGrew"

Robert W. Service is, of course, renowned for his dramatization of northern life during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-1898. Yet, when he arrived for the first time in Dawson in 1908, a year after the publication of Songs of a Sourdough, the rush was over: the city had shrunk from the 40,000 residents of its heyday as the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg to some 4,000; the last of the dance-halls -- the Floradora -- which had flourished ten years earlier was on the verge of closure; and placer mining, known contemporaneously as "poor man's" mining (Harris 375-76), had given way to highly capitalized, large-scale industrial engineering. Returning to the past in such poems as "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," Service not only enshrines the myth of masculine individualism within the folklore of the Yukon but also celebrates the release of fin-de-siècle manhood from the constraints of bourgeois domesticity. In the process, he opens a window into a world of homosocial play wherein "boys" have fun, a "kid" performs on the piano, and even grown men can amuse themselves with a "game." Inasmuch as gender is, as Judith Butler contends, performative, these images are productive of a masculinity that ascribes to men the physicality, the hedonism, and the savagery of boys. Repudiating contemporary challenges to male power while yet affirming the heterosexual imperative that it seeks to evade, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" thus commands attention not only for its depiction of the north but also for its complex mediation of anxieties related to gender and identity at the turn of the century.

While Anglo-American men had, at the height of the nineteenth century, defined themselves through success as independent entrepreneurs and middle-class professionals, a number of factors, including industrial corporatization, urban migration, and cultural

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