

# Toward Individual Welfare and Communal Prosperity: Utopian Promise through Agricultural Industry and Education in Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's *Jean Rivard* (1862–1864)<sup>1</sup>

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## Jean Rivard: Utopian Pioneer or Ideological Re-enactor

In its bid to promote French-Canadian prosperity, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's mid-nineteenth-century novel *Jean Rivard* [*Settler; Economist*] engages with both retrospective idealization and forward thinking. Gérin-Lajoie's work is Quebec's first such lengthy pastoral and utopian saga. It is at once emblematic of the traditional rural novel popularized at the time and relatively nuanced in its ideological orientation. The story recounts the life journey of the eponymous protagonist, from student of classical studies and rhetoric to paternally orphaned young man, to clear-cutter, to settler, to farmer, to village founder, to community counselor, to husband, to father, to mayor and to Member of Parliament. While the value of heritage, agriculture and religion are of the utmost importance to him, his becoming is also characterized by a certain endorsement of social and economic progress, through freedom, education and industry.

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<sup>1</sup> A brief explanation of the disparity between dates of publication: *Jean Rivard, le défricheur*, first appeared, with illustrations, in *Les Soirées canadiennes* in 1862; *Jean Rivard, économiste*, first appeared, again with illustrations, in *Le Foyer canadien* in 1864. The texts then appeared in novel form, as revised 2<sup>nd</sup> editions, in 1874 and 1876, respectively, thanks to the Montreal publishing house J.B. Roland & Fils, Libraires-Éditeurs. Subsequent editions and the translation of *Jean Rivard* were presented as two parts within a single volume.

The tale is didactic, not only in that it seeks to deliver a message, strengthening its argument throughout the plot with points, counterpoints and a synthesis—presented through the thoughts, statements, correspondence, and actions of characters—, but it also serves as a sort of “how to” guide thanks to which the nineteenth-century model reader might answer the call to emulate the course of the story’s hero. Indeed, one chapter is entitled “Secrets of Success—Important Revelations” and relates through dialogue and narrative description the means to succeed as a settler and citizen based on Jean Rivard’s experience. The fictional nature of the text is toyed with as the preface denies its status as a novel, in the negative sense of frivolous escapism. According to the author, the tale represents, in contrast with “marvellous adventures, duels, murders, suicides, or somewhat complicated love intrigues,” a “true, simple story of a young man of slender means and modest origins, [...] whose life seemed [...] to be worth the telling to those who appreciate obscure merit and genuine greatness wherever it is found” (Gérin-Lajoie 17, hereafter *JR*).<sup>2</sup> Jean Rivard’s humble ambition, faith and effort lead him to establish an intentional community with both traditional values and a progressive impulse, bridging in a sense rural and urban ways (the reverence for nature, social values and work ethic of the former; the—albeit cautious—receptiveness to change, the administrative organization and commercial networking of the latter): “[O]ur ambition would be to transpose all that is good in urban living, taking care to exclude the false, the exaggerated and the immoral...” (*JR* 264). To underscore the story’s “true” quality—the plausibility of its events—the dénouement justifies author Gérin-Lajoie’s supposed encounter with the protagonist starting with chapter “XXI How the Author made the acquaintance of Jean Rivard.” The purpose of this meeting is to lend a certain authenticity or realism to the ideal portrayal. This blurring of the lines between imagination or even speculation and reality was an important rhetorical tactic of the national literature movement in general (that of the *école patriotique*) and of the rural novel in particular in persuading the readership of the feasibility of such feats as those of Jean Rivard—extraordinary as they may be.<sup>3</sup> This, in a time of declining rural demographics (through urbanization and emigration), where there was fear for the preservation of French-Canadian culture and therefore a concerted discourse aiming to remedy its possible dissolution. The novel serves indeed as a herald for patriotic allegiance, through an example of

<sup>2</sup> I will be citing Vida Bruce’s 1977 English translation throughout the article.

<sup>3</sup> Vida Bruce, among other readers, contests the verisimilitude of the hero’s accomplishments, which will be addressed in detail further on.

uniting industriousness, intelligent reform and sound development on the part of a specific segment of Canadian civilization, the cornerstone of which would remain agriculture.

*Jean Rivard* subscribes to an enclave mentality all the while espousing openness to expansion through communal enterprise. While self-sufficiency is crucial in the initial establishment of a liveable space, the need for outreach and exchange becomes palpable in order to advance the cause, a practice which is facilitated through “the construction of roads through the bush” (*JR* 111). Thus, the novel highlights the importance of networks, both physical and intercultural. Its forward thinking also involves a certain reconciliation of historical injustices, namely, from the mid-eighteenth century onward, recovery from the domination of the British Empire’s colonial command over New France (which would become Lower Canada, today Quebec); among the grievances were the execution of those who rebelled or were perceived to pose a threat of insurrection against the Crown, the seizing of control over land and resources, and the continued political undermining of the people’s cultural distinction:

In studying the causes that have delayed the settlement of Lower Canada and closed off vast, fertile regions from legions of strong, brave men, one is shaken, in spite of oneself by feelings of indignation. But forget the past. History will reveal all the harm done to our people by the insatiable acquisitiveness and pitiless greed of big, wealthy speculators, by a selfish, unjust, petty political regime, and by bad administration of this fine colony for three quarters of a century. Without wasting our time today on just, but useless, regrets, let us seek to repair as far as possible the evils of the past and look to the future (*JR* 111-112).

While nostalgic and conscious of the past, the text seeks thus to promote a message of overcoming conflict and resentment, of advancing thanks to both self-sufficiency and communal subsidy, and achieving prosperity through progressive and prospective means.

Drawing on theoretical works by scholars Fredric Jameson, Tom Moylan, Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Suvin and critical, analytical works by Vida Bruce, Maurice Lemire, Robert Major, Yannick Roy, and Victor Laurent-Tremblay, this study will situate *Gérin-Lajoie’s* seminal text, demonstrating the novel’s bridging of divides including that of ideology and utopia, as these notions apply to the French-Canadian context in particular, notably by linking standards of the past with intentions and

prospects for the future through the positivistic spirit of modernity.<sup>4</sup> This socio-political orientation seeks to extend well-being and prosperity through traditional means while integrating progressive and sustainable practices, placing value on a greater possible harmony and connecting across space and through time with predecessors, fellow citizens and eventually successors thanks to meaningful dialogue and possible collaboration. The objective is an effort to achieve a greater model society; a present grounded in a certain nostalgia with a gaze to a brighter tomorrow. Among the objects of study will figure the underscoring of the dominant values of the past, problems with the status quo, the reform of certain ways, socio-political dynamics and the constitution of a pseudo-utopian society, all this in the context of the rural/urban divide or schism that characterizes the nineteenth-century discourse of the *école patriotique* in its diagnostically critical and prognostically prescriptive vision of the Quebec way of life.

### Framing Utopia

While *Jean Rivard* is very much positioned ideologically, and specifically located geographically and historically, the novel can be read to fit into a universal aspiration. A great number of definitions have served to outline the literary utopia and its principal preoccupations, one of the most often cited being Darko Suvin's:

Utopia is the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis (49).

While the potentially more perfect principle of the community's organization is at the heart of Jean Rivard's quest to establish a utopian *enclave* (Jameson 10-21), there is far less alternative history and estrangement in the novel than one might find in a uchronia or a space opera, for example.

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<sup>4</sup> A reviewer of my first manuscript rightly urged the following specification: The text reflects tensions that have remained at the heart of Quebecois identity up to the present day, as the Jean Rivard character negotiates between precise dichotomies (e.g. remembering vs. progress; agriculture, among other traditional vocations vs. urban professionalism and industrialism; reality vs. utopia) that have continued to shape, and at times to plague, the cultural footprint of Quebec.

Indeed, the desire for a resurgence and reinforcement of traditional values prevails over a total historical upheaval or significant existential change, for the community evolves within the then-current system, seeking to improve the people as well as their institutions. The notion of the orientation of desire in such enterprises is essential to Raffaella Baccolini's framing of the literature, "for it is desire for change, for a better place, and a better life, that moves Utopia, and it is desire for a lost place and a lost time that informs nostalgia" (159). These notions are relevant to *Jean Rivard* in that the two desires—looking forward and looking backward—motivate the protagonist, who laments the course of Quebec's development away from socioeconomic foundations such as agriculture and practical instruction and toward urbanization with an overemphasis on bureaucratic professionalization, leading at once to social pressure, material excess, idleness, and moral depravity. He does, however, find hope in communal solidarity and mobilization, reconstituting a traditional Lower-Canadian parish through a relatively progressive politics, based on a modified historical trajectory and a new imperative. The novel is thus at once nostalgic and utopian, speculating on an ideal remedy to society's perceived shortcomings and apparent lack of direction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The scope of this article will not permit a fuller engagement with nostalgia, but, once again on the wise counsel of a reviewer of my first manuscript, I would like to provide some relevant, if limited, material on the subject by drawing on the work of Karine Basset and Michèle Baussant, who highlight pertinent intersections between nostalgia and utopia that might complement this study: "How are we to conceptualize the link between these two notions [nostalgia and utopia] and the social phenomena on which they rely? The former, nostalgia, is often defined in a relatively narrow way, usually in the context of individual experience—nostalgia as a moral malady whose somatic repercussions can lead to death [...], and then as a concept designating a cultural practice whose forms, content, meanings and effects change with the present context [...]. The second, utopia, is polysemic [...], forming part of the collective and social spheres and characterized by a non-linear history—sometimes as a formal 'totality' (a closed system), sometimes as an '*élan*' or impulse contained in heterogeneous and scattered fragments or hidden within the folds of daily life, or as a 'nightmare', a dystopia whose definitive realization must be prevented [...]" (§4); "[B]oth [nostalgia and utopia] are linked to the sense of loss lying behind the gesture of revolt against the present which gives its momentum to the projected ideal. It is also the point of connection where they meet and create histories and stories: sometimes critiques of the present, sometimes projections of an elsewhere (temporal and spatial) which are rooted in an idealization of the past" (§5); On the one hand, "nostalgia [...] is nothing but a trace of losses and ruptures, no present or future can be revitalized. It is an impossible return: in this respect it is distinguished

According to Lyman Tower Sargent, “most utopias are inevitably recreations of the past placed in the future. Much utopianism looks back at some improved version of the past to find inspiration [...]” (“Choosing Utopia” 311);

Eutopia [a positively-oriented utopia] is what the past would have looked like if the past had gotten it right. One can call this romanticizing the past, and sometimes this is the correct label. Sometimes it is nostalgia, but nostalgia is always for a past that did not exist, that has been made better in memory, with the pasts that make us uncomfortable or embarrassed conveniently forgotten (“Choosing Utopia” 312-313).

This is certainly the case with the *roman du terroir* (rural novel) in general and *Jean Rivard* in particular.

In the context of his book-length study of *Jean Rivard*, Robert Major offers the following criteria to define utopia, which apply to literature of the genre as a whole and specifically to Gérin-Lajoie’s novel:

Utopia is a critique of the existing order where contemporary society is perceived to be inadequate, failing to fulfill individual and collective aspirations. The normative project goes beyond the dream to layout [citing Raymond Ruyer] not only what could

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from history as a form of reconstruction of the past, expressing a desire for what is lacking, a desire to create or rebuild what one can never possess. For others, nostalgia is, on the contrary, a social construction of regret, which is neither a retreat nor the signal of a rejection of the present,” (§8) but forward-looking. Hence, like utopia, nostalgia can be seen as “a response to disenchantment” and a “desire for re-enchantment” (§9); “[T]he sociology of romanticism developed by Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre has opened up other perspectives by associating this concept (often used in a literary way) with an overall social situation. These authors define romanticism, as it unfolds in very different spheres of cultural life (literary, artistic, economic, political), as a ‘view of the world’ characterized by a tension between revolt, the inaugural gesture of utopia, and melancholy, which the authors equate with nostalgia [...]” (§12); “[H]istorical narratives embedded in the utopian narratives represent forms of counter-history in which a certain form of nostalgia for the past is also expressed” (§24); “the reference to the past, in its idealized and nostalgic form, can be a source of genuine creativity. The past becomes a ‘resource’ and is here placed at the service of a utopian project of personal emancipation, one that seeks to be consistent with an ethical, cultural and political change that seems necessary in order to preserve an increasingly threatened and threatening future.” (§30).

be, but what should be, thus proposing a solution to the enigma of human organization (227).<sup>6</sup>

Major describes the means by which *Jean Rivard* evolves throughout the narrative from a traditional rural novel to a utopian one, notably by opposing two parallel worlds, by engaging in a concerted, conscientious critique and by proposing renewal:

The urban and the rural worlds are in direct contrast, first as seen through the epistolary correspondence between Gustave Charmenil [a former schoolmate] and Jean Rivard that tackle a variety of relevant topics [from the perspective of their respective spaces], and secondly as the outsider narrator and character Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, full of wonder and curiosity, seeks to recount his experience. In the narrative, the protagonist himself breaks as it were with the known world to construct a sort of desert utopia, first foreseen in a dazzling dream. The division of the novels corresponds to a commonplace of the genre, in the first place denouncing what's wrong to describe then the ideal, complementing the socioeconomic exposé (228-229).

It is in reading the last part of the second novel that the scattered elements of critique disseminated throughout the text are given consistency and coherence, shedding new light on the whole of the work. Thus, the Settler/Economist diptych is in fact a triptych with the guided tour fifteen or so years later [and I would add the preceding one-term parliamentary career] serving as a third part that gives global meaning to *Jean Rivard* (229).

For the purpose of this study, the notion of *enclave* as it pertains to rural idealism—especially in the latter chapters of Gérin-Lajoie's work—merits consideration.

### Notes on the Utopian Enclave

Fredric Jameson spends some time in his book *Archaeologies of the Future*, specifically in the chapter entitled “The Utopian Enclave” (10-

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<sup>6</sup> Translations from the original French of the proposals of Bouchard, Lemire, Major, Roy, and Tremblay are my own. In the interest of clarity and efficiency, the translations are sometimes direct, sometimes heavily abridged or modified syntactically, but never sufficiently distinct from the original formulations to be considered paraphrases.

21), identifying governing bodies (such as courts) and coded values (such as money) as enclaves, but then moves on to modern, human-inhabited geographic—and by extension socioeconomic—spaces, which are more relevant to my conceptualization of the matter and with regard to *Jean Rivard*: “[...] Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, [...] the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation” (Jameson 15). In the case of Rivardville, the utopian town in question, it is not a matter of living independently of the non-enclave world: the space remains, for legal, civic, sociocultural, commercial and infrastructural reasons, linked to (Lower) Canada. Beyond a utopian impulse<sup>7</sup> however, it persists in exploiting its energies<sup>8</sup> toward the continual betterment of the community, a fictional enclave thought to be realizable by its author:

[S]uch creation must be motivated: it must respond to specific dilemmas and offer to solve fundamental social problems to which the Utopian believes himself to hold the key. The Utopian vocation can be identified by this certainty, and by the persistent and obsessive search for a simple, [...] single-shot solution to all our ills. And this must be a solution so obvious and self-explanatory that every reasonable person will grasp it [...] (Jameson 11).

For Gérin-Lajoie, what requires remedying above all is the progressive devaluation of agriculture and the rural way of life as a socioeconomic force in the mid-nineteenth century. He then proposes throughout the novel a variety of measures—from the individual to the institutional to the political—in order to draw on past strengths and present potential to improve prospects for the future (prospects that are likely to go unrealized without implementing said measures). Jameson, for his part, lists an inventory of authors and their respective preoccupations for the purpose of framing the centralized problem/solution as a recurring phenomenon in Utopia: More’s “abolition of money and property;” Campanella’s “order to be realized by a generalization of the space of the monastery;” Winstanley’s “abolition of wage labor in the new space of the commons;” Rousseau’s “ideas about freedom and dependency” to which I would add (in)equality; Fourier’s “desire;” Saint-Simon’s “administration;” Bellamy’s “industrial army” (12), among others. To be clear, Gérin-Lajoie, like the other authors, may identify an overarching problem and straight-

<sup>7</sup> On the utopian impulse, see Jameson.

<sup>8</sup> On utopian energies, see Jameson, and Sargent, “Choosing Utopia.”



forward solution, but an abundance of subcategories requiring moderate reform or radical change necessarily ties in to the ecology of the issues raised in the story. In *Jean Rivard*, these include more transparency in government, greater political will, enhanced commercial regulation, more widespread instruction regardless of class, among others.

### The Rural Novel

Now that I have framed utopia and some of its associated concepts, it is important to address the historical and literary context in which *Jean Rivard* was produced before delving into a more detailed analysis of some of the most salient aspects of the novel. The text is certainly a product of its time:

*Jean Rivard* is in large part inspired by the social and political context of the mid-nineteenth century: political struggles, massive emigration, colonial crusades, a desperate search for a future in a depressing situation. It is tempting to read in the novel something akin to social sciences research as practiced at the time, but the work remains a fiction, though its austere tone seeks to deliver the pretences of serious, informative and pedagogical works. [...] The text is ideological and demands analysis (Major 20-21).

The relevance for a contemporary reader is therefore not evident on first blush, as Yannick Roy's "Postface" to the most recent critical edition in French attests, and whose proposals I translate freely as follows:

We demand of literary works that they translate the complexity of the world, and if we turn away from those that seem edifying and righteous, [...] it is because we suspect them of being dishonest, masking, distorting and simplifying reality for the purpose of winning us over to their cause (466-467).

[In Quebec,] novels of the second half of the nineteenth century embrace for the most part the goal of mobilizing the people, to promote the settlement of new lands in order to ensure the future of the "race," to nourish love of country, or more generally to offer for the admiration of all some exemplary and virtuous heroes (467).

Conceived at a time when the great demographic "haemorrhage" needed to be halted, the congestion of the liberal profes-

sions needed to be remediated, and a certain identity-related fragility needed to be defeated, these novels have clearly lost all relevance in modern Quebec, with its urban, festive, uninhibited, aging, multiethnic and neoliberal atmosphere (467).

However, there is a relative progressiveness in certain respects:

[E]ven if colonial settlement as it is portrayed by Gérin-Lajoie responds to a certain anxiety related to identity and fits into a preservation mentality, there is also—in a more intensified proportion than elsewhere—an uninhibited will to transform society and to free it from its past by modernizing it (Roy 473).

According to Major, in Gérin-Lajoie's novel, the "solution to the enigma of human organization" (227) cited earlier comes back to overcoming British domination, following the American model, starting first and foremost with individual effort and achievement:

The collective had been dominated through military conquest, crushed again after an uprising, forcefully associated with a neighbouring province with the intent of ensuring its assimilation, threatened by yet a greater assimilation [on a continental scale], confined to a limited territory, and sapped of its vital energy to the benefit of a neighbouring republic. Given these conditions, how could one be expected to survive? Furthermore, how might one possibly take power? *Jean Rivard's* answer will be radical, provoking a reversal of traditional roles. For a century, since the Conquest, the struggle is constitutional and takes place in the political arena; yet power is money, it is wealth. One must first achieve personal fortune. The rest will follow. It is an American model (Major 18).

For Major, it is Quebec's mid-nineteenth century literary manifestation of the American dream, a portrait of the self-made man who, through determination and diligence, attains greatness for himself, his dependents and, by extension, his community.

The unfavourable situation of Lower Canada (and later Quebec) results in an imperative to ensure the survival of the culture by persuading citizens to model their lives on that of local heroes—real or imagined—such as Jean Rivard. Among these citizens are, of course, writers and readers. In the 1860s, a literary initiative to valorize at once their heritage

and future prospects is supported and in large part funded by the church (who indirectly, but significantly, determines the content of texts), inspiring a generation of authors to produce almost exclusively works of this variety.

Indeed, the writers are assigned a sort of messianic mission in producing the texts, “according to which the French-Canadian race constituted a chosen people tasked with ensuring the reign of God on the new continent” (Lemire XXII): “Literature, so dominated by conservatives, or at least elements of the right, will serve the established order and, instead of addressing problems, will work to camouflage them. Writers and orators ceaselessly claim that all is going well in the best of all possible worlds” (Lemire XXII). There was thus a certain template to respect in formulating stories destined to belong to this national literature:

The country is above all the rural world, not as it exists, but crowned with the halo that “the good old days” confer upon it. The way to treat topics will be implicitly determined. In the novel, the father’s will must always dominate over that of the son, tradition over novelty, the country over the city, religion over impiety. Submission, the spirit of sacrifice and renunciation should be presented as the foundations of happiness based upon self-denial and divine will.

Those whose works conformed to these canonical criteria were recognized as good authors and earned the praise of their compatriots (Lemire XX).

If *Jean Rivard* distinguishes itself from some of these rigid criteria, it is in that, while espousing traditional values, it does in fact promote change, seeking to establish a community on the premise of development. The societal model is thus dynamic, not static. Agriculture is of course a fundamental aspect of this glorified history, contemporaneous state of affairs and anticipated future. It is in agriculture that the protagonist sees utopian promise, as opposed to the tendency toward urbanization and professionalization. By counter-example, his city dwelling friend Gustave Charmenil confirms in their correspondence throughout the novel the validity of Jean Rivard’s mentality, also taking time to laud the settler’s endeavours as those of a national hero:

[T]he most useful among us are precisely the men of your class; that is to say, intelligent, courageous, persevering workers who unlike us do not draw their means of existence from other’s purses but from the earth. [...] [W]hen I think of the immense resources

our country possesses, I would like to see thousands of young men appearing on all sides with ardent, strong energetic souls like your own. In a few years our country would become a model, as much from the moral point of view as from the material (*JR* 93).

Indeed, the novel recounts the noble struggles of the colonist, settler and model parishioner/citizen, endorsing this course as a panacea for the cultural and economic survival of the community. It diverges from the conventional message, however, in that in its relatively moderate promotion of reforms, development and advancements, it also favours an evolving state rather than a tradition of unchallenged continuity.

Having now provided an outline of some of the key aspects of the rural genre, in tandem with an overview of the historical context in which it was produced, all the while framing the orientation of Gérin-Lajoie's text, we can proceed to a systematic analysis of issues of societal modeling in the story according to the enclave that constitutes utopia within it. Given the spatial constraints of an article, I'll limit this analysis to the later chapters of the novel, notably the guided tour,<sup>9</sup> which details the results of Jean Rivard's efforts more so than the means by which they were achieved over a decade and a half.

### **Analysis of the Utopian Enclave in *Jean Rivard***

Before revealing the "Secrets of [his] Success" (*JR* 258-262), Jean Rivard accordingly expresses his contentment and fulfilment with his status and his ease of living, which he ostensibly owes to faith, health, hard work and a sense of duty, without which one finds nothing but misery: "Those who refuse to submit [to this perceived will of 'the Supreme Being'] or find ways of avoiding it, are punished sooner or later either in mind or in body" (257).

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<sup>9</sup> While Gérin-Lajoie's oeuvre might generally be perceived a diptych, according to the two novels, *Settler* and *Economist*, Major considers the guided tour that concludes *Economist* a third part in and of itself, thus conceiving the work as a triptych: The saga first explores Jean Rivard's life as a pioneering "settler," then as an established "economist," and, lastly, as a *bona fide* model citizen, whose crucial role and contributions at the county and provincial levels and whose personal success are widely acknowledged. Jean Rivard accounts for this throughout the guided tour, allowing Gérin-Lajoie—author, presumed narrator and now character—to bear witness to the protagonist having finally taken up the role of a not-quite-elder statesman in his community.

In this chapter (XXVI, subtitled “Important Revelations” [258]), Jean Rivard explains to the author that his achievement is owing to the primordial drive of the rural settler to survive. Recognizing the extraordinary, perhaps unbelievable nature of his success, Jean Rivard evokes the incredulity of Gustave Charmenil in this regard, but counters it with reason: “Seeing my prosperity increase rapidly each year he thought me some kind of sorcerer. However, the laws of success in the life of a settler, and for the farmer in general, are as simple, as sure, as infallible as the laws of physics, or the least complicated mechanism” (258). I would draw the reader’s attention to the insistence on a rational, elementary explanation, which serves to underscore the natural feasibility of the accomplishments, as it were, and recalls Jameson’s “obvious,” “self-explanatory,” “single-shot solution” (11). For the author of the novel, this is not fantasy; Gérin-Lajoie will evoke the town of Industrie (today Joliette), County Montcalm as a valid example of similar achievement (*JR* 267).

The *secrets of success* fall under five headings, according to Jean Rivard:

1. “a property with soil of excellent quality” (258);
2. “good health [...] thanks to God” (258);
3. “work” (258);
4. “attentive supervision, order, and thrift” (259); and
5. “keeping a journal of [...] activities and an account of [...] receipts and expenditures” (260).<sup>10</sup>

Gérin-Lajoie adds to this list: 6. “Louise” (261), the love of Jean Rivard’s life.

The headings are expanded upon throughout the chapter in order to highlight 1. the fundamental value of land for cultivation and resale; that “agents in charge of the sale of public lands ought not to be authorized to sell useless lots,” from which we can extrapolate that this property should be reforested; 2. that “nothing is better suited to developing physical strength [and therefore a healthy lifestyle] than exercise in the open air”;

<sup>10</sup> Here is an excellent example of inter and metatextuality: Drawing on Lacan and Foucault, among others, Tremblay suggests that, with regard to this activity of Jean Rivard’s: “his own writing exercises participate in the traditional phallogocentric desire to master reality. Religion, laws, and, later, the sciences, are they not means of control?” (59) [my translation]; On the whole, the desire to impart a certain wisdom, the valorization of economic efforts, and the spiritual basis of said efforts make for a distinctly ideologically-oriented utopian project: “the novel transforms into a New Testament capable of responding to the social problems of its era” (Tremblay 59).

3. a productive, intelligent use of time, including recognizing that there is always something that can be done and trading notes with fellow cultivators in order to improve methods and systems (so, in short, instruction equals progress); 4. a vigilance with the running of all operations, not only the logistics and conditions of animals raised and crops grown, but those of laborers as well, who must not only be looked after, well fed, rested and paid, but also given opportunities for forward mobility by “improving [...] position” (260) and “accumulat[ing] savings” (260), without accruing debt; 5. the “habit of thinking about and planning carefully [one’s] affairs” (260), including expenses and profit margins, taking into consideration the richness of different soils according to acreage and therefore the most efficient use of land, and bookkeeping the results, which record the development of the land and an increase in its value. Much is owed to faith, naturally, as Jean Rivard clearly states: “I would be ungrateful to Providence if I didn’t clearly recognize its blessings as well. The voice that said to me at the moment I entered the forest: ‘Heaven helps those who help themselves’ did not deceive me” (261). Gérin-Lajoie adds the sixth element in order to underscore the degree to which Jean Rivard’s wife “contributed a great deal in sustaining her husband’s courage and in making him happy through the affectionate attentions she lavished on him. She loved him, as Canadian women know how to love, with a selfless, concerned devotion lasting as long as life itself” (261). At the same time, the author highlights her kindness towards servants and neighbours, as well as the fact that she is a “faithful observer of religious obligations” (261) and efficient homemaker through thriftiness, diligence and generosity.

In chapter XXVII “An Unusual Parish” (263-268), we see through Gérin-Lajoie’s continued guided tour the ways in which Rivardville does not represent the status quo, but rather, through its reforms, something possibly resembling a utopian enclave. Some of the descriptions are of a decidedly pastoral nature: “The whole parish seemed to me like and immense garden” (263), etc. Indeed, there is a seamless harmony between the environment and its occupants: “All nature seemed to be working for the wellbeing and pleasure of man” (263). The area proves “immaculate” and the “air of prosperity” is manifest. Modesty remains, however: “no useless ostentation but an exquisite neatness and even a certain elegance—and all the comfort you could desire” (264). This ease and prosperity is of course attributed to Jean Rivard’s modeling:

Example is contagious. Neighbour imitates neighbour and good habits and useful reforms are introduced in this way. Most of the

farmers whose wealth you admire came into the forest twelve or fifteen years ago with nothing but courage and good health for their entire fortune. Work and industry have made them what they are... (264).

The reformist tendency is palpable: Once again, “our ambition would be to transpose all that is good in urban living, taking care to exclude the false, the exaggerated and the immoral...” (264).

Communal solidarity is also found in the formation of an association of parish inhabitants who work to establish industries, such as mills and small factories. Jean Rivard would add this to the secrets of Rivardville’s prosperity:

“The risk for each of us has been small and the results for the parish, immense. [...] [A]ll the industries support one another. The workers in our factories belong to the agricultural class for the most part. They give to the association the time they can’t profitably use on the land. In this way, winter as well as summer, the inhabitants of Rivardville make good use of their time. No one is idle and no one thinks of leaving the parish” (265).

To reservations one might raise to such elaborate rural development, Jean Rivard claims the “activities have been rather restrained until now, because we wanted to act very carefully” (265). Earlier in the novel Jean Rivard made reference to the extra time that settlers/farmers had in the off-season, thinking it ought to be used for instruction; here it is possible to continue productive labor as well. There is ecology in this economy. As for “no one think[ing] of leaving the parish,” this is an allusion to the very real exodus of French Canadians migrating from rural areas to cities, if not for the United States in search of better opportunities, a phenomenon referred to as the “great haemorrhage.” For Jean Rivard, these people ought to fulfill their patriotic duty to continue looking within their own borders, as did he. If his experience were to serve as an example, there would be potential for widespread wealth (though the question of his truly representing the rule or rather the exception is in the air).

First and foremost, however, the government should be responsible for facilitating the process, for the greater good. Acknowledging, meanwhile, that not all are fortunate enough to be born with a natural talent or in optimal conditions to ensure success, Jean Rivard discusses the association and off-season industriousness as solutions to possible social difficulty

or unpleasantness. He also discusses the risks of rural industrialization, offering a system of ensuring a defence against its most disadvantageous consequences while maximizing prosperity:

“The principal goal of our association has been to provide work for those who are without. Unfortunately, in any somewhat populated district there exist a certain number of individuals without the knowledge, experience, or energy necessary to find work for themselves” (265).

“We don’t hide the disadvantages of the manufacturing industry on the grand scale. In European countries the happiness and very life of the poor workers are at the mercy of manufacturers. Young children waste away, young girls are corrupted, human beings are turned into machines and spend their lives in the most complete state of ignorance and degradation. But can’t we protect ourselves in advance against these dangers?” (266)

“The association [...] encourages agriculture, without which all other industries languish. [...] [I]t favours the dissemination of ordinary knowledge and popular education. These serve as tools for all the rest” (265-266).

“Canada can be at one and the same time, an agricultural and manufacturing country.

“One thing at least is certain. The establishment of manufacturing firms will contribute strongly to stopping the emigration and expatriation of our finest youth and bring back those thousands of Canadian workers scattered in all the manufacturing cities in the American Union” (266).

In Chapter XXVIII “A visit with the Curé—Economic Discussions” (268-273), as quoted by Gérin-Lajoie, the values and vision of Octave Doucet (another schoolmate, who becomes the local priest) are perfectly in line with those of Jean Rivard. Over dinner, they discuss “those thousand and one vital, fascinating questions having to do with the destiny of our country, and on different ways of improving the welfare of the people...” (269), namely the utopian imperative that drives Rivardville’s growth. Octave Doucet appears to live up to his reputation of remaining engaged for the benefit of the people, without regard to political partisanship. Like Jean Rivard, Octave Doucet believes that in order to improve the agricultural situation in Quebec, one must lead by example in order to inspire hard work and expect results. The government must see its own initiative



in the matter as an essential investment, as a priority, along with if not above other major industrial and infrastructural projects that they finance.

Among the great, foundational reforms that might stimulate others would thus be that of the establishment of model farms and the expansion of the agriculture industry: according to Octave Doucet, “it would be a tremendous task and would require extraordinary efforts. But the results would justify the magnitude of the sacrifice” (270). Among the wishes are however to become more autonomous, as a common concern remains, according to the author, “that our people rely a little too much on the government to look after their material interests [...]” (270). Octave Doucet acknowledges this shortcoming, attributed to the youth of the country under British rule, the lack of an independent administration for Lower Canada / Quebec for so many years, and thus the lack of experience of their ancestors in these matters, whose input in the running of the nation paled in comparison to that of the English. Like Jean Rivard, he sees education as its remedy:

“[...] What is striking, what seems incomprehensible is the indifference of almost all politicians for this cause, for this great reform, the basis of all others. How can they fail to comprehend that to create a strong and vigorous people, with potent vitality, each individual must first develop his natural faculties, his intelligence above all. Intelligence is what rules the world. Don’t they understand that enlightened men in all walks of life—agriculture, business, industry, administration—constitute the strength, the wealth, the glory of a country[?]”

“Those who believe that a priest is indifferent to material progress and improvements in physical living are strangely mistaken. [...] [W]e don’t want to see wealth collecting in the hands of a few privileged individuals[;] we *do* want material comfort to be as wide-spread as possible. All our resources should be exploited in the interests of the public good” (270).

On the question of multiculturalism, Octave Doucet raises in decidedly positive, even advantageous terms the presence of citizens of non-French ancestry in the region. The diversity is relative of course, as they do possess an “unshakeable attachment to the Catholic faith” (271), without which it may not, however, be that “the most perfect harmony has reigned between them and the rest of the inhabitants” (271). That said, Octave Doucet makes some perhaps surprisingly progressive statements on the

matter, given the period and the historically hostile power dynamics that existed based on longstanding enmity:

“[...] I often mention the apostle’s maxim: love one another. I have always considered it one of the first duties of a priest to try and eliminate race hatred and national prejudices, the groundless animosities which cause so much harm among Christians. I work toward making the members of the parish one big happy family, united by ties of love and charity.

“I feel compassion for poor immigrants who come seeking life and happiness in a strange land, in exchange for their labour. I welcome them with sympathy and enthusiasm. ‘There is room under the sun for all of us. You will find friends and brothers here.’ In a few years, hard-working families have won a comfortable living. Several marriages contracted with their French neighbours contribute still more to cementing the union and good will that has never ceased to exist between these two nationalities.

“There is something good to be drawn from the customs and habits of any people. Our contact with people of different origins and countries can introduce, without harming our national character, certain modifications in our habits which will affect our destiny and our material future” (271).

Communal solidarity, in spite of class or national distinctions, making intelligent advancements in agriculture and related industries, all the while increasing education among the populace, these values and acts are perceived to propel Rivardville, and by extension Quebec, forward. Failing participation on a provincial or national scale, improvements can at least be made locally, if only on the parish level:

“If it is well understood and administered, our municipal government,” said the *curé*, “can develop political common sense and an understanding of government in our people and, at the same time, be the safeguard of all we hold dear. Each parish can form a small republic, where, not only the natural and material, but the moral resources of the nation can be exploited in the interest of our future existence as a people. The parish will be our fortress. Even if all other resources failed us, it seems to me that here we would find an impregnable rampart against aggression from without” (271-272).

From honourable values, then, spring virtuous deeds, those that Octave Doucet hopes to see manifest by establishing a utopian enclave through political organization and action.

In Chapter XXIX, “A Solid [or Upright] Man” (273-276), Gérin-Lajoie lauds Jean Rivard’s perfect family and his uprightness as a model settler, farmer and leader, expressing his esteem and admiration for him. Indeed, *Jean Rivard* ends on Gérin-Lajoie metadiscursively stating the following: “Don’t be surprised if someday, at the risk of not being believed, I take the liberty of writing your story” (275-276). The novel thus concludes on the notion of the “authentic” life experience of Jean Rivard as a noble tale worth the retelling and serving as an ideal individual, familial and civic model for social development.

As several critics have pointed out, the ability to suspend one’s disbelief in the reading of these allegedly plausible proposals is a difficult one:

Jean Rivard’s success is, to say the least, incredible. Details of the actual labour of clearing the land, the hardships imposed by the lack of roads, isolation from established parishes, primitive equipment and methods, are glossed over in apparently matter-of-fact descriptions that serve to conceal romantic illusions (Bruce 12).

While there is some truth to this critique, the extraordinary nature of Jean Rivard’s situation is in fact addressed on multiple occasions throughout the novel. The steps of the process are developed significantly, despite the inherent limitations of the text. For example, when Gustave Charmenil suggests “magic” or “sorcery” as the only possible explanation for the incredible results of his friend’s enterprise (*JR* 170; 198; 258), Jean Rivard does respond with an acknowledgement of divine will in his destiny in addition to health and hard work (211; 258). Faith in the supernatural does then play into his success along with character and diligence.

On the rational end of things, in addition to the historical example of the village of Industrie (today Joliette) as having succeeded in a similar fashion to the hero’s Rivardville, rendering in some way credible the novel’s assertions (267), there is also an allusion to a Department of Agriculture brochure with projected expenditures and yields “for a one hundred acre crop over a period of two years” (133) and upon which the author would have based certain estimates for Jean Rivard’s harvests and profits.

In the end, as I noted, Gérin-Lajoie concludes the novel suggesting that once he will have related the story, people may not believe in the

extraordinary reality to which he bore witness (275-276). While there are justifications for the coming to fruition of Jean Rivard's dreams, the model he provides is not a universal path, and this is recognized by different characters throughout. For example, others might find infertile soil and destitution where Jean Rivard found fertility and thus prosperity (198). He is therefore for the most part "the spoiled darling of Providence" (186) as opposed to an everyman. That said, he is equally vulnerable to the whims of the elements, though he remains fortunate for the most part.

Despite the remoteness of the utopian parish or canton, the people are not entirely without supportive links to the outside world, either. Where this isolated space within a dominant culture is concerned, the enclave never exists in a vacuum; it is always connected to an external, pre-existing state of affairs, socially, politically and economically. Rivardville is the microcosmic manifestation of cumulative good (social justice, for example) with an ameliorative view toward what remains to be achieved. The people of the locale manage in some way to bridge the accomplishments of the past and to instill confidence in the future through a conscientious, critical present (dreaming, mapping, cautiously hoping, and warning when necessary, to draw on Moylan).<sup>11</sup>

For Bruce, however, the novel falls into the category of those that "attempt to make the most conservative aims wear the face of liberal and progressive idealism [...]" (14). According to Bruce, Gérin-Lajoie's work seeks above all else to conserve a fossilized vision of an ideal society (via nostalgia) through the illusion of a utopian renaissance. Its realization would be accomplished not necessarily according to innovative means, but rather through cyclical approaches, in word and in deed, perhaps making the hero more of a re-enactor than a pioneer. Nonetheless, Jean Rivard does break with tradition in a certain way throughout his initiatives, some successfully (by embracing the agricultural career despite his education and perceived natural path), and some unsuccessfully (evoking the desired reform of the parliamentary system). His opinions on the expansion of the community's activities change over time as well, according to the circumstances: productively taking advantage of leisure time by avoiding idleness in winter, for example, through continued learning; cultivating one's intelligence and establishing more efficient practices.

A major sticking point with those such as Bruce, who find their sense of credulity and incredulity challenged throughout the reading, comes down, once again, to the place of realism or simply verisimilitude,

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<sup>11</sup> The quote is in fact in reference to dystopia, which Moylan construes as a "strategy to map, warn and hope" (196).

indeed authenticity in the narrative action, given the proposals and the straightforwardness of their retelling. In the preface, the downplaying of the romantic elements in favor of practical ones further complicates the matter, as the glossing over of details cannot reasonably be reduced to narrative constraints; simple solutions come across as a lack of rigour, akin to the plot device known as *deus ex machina*, rather than the result of credible human achievement. Therefore, the desire and intention of the author to persuade through reason becomes problematic. While the text certainly constitutes a didactic thesis with a desired emphasis on application over aesthetics, it remains novelistic nonetheless. From the geographic *no places* to the fictional characters to the alternate history, *Jean Rivard* does not reflect the French Canadian/Quebecois reality of the mid-nineteenth century, but a parallel world.

However, to be fair, one must never confuse the map with the territory, that is to say the text with the universe that it represents. As in any novel, mimetic or non-mimetic, inference is necessary to explain and to justify the way in which history unfolds, or more to the point the way in which feats are ordinarily or even miraculously accomplished. It is explicitly stated by Gérin-Lajoie as author and narrator when describing the process of harvesting grain: “It must not be thought that this was an easily executed [...] enterprise” (*JR* 90-91). Similarly, an explanation of content omission is offered on an earlier occasion, with respect to Jean Rivard’s journey between the established village in the County of Bristol and his distant property, which is undergoing clearing at the time:

I won’t undertake to tell here the story of Jean Rivard’s trip from Lacasseville to Louiseville, through the woods in that season of the year. The men, burdened with agricultural implements, nearly died in the effort. It took the whole long day of the sixteenth of April to make the trip. Jean Rivard spent twelve hours covering three leagues. On an ordinary railway, he would have travelled three hundred miles. The story would never end if one had to mention every stop, every detour, every moment spent chasing the animals to bring them back to the path, or if one took account of the long and frequent deliberations between our travellers on how to avoid a bad stretch or how to get out of a mud hole. And yet all this would be done more easily on paper than on land. One had to be hardened to fatigue, as our young settler already was, to withstand the whole long day with scarcely a moment’s rest, running this way and that through the snow and the woods (67).

Thus, in narrative representation, it is a question of economy, once again an explicit map (the text) representing an implied territory (the fictional universe). Certain procedures need not be outlined in meticulous detail in order to get the point across, in this case to show that hard work is required to accomplish all that is. Again, *Jean Rivard* is a novel; despite the author's contention, it isn't actually a how-to guide, hence the apology for the didactic, almanac-like content of the *chapitre scabreux* [Chapter Not to be Read] in French editions and its nearly total omission in the English one, noted in one of Bruce's footnotes (133).

All told, the text is not comprised of minute, factual description and the step-by-step process of utopian implementation. Rather, it constitutes a critique of what is and of what ought to have been, speculating further on what might and should be, as seen through the eyes of characters portrayed as relative idealists. However, unlike most literary utopias—which do not seek to breach the fictional universe—, *Jean Rivard* does envision the potential carrying out of its proposals. Nonetheless, it remains a thesis novel, not an essayistic program.

## Conclusion

*Jean Rivard*, like many, is a novel with strengths and weaknesses (from the perspective of its epoch and our own), but whose ideological orientation is not necessarily clear-cut with regard to the typical schism: the text contains at once conservative and liberal tendencies. It is a sort of survivalist novel espousing socialist means that comes to progressively (but perhaps begrudgingly) embrace the ends of existing political circumstances as the community develops and expands, thus adhering to the status quo of a disproportionately represented parliamentary democracy and capitalism rather than reinventing social organization. Even the community's municipal association is made up of those prosperous and therefore influential enough to run the enterprises and to pursue political activity, nobly providing a variety of work for many, but also promoting in a self-congratulatory and not altogether forthcoming manner a form of so-called trickle-down economics, in contemporary terms. There will be no leveling of classes, however. While accessing education and given opportunities to serve, there are logistical and social limits to those who might seek to trail-blaze and experience the exponential increase in wealth as does Jean Rivard over the course of a decade and a half. (Among the obstacles in the interim are the increase in property value and the abandonment of certain cooperative practices such as mutual aid or assistance.)

The exercise of influence also creeps into politics, which has a ripple effect with regard to municipal policies and priorities. While the novel calls for greater participation, accountability and generosity at both the individual and state levels, there is no guarantor of a truly egalitarian outcome. It remains, to cherry pick from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, that "[a]ll [...] are equal, but some [...] are more equal than others" (105), particularly Jean Rivard, the supposedly self-made man, who succeeds miraculously thanks to a constellation of gifts, efforts and rewards: a modest inheritance; a supportive community; a certain reciprocity; a positive attitude; strong health; intelligence and continued, mainly autodidactic, instruction; diligent labor; attentiveness; and, to his mind, Providence. If there appears to be a perpetuation of the status quo—or an ideal vision thereof—based on the values and activity of a would-be prototypical rural hero, possible progress through socio-political reforms is also evident, contributing—speculatively—to an alternative to the disadvantageous state of affairs in which Lower Canada/Quebec found itself in the mid-nineteenth century.

With an improved society, composed of balanced, good-willed, hard-working, educated citizens, lead by competent and ethical administrators, inspired by gifted preachers and an enlightened press, a certain utopian enclave has been achieved in the fictional world and by extension might be achievable in the real world. Alternatively, the status quo, the continued lack of prioritization of the foundational elements of a successful civilization in favor of urbanization and its discontents, would spell the death of a culture; this is the message of the *roman du terroir*, the genre under which *Jean Rivard* is generally classed, though I would argue that while the novel respects the conventions, its thesis is slightly more nuanced than the caricatured plotline normally associated with this period and movement.

While in many ways pastoral on the surface, this utopia is grounded in a hyper-masculine, capitalist hierarchy, as Victor-Laurent Tremblay points out, "an ideal androcentric society" (59),<sup>12</sup> whether organized by vertical, patriarchal linearity or horizontal, civic fraternity (Tremblay 60). In terms of class, rank or position, Tremblay notes the subaltern character as an implicitly or explicitly feminized one. Indeed, if Jean Rivard represents the Self to which a reader might aspire, the Other, represented through various characters and fictional analogies, is either feminized, infantilized, racialized (Tremblay 54-55) or animalized (56), thus reinforcing an intractable patriarchal regime. From a contemporary point of view, then,

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<sup>12</sup> Guy Bouchard would have called it *androcratique*, because for him *androcentrique* is a societal model from which women are excluded entirely; indeed, a world without women.

the proposals are not nearly as radically different from the established order nor do they represent as progressive a societal model as the author would have the reader believe. In many ways, the novel reinforces rather than counters existing ideologies.

That said, given the historical tendencies of expatriation and urbanization, the quasi-utopian solution goes against the dominant behavior at the time, speculating on options for social betterment in the community, providing hope for the cultural survival of French-Canadian heritage and tradition, as well as future socioeconomic autonomy through the streamlining of agriculture, its associated industries and education in rural settings. For Gérin-Lajoie, the “better” citizens of these ameliorated parishes, as well as their institutions, are the speculative models on whom and which to base wellbeing and prosperity going forward.



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