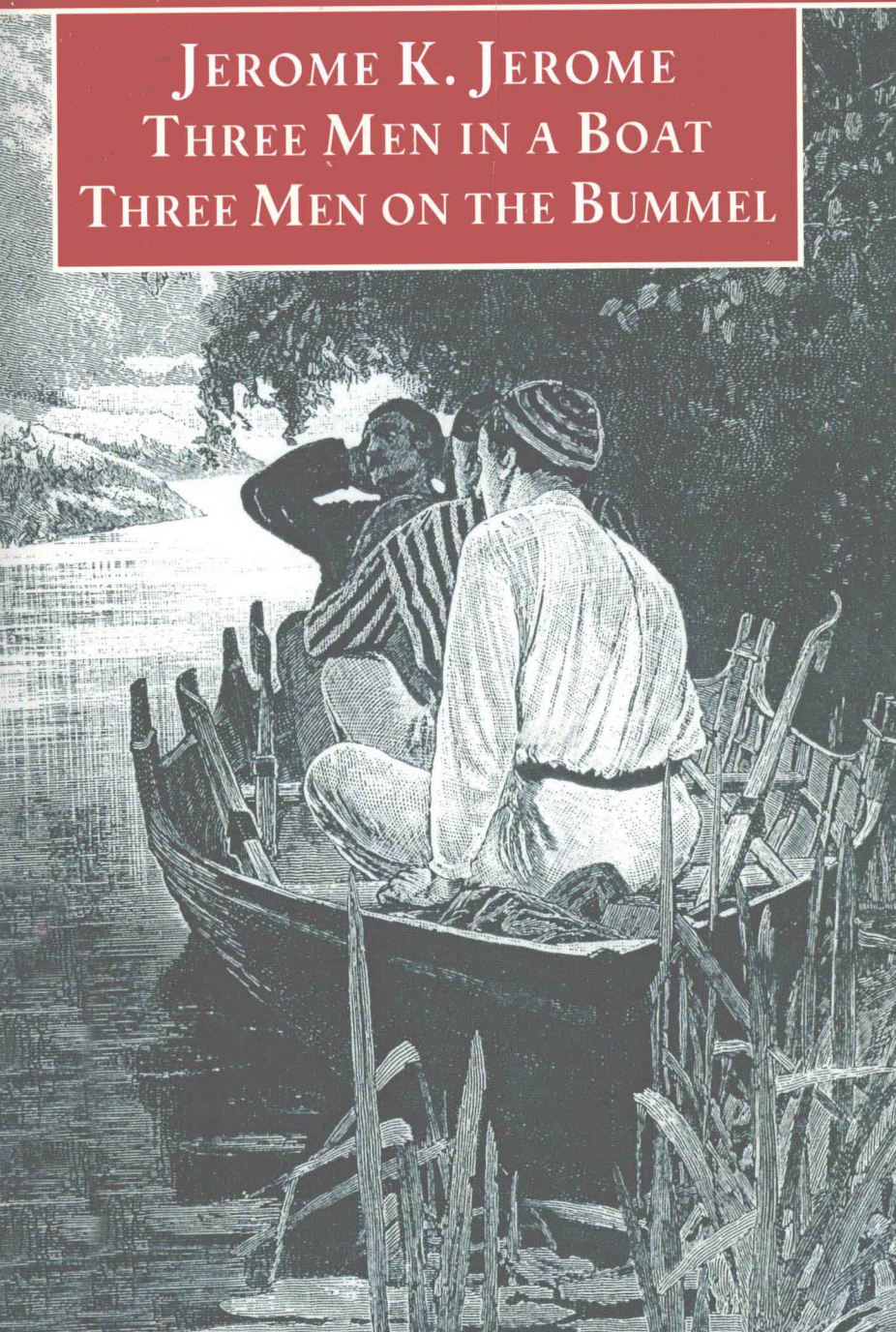


OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

JEROME K. JEROME
THREE MEN IN A BOAT
THREE MEN ON THE BUMMEL



OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



JEROME K. JEROME

Three Men in a Boat
Three Men on the Bummel



Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

GEOFFREY HARVEY

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogotá Buenos Aires Calcutta
Cape Town Chennai Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul
Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Mumbai
Nairobi Paris São Paulo Shanghai Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw
with associated companies in Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

Editorial matter © Geoffrey Harvey 1998

The moral rights of the author have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)

First published as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 1998

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organizations. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above

You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Jerome, Jerome K. (Jerome Klapka), 1859–1927.

[Three men in a boat]

Three men in a boat; Three men on the bummel / Jerome K. Jerome;
edited with an introduction and notes by Geoffrey Harvey.

(Oxford world's classics)

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Young men—Travel—England—Thames River—Fiction. 2. Boats and boating—
England—Thames River—Fiction. 3. Thames River (England)—Fiction. 4. Dogs—
Fiction. 5. Black Forest (Germany)—Description and travel—Fiction. 6. Humorous
stories, English. I. Harvey, Geoffery, 1943–. II. Jerome, Jerome, K. (Jerome
Klapka), 1859–1927. Three men on the bummel. III. Title. IV. Title: Three men on the
bummel. V. Series: Oxford world's classics (Oxford University Press)

PR4825.J3.A7753 1998 823'.912—dc21 97–3231

ISBN-13: 978-0-19-288033-8

ISBN-10: 0-19-288033-0

9

Typeset by The Spartan Press Ltd.
Printed in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

THREE MEN IN A BOAT
THREE MEN ON THE BUMMEL

JEROME K. JEROME (1859–1927), the son of a Nonconformist preacher and failed entrepreneur, was brought up in the East End of London, a period of his life recorded in his autobiographical novel *Paul Kelter* (1902). He started work at 14 as a clerk at Euston Station, leaving to join a theatrical touring company; and then embarked on a writing career with the publication of essays and humorous sketches in *Home Chimes* in 1885, and in the following year in *The Playgoer*. His reputation as a comic writer was established in 1889 by the immense popularity of *Three Men in a Boat*. Although he was a respected playwright, his work for the stage had mixed fortunes, the most notable plays being *Miss Hobbs* (1899), and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1908). He also had a successful period as an editor, first with *The Idler*, a monthly magazine, to which he also contributed, and later as the founder of his own weekly journal, *To-day*, which he relinquished after a costly libel suit. His love of Germany, and especially Dresden, where he spent two years, is evident in *Three Men on the Bummel*, published in 1900, though his admiration for German society was not uncritical. A radical socialist by instinct, and for a time a member of the Fabian Society, he angered the press by speaking out against British anti-German propaganda during the war. Contemporary literary critics labelled him, controversially, a 'new humorist', but his best-known works have a secure place in the tradition of comic writing. He died while on holiday in Devon, on 14 June 1927.

GEOFFREY HARVEY is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Reading, and the author of *The Art of Anthony Trollope*, *The Romantic Tradition in Modern English Poetry*, and *D. H. Lawrence: 'Sons and Lovers': The Critics Debate*. He has edited *Mr Scarborough's Family*, *The Bertrams*, and *The Forsyte Saga* for the Oxford World's Classics series.

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics have brought readers closer to the world's great literature. Now with over 700 titles—from the 4,000-year-old myths of Mesopotamia to the twentieth century's greatest novels—the series makes available lesser-known as well as celebrated writing.

The pocket-sized hardbacks of the early years contained introductions by Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and other literary figures which enriched the experience of reading.

Today the series is recognized for its fine scholarship and reliability in texts that span world literature, drama and poetry, religion, philosophy and politics. Each edition includes perceptive commentary and essential background information to meet the changing needs of readers.

INTRODUCTION

Jerome K. Jerome is known today principally for his huge best-seller *Three Men in a Boat*, which achieved immediate popularity on its appearance in 1889, and was promptly pirated by unscrupulous American publishers. It quickly made his name, not only in England and America, but throughout Europe, and has been filmed three times, in 1920, 1933, and 1956. Also a great success was its comic sequel, *Three Men on the Bummel*, about a cycle tour through the Black Forest region of Germany. However, although Jerome became a celebrity, to the contemporary reading public his was a somewhat enigmatic literary personality. There was his unsettling propensity to frequent switches of mood, from the farcical, as in *Three Men in a Boat*, to the sombre, in novels such as *Paul Kolver*, and from the light-hearted to the sentimental and back again, even within a single book. There was also his dual role of novelist and editor. For a while he was one of the foremost editors of the day, producing simultaneously the popular though very different periodicals *The Idler* and *To-day*. And he was also a successful playwright, the author of such diverse stage hits as *Miss Hobbs*, a play about the 'new woman' which drew on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, an allegorical morality play which was frequently revived. Jerome's literary versatility was not always recognized, and in his autobiography he records wryly his response to a woman who was encouraging him to write a play:

I told her I had written nine: that six of them had been produced, that three of them had been successful both in England and America, that one of them was still running at the Comedy Theatre and approaching its two hundredth night. Her eyebrows went up in amazement.¹

Jerome Klapka Jerome (his second name was in honour of a Hungarian general, George Klapka, who was staying with the Jeromes at the time of his birth) was born in 1859 in Walsall, where his father, a Nonconformist preacher and unsuccessful farmer, had

¹ Jerome K. Jerome, *My Life and Times* (London: John Murray, 1926; reprinted 1983), 100.

invested in a small coal pit, which came into production only after he had sold it. Jerome was brought up in relative deprivation in the East End of London, where his father's wholesale ironmongery business also failed to prosper; following his death Jerome began work at the age of 14 as a railway clerk at Euston Station, in order to support his mother and sister. However, from these unpromising beginnings, by middle age he was not only an established writer, who had achieved literary fame as a 'new humorist'; he was also financially secure, with a substantial house on the hills at Wallingford, close to his beloved Thames.

The years of Jerome's maturity coincided with the exciting period of cultural change around the turn of the century, and through his role as an editor he enjoyed the esteem and friendship of many of the rising literary men of the day, including H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, J. M. Barrie, H. Rider Haggard, George Moore, George Gissing, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Rudyard Kipling; while he was a welcome visitor to Thomas Hardy's Dorset home, Max Gate. Jerome also counted among his circle several famous people in the world of theatre, such as Sir Henry Irving, Marie Tempest, for whom he wrote a number of plays, and Sarah Bernhardt. He was acquainted with German royalty, knew important political figures such as Lloyd George and Ramsay MacDonald, and enjoyed the distinction of being invited to meet President Theodore Roosevelt during his first lecture tour of America.

Jerome's father died when he was 12, and his mother three years later. As an escape from loneliness and depression, following the subsequent marriage of his sister, and as a release from the tedium of his job, Jerome abandoned the station office for the stage. He spent three years touring with theatre companies, accumulating a wealth of experience, which he recorded in a volume of humorous sketches, *On the Stage—and Off*. (He notes, with some pride, that he played every part in *Hamlet* except Ophelia.) This period of his life proved useful later, in the writing not only of plays but of prose fiction, for many of the scenes in *Three Men in a Boat* and *Three Men on the Bummel* possess dramatic rhythm, reveal an ear for dialogue, and display a superb sense of comic timing. Although Jerome gave up acting, he never lost his passion for the theatre and, with a group of fellow first-nighters, he organized regular meetings to discuss the plays they had seen, later

formalized as the 'Playgoers Club', which in due course launched its own periodical, *The Playgoer*.

Tired of provincial touring, Jerome returned to London with thirty shillings in his pocket. For a while he slept rough, selling his clothes to buy food, and to pay the ninepence a night required for a place in the doss-house, when the weather was bad. He was rescued from this by a chance meeting with a boyhood friend, who introduced him to journalism, and he soon found himself working as a penny-a-liner, reporting police court proceedings and coroners' inquests. It was in this competitive trade, he reveals, that he learned the craft of humour, in order to influence sub-editors in favour of his 'flimsy', in preference to other contributors' more soberly written reports. Then followed brief spells teaching in a school in Clapham, and working for a firm of commission agents, until he gained more regular employment as a solicitor's clerk, and began seriously to consider a legal career. However, during the whole of this period, Jerome the writer had also been at work, in what time he could find, producing stories, plays, and essays. In fact Jerome had decided firmly on authorship at the age of 10, and the confirmation of this choice of a literary life came about in a strange fashion, through a chance encounter with Charles Dickens, in Victoria Park, in Hackney. While admitting the possibility of a remarkable resemblance between the man in the park and photographs of the novelist, Jerome remained convinced of his identity, and later recorded their fascinating conversation in his autobiographical novel *Paul Kelver*.

Although by 1891, with the publication of *Three Men in a Boat* behind him, Jerome was fully engaged in writing, he took up the opportunity of a second career as an editor when Robert Barr chose him, in preference to Rudyard Kipling, to coedit *The Idler*, a sixpenny monthly illustrated magazine, to which he also contributed a series of essays. However, he had always nursed an ambition to edit his own periodical, and later he founded a more broadly-based weekly paper, *To-day*, a combination of magazine and journal, which included entertainment, reviews, news, and political comment. It soon carved out for itself a niche in the crowded periodical market, attracting contributors of the quality of Conan Doyle, Kipling, Gissing, and Hardy, and was highly successful until Jerome relinquished the editorship, after a costly libel action, five years later.

Jerome used *To-day* as the mouthpiece for his own opinions. His

early political instinct was radical socialist, and his hatred of poverty and oppression expressed itself in several ways. When he was a young man he fell into the company of revolutionaries, both those who lived in Soho and those he met in Brighton at the home of Prince Kropotkin, the leading Russian anarchist, who had settled in England in 1886. Later, together with his friends Wells and Shaw, he joined the Fabian Society. Although he gradually became more of a liberal, he remained a man of firm convictions. And his political courage was considerable. On a lecture tour of America he once braved a sullenly hostile white audience, after a reading in Chattanooga, to speak out against the lynching of negroes in the South. During the war he questioned publicly the morality of the British propaganda campaign against the Germans, an action which brought upon him the wrath of the press, and distanced him from his friends Wells and Kipling. This serious side of Jerome comes through in one of his best works, *Paul Kelter*, which has overtones of Christian allegory, and also in the closing chapters of his autobiography, where he records his sense of shame at making no contribution to the war. He tells how, having been turned down for service on the grounds of age, he was finally accepted as a volunteer ambulance driver for the French Army in 1916, the same year that his fellow-writer John Galsworthy (also rejected by the War Office) went to work in a hospital for convalescent French soldiers. Jerome goes on to describe his experience of the front line, and closes with a reflective examination of the grounds of his religious faith.

Three Men in a Boat

The dual aspect of Jerome's personality—humorist and liberal humanitarian—which is graphically revealed in his own life and writing, enabled him to perceive a similar division within Mark Twain, when they met in London. But it is predominantly Jerome the humorist that the reader encounters in *Three Men in a Boat*, the writing of which saved him from the solicitor's office. The moving spirit behind the venture was his supportive wife, Georgina Stanley, the half-Irish daughter of a Spanish army officer. She persuaded him to pursue a literary career, and the result was *Three Men in a Boat*, written in a state of exhilaration in their top-floor flat in Chelsea Gardens, into which they had moved shortly after their honeymoon.

Three Men in a Boat was begun as a serious travel book, but it refused to conform to its author's intentions. This is Jerome's account of its genesis:

I did not intend to write a funny book, at first. I did not know I was a humorist. I never have been sure about it. In the Middle Ages, I should probably have gone about preaching and got myself burnt or hanged. There was to be 'humorous relief'; but the book was to have been 'The Story of the Thames', its scenery and history. Somehow it would not come. I was just back from my honeymoon, and had the feeling that all the world's troubles were over. About the 'humorous relief' I had no difficulty. I decided to write the 'humorous relief' first—get it off my chest, so to speak. After which, in sober frame of mind, I could tackle the scenery and history. I never got there. It seemed to be all 'humorous relief'. By grim determination I succeeded, before the end, in writing a dozen or so slabs of history and working them in, one to each chapter, and F. W. Robinson, who was publishing the book serially, in *Home Chimes*, promptly slung them out, the most of them. From the beginning he had objected to the title and had insisted upon my thinking of another. And half-way through I hit upon *Three Men in a Boat*, because nothing else seemed right.²

In spite of this, the Thames remains very much the book's centre. Jerome loved the river. His closest friends were enthusiastic boating men, with whom he had spent many weekends rowing at Richmond. And when they made their trip up the river to Oxford in 1889, according to Jerome, he simply recorded what happened. Thus the memorable characters of the fiction are drawn directly from life. George is George Wingrave, the best man at Jerome's wedding, who in due course became a bank manager. He had been a fellow lodger, and had shared a room with Jerome in Tavistock Place, which they found convenient for the British Museum. Harris is Carl Hentschel, whom Jerome had met at a theatrical first-night in London. He was a photographer, who later built up his father's business of photo-etching into a thriving concern. However, the dog Montmorency, Jerome admits, was pure invention, developed out of that area of inner consciousness which, he asserts, in all Englishmen contains an element of dog.

Three Men in a Boat retains enough of its original intention to offer a brilliant snapshot of a brief period of English social history—the

² Jerome K. Jerome, *My Life and Times*, 82.

Thames Valley in the late 1880s. Two profound changes in the life of the Thames had taken place by this time, both the result of the coming of the railways in the 1840s. In the early years of the century, the river had been a very important commercial waterway, connecting London with other areas of England, such as Bristol through the junction with the Kennet and Avon canal at Reading, and it carried a considerable volume of barge traffic. But by the 1880s competition from the railways had virtually driven barges from the river.

This process of economic change is reflected in contemporary fiction. Anthony Trollope records the danger that commercial traffic represented to other boats in the earlier years of the century, in *The Three Clerks* (1857), when Henry Norman's wherry is struck by a ponderous barge competing for water under Hampton Court Bridge. However, by the time George Eliot came to write *Daniel Deronda* (1876), in which she describes Daniel's rowing on the Thames between Richmond (later the favourite haunt of Jerome and his friends) and Kew, barges had been replaced by pleasure boats, so that in her novel the passing of a great barge under Kew Bridge is of particular interest to the people on the tow-path. As R. R. Bolland records, in addition to the palatial houseboats which were towed up and down the river from regatta to regatta, and the new luxury steam launches (250 in 1888), there was a huge number of skiffs and punts in use on the river. Indeed by 1889 there were 12,000 small pleasure craft registered by the Thames Conservancy.³

The reason for the rapidly growing popularity of the Thames during the 1880s was the fact that the railways offered cheap excursion tickets to stations along the river. From Waterloo people could reach Teddington, Kingston, Hampton Court, and Windsor, while the Great Western Railway brought Henley within the scope of a day trip. It is recorded that on one Sunday evening at the end of June 1888, 950 people caught the last train from Henley to London.⁴ Jerome notes in his autobiography that he and George Wingrave and Carl Hentschel used to have the river between Richmond and Staines almost to themselves on Sundays, but that year by year it grew more crowded, and so their starting-point became Maidenhead. So it did for thousands of other Londoners. The Thames rapidly became

³ R. R. Bolland, *Victorians on the Thames* (Tunbridge Wells: Parapress, 1974; reprinted 1994), 13, 73-9, 104.

⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

London's new playground, a venue for picnics, carnivals, and regattas. It attracted the wealthy, with their steam launches and houseboats, and also the clerks and shop assistants, with their wives and girlfriends in hired skiffs and punts. For the fashionable world, the Thames was the place to be seen. A new river society came into being, which by 1892 even had a periodical, *The Thames Times and Fashionable River Gazette*, devoted to it. Society took over the regatta at Henley, and it drew increasingly large crowds. According to the *Lock to Lock Times*, in 1888, on the second day of the regatta 6,768 people travelled there from London by train.⁵ Henley Royal Regatta became comparable with Royal Ascot, and the newspapers gave more space to the presence of the titled and the wealthy than to the results of the racing. Jerome, in *My Life and Times*, is not entirely accurate, therefore, in blaming the later patronage of the king for transforming the whole ethos of the regatta, but his comment does point up the extraordinary changes that had taken place over a comparatively short period:

It was King Edward who spoilt Henley Regatta. His coming turned it into a society function, and brought down the swell mob. Before that, it had been a happy, gay affair, simple and quiet. People came in craft of all sorts, and took an interest in the racing. One could count the people on the tow-path: old blues, the townfolk, with the farmers and their families from round about.⁶

The contemporary popularity of *Three Men in a Boat* depended to some extent on its presentation of a world with which many of its readers would be familiar and which for others had the interest of dealing with a contemporary craze, or registered the stirrings of social change. The success of *Three Men in a Boat* as a best-seller was also made possible by the transformation of the publishing industry, in response to the new mass readership that the 1870 Education Act had produced. It was a new, dynamic market for literature, and its demand for shorter books effectively killed the ample, highly priced three-volume novel, which had been the staple of the circulating libraries throughout the Victorian period. Jerome was very alert to these changing market forces, and in his negotiations with his publisher, J. W. Arrowsmith, over *Three Men in a Boat* he was

⁵ Quoted *ibid.*

⁶ *My Life and Times*, 181.

concerned to find the right niche for it. He did not want it to appear as one of Arrowsmith's one-shilling volumes of ephemeral fiction that happened to be the temporary 'rage', but to come out in their increasingly popular three-and-sixpenny series, to whose readers Jerome felt that he was better known. And this was what he and Arrowsmith finally agreed. Jerome's judgement proved to be sound, for this series was soon to include work by such promising writers as Conan Doyle and Anthony Hope.

The market also demanded variety. Among the different new forms that were spawned at this period, blurring the distinction between high and popular fiction, was the regional novel. Stories of the river had always been popular, and in Victorian fiction the Thames afforded a mechanism for bridging the abysses of class, sex, and race. In Trollope's *The Three Clerks* and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* these are overcome by the heroes' actions in rescuing their future wives from drowning in the river. However, more specifically, Patrick Parrinder has identified the later emergence of a particular form, the Thames Valley 'romance'.⁷ Indeed, two years after the appearance of *Three Men in a Boat* William Morris published his Utopian romance *News from Nowhere*, which also describes a journey up the Thames from London to beyond Oxford. These romances of the river not only treat the Thames Valley as an ideal landscape, but, as Patrick Parrinder points out, do so in ways that suggest that they are also anti-railway. Jerome notes in *Three Men in a Boat* how the proximity of the railway at Tilehurst spoils the beauty of the river upstream from Reading. Moreover, the tiresome railway journeys of Harris and J. to Kingston, and of George to Weybridge at the start of their river jaunt, find an echo in Morris's details of his narrator's trip by the underground railway to Hammersmith, at the beginning of *News from Nowhere*. By contrast, the landscape of the river valley, the hinterland of the great metropolis and its burgeoning suburbs, is a symbol of a pre-urban, and pre-railway world.

In keeping with the river's general symbolic role, there are moments in *Three Men in a Boat* when it is briefly taken to represent the journey of life, as in Jerome's cheerful injunction to the reader to travel lightly:

⁷ Patrick Parrinder, 'From Mary Shelley to *The War of the Worlds*: The Thames Valley Catastrophe', in David Seed (ed.), *Anticipations* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 58–74.

Throw the lumber over, man! Let your boat of life be light, packed with only what you need—a homely home and simple pleasures, one or two friends, worth the name, someone to love and someone to love you, a cat, a dog, and a pipe or two, enough to eat and enough to wear, and a little more than enough to drink; for thirst is a dangerous thing. (p. 22)

But for the most part Jerome exploits the metaphor of the journey for sustained comic effect, through the opportunity that it affords for an extended parody of the epic voyage. This element is prepared for early in the story, when he details the travellers' extravagant accumulation of provisions for their journey; and it is sharpened when, waiting with their baggage for a cab to take them to the railway station, Harris and J. attract the unwelcome attention of the local errand boys, led by the youth who is employed by their greengrocer, Biggs:

'They ain't a-going to starve, are they?' said the gentleman from the boot-shop.

'Ah! you'd want to take a thing or two with *you*,' retorted 'The Blue Posts', 'if you was a-going to cross the Atlantic in a small boat.'

'They ain't a-going to cross the Atlantic,' struck in Biggs's boy; 'they're a-going to find Stanley.' (pp. 39-40)

The crescendo of sarcasm and ironic hyperbole, culminating in the comic absurdity of the suggestion that they are replicating Stanley's heroic expedition into the heart of Africa in search of Dr Livingstone, the supreme quest of the Victorian era, places their paddling up the homely Thames Valley in a sharply satirical perspective. Far from raw adventure, feats of daring, and the ritual tests of the traditional quest narrative, the trials and obstacles that Jerome's heroes endure involve duckings in the river, encounters with monster steam launches, and a drunken battle with swans. The achievement of their quest is not privileged knowledge, or some kind of illumination, but the complacent, muted Elysium of a couple of pleasant days in Oxford, where Montmorency, in his own private doggy heaven, gets into twenty-five fights. And the great expedition ends in comic bathos as the three heroes, feasting on a cold veal pie in a damp boat in the evening rain, fortified by some toddy, seek to cheer themselves by singing 'Two Lovely Black Eyes' to the accompaniment of George's banjo, only to succumb to sentiment and break down in tears. This

signals their rapid retreat by train to the civilized comfort of London: to the Alhambra music-hall, followed by a decent restaurant.

Jerome's conduct of his story in *Three Men in a Boat* is reminiscent, in some respects, of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*. Sterne utilizes every incident of his travels to luxuriate in the exercise of an exquisite sensibility, which he calls into question by simultaneous ironic undercutting; Jerome, a superb raconteur, also adopts patterns of seemingly inconsequential anecdote, in order to engage in the firm, comic debunking of sentiment. Jerome's treatment of incidents always involves the abrupt deflation of excessive feeling by the intrusion of physical reality. The glorious, romantic dawn in which George, Harris, and J. anticipate revelling in an early swim brings instead a chilly, windy morning, and a most unpleasant plunge into a very cold river; and their day-dreaming, when sailing, about crossing a mystic lake like knights in an old legend is similarly brought to a sudden end by their collision with a punt containing three old fishermen. Even love is undermined by an anecdote about an infatuated young couple's failure to realize that the boat containing auntie that they are towing has been replaced by that of George and his friends, who have gleefully attached themselves to the empty tow-line for a free pull up to Marlow.

Structurally, Jerome's simple tale of a journey up the Thames is complicated by his breaking off to record historical events, by his excursions into the by-paths of memory, and, principally, by anecdotes: stories embedded in the main narrative that occasionally belong to another genre and are written in a different style but which develop out of a foregoing digression, by an association of ideas. J.'s sentimental meditation on the maternal nature of night leads naturally into a medieval legend, beginning with the formulaic 'Once upon a time', which turns out to be a religious allegory, and then the following chapter returns the reader to the comic holiday world of a cold morning on the Victorian river. These narrative meanderings recall George's own anecdote about his experience of the maze at Hampton Court, where after forays down various paths, followed by a procession of hopeful escapees, he kept finding himself at the point from which he started. If the river operates as the dominant metaphor in Jerome's tale, the maze is also a prominent one, as the reader is returned from frequent digressions—shot through with comic observations, exaggerations, embarrassments,

and reversals—to the narrator's current situation in a boat on the Thames.

Although *Three Men in a Boat* is composed of humorous anecdote and farce, it also includes a strong element of travelogue. Jerome slides easily into this mode, extolling the beauty of Clifton Hampden, and advising the reader to put up at the 'Barley Mow', 'the quaintest, most old-world inn up the river' (p. 149). In addition, because the novel set out to be seriously historical, it retains a framework of historical reference. Characteristically, Jerome tends to pick out the stories of the river which have the greatest human interest—the ghost of Lady Hoby, who murdered her little boy at Bisham Abbey; the Hell-Fire Club at Medmenham, where groups of aristocratic young men engaged in satanic rituals; or Tennyson's quiet wedding to Emily at the little church in Shiplake. And he works hard at dramatizing the signing of Magna Charta at Runnymede. But sometimes he simply cannot resist the book's basic comic impulse, and the narrative breaks away into the absurd. Jerome's transposition of Tudor courtship into the modern idiom, in his treatment of the pursuit of Anne Boleyn by Henry VIII, is a piece of historical fantasy which culminates in a general comic flight from the royal presence—from the embarrassment of continually coming across 'that wretched couple, kissing under the Abbey walls' (p. 95).

In his Preface to *Three Men in a Boat*, Jerome claims that 'for hopeless and incurable veracity, nothing yet discovered can surpass it'. One interesting aspect of Jerome's veracity is his close observation of various aspects of contemporary river life. He reflects the concern, recorded in a number of river journals, about the growing predilection among river users for being towed upstream, especially on windy days, by unskilled loiterers on the banks, which led to crowding, dangerous incidents, and even the occasional fatality. Jerome also testifies in passing to the abundance of fish in the Thames. And he notices the social gradations among the river's fishermen: the distinction between the gentlemen anglers, assisted by a professional, who moor their boats in midstream, oblivious to the steam launches, and the local anglers who are strung along the muddy banks.

The subjects of Jerome's observation include river fashions. Like the Victorian seaside, the Thames had become an area of recreation that afforded great opportunities for display. He notes the women's

elegant dresses—fashion-plate young ladies, he calls them—and the men's river uniform of blazers and caps, in terms that are echoed in the periodicals devoted to Thames social life. George's purchase of a particularly flamboyant blazer for his boating trip is a response to the dictates of river fashion. So, too, is his decision to bring a banjo with him, even though he is unable to play it. These were widely popular, and magazine illustrations of the day include pictures of young ladies sitting languidly on the river bank, strumming banjos as a means of attracting the amorous attention of boating men. Another river ritual was the taking of photographs. In the locks the jams of river traffic were turned to commercial advantage by speculative photographers, who took pictures of the little flotilla of boats as the water rose. And one such episode provides Jerome with the opportunity for farce, as George, Harris, and J. strive unsteadily to pose for the camera, while their boat, jostling among the others, becomes dangerously entangled with the structure of the lock.

Running counter to Jerome's gypsy spirit, and his evident irritation with the crowdedness of the river, is his nostalgic, Utopian feeling for a shared landscape. This ideal comes into sharp conflict with the Victorian property culture, symbolized for Jerome by the enclosure of the river's banks. He is especially angered by those landowners who stretch chains across tributary streams, and erect notices forbidding trespass. In other respects, as a pleasure-ground, of course the Thames was very much a shared landscape, where the social classes came into close contact, and although Jerome refers, in the slang of the time, to their having left both 'Arry and Lord Fitznoodle behind at Henley, it is clear that he had no time for snobbery. Encountering 'a party of provincial 'Arrys and 'Arriets, out for a moonlight sail' (p. 75), and engaged in rendering a popular song, to the accompaniment of a badly played accordion, he hails them in the spirit of river fellowship. It is the opposite end of the social scale that comes in for Jerome's censure. Maidenhead is described as 'too snobby to be pleasant. It is the haunt of the river swell and his overdressed female companion. It is the town of showy hotels, patronised chiefly by dudes and ballet girls' (p. 101).

Like all rowing men, he regards these swells and their steam launches as the enemy. Here Jerome's humour functions as a safety-valve, as his murderous rage at their arrogant, imperious whistles is deflected into whimsical fantasy: 'I never see a steam launch but I feel