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## Visual Interpretations, Cartoons, and Caricatures of Student and Youth Cultures in University Yearbooks, 1898–1930

E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz

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Article abstract

Students have always been integral in the development of the university in Canada. Driven by personal, professional, and political agendas, student experiences, understandings, and narratives helped construct the academic and intellectual cultures of universities. In their relationships with professors, administrators, and the spaces they inhabit, students crucially contributed to the university as a historically vibrant idea and social institution. As cast by the students, the university was clearly expressed in variant and creative ways through the annual yearbook. In particular, within the yearbook, the practice of parody in cartoons and caricatures was powerful in depicting the imagined worlds of academe as seen through the students' eyes, and importantly how the students saw themselves and their life on campus. Using yearbooks from three universities — Toronto, Alberta, and British Columbia — visual images are studied that reveal underlying intentions to comment, marginalize, ridicule, and esteem groups of students according to both ascribed and self-imposed socialized hierarchical structures and codes of expectations and behaviour. Among the universities, the visual satire was consistent in tone and image, exposing the historic place and activities of students in the early university and in society, the contingent formation of student identities, and the nature of the pursuit of academic knowledge and credentials by youth in early-twentieth Century Canada.

# Visual Interpretations, Cartoons, and Caricatures of Student and Youth Cultures in University Yearbooks, 1898–1930<sup>1</sup>

E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz

## Abstract

*Students have always been integral in the development of the university in Canada. Driven by personal, professional, and political agendas, student experiences, understandings, and narratives helped construct the academic and intellectual cultures of universities. In their relationships with professors, administrators, and the spaces they inhabit, students crucially contributed to the university as a historically vibrant idea and social institution. As cast by the students, the university was clearly expressed in variant and creative ways through the annual yearbook. In particular, within the yearbook, the practice of parody in cartoons and caricatures was powerful in depicting the imagined worlds of academe as seen through the students' eyes, and importantly how the students saw themselves and their life on campus. Using yearbooks from three universities — Toronto, Alberta, and British Columbia — visual images are studied that reveal underlying intentions to comment, marginalize, ridicule, and esteem groups of students according to both ascribed and self-imposed socialized hierarchical structures and codes of expectations and behaviour. Among the universities, the visual satire was consistent in tone and image, exposing the historic place and activities of students in the early university and in society, the contingent formation of student identities, and the nature of the pursuit of academic knowledge and credentials by youth in early-twentieth Century Canada.*

## Résumé

*Les étudiants ont toujours joué un rôle important dans l'histoire des universités au Canada. Lourds de leurs ambitions personnelles, professionnelles et poli-*

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1 We would like to thank the Alma Mater Society of the University of British Columbia for permission to cite from *The Annual* (later the *Totem*) and *The Ubysey* student newspaper. As well, we gratefully acknowledge our research assistant Georgia Gaden and the research support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

*tiques, l'expérience des étudiants, leurs connaissances et leurs récits ont tous contribué à la construction des cultures intellectuelles et académiques des universités. Par leurs relations avec leurs professeurs, les administrateurs et les espaces qu'ils occupaient, les étudiants ont profondément aidé à façonner l'université, à la fois comme idée vibrante et comme institution sociale. Les pages des albums de finissants recèlent plusieurs expressions des ces idées, exprimées dans des formes aussi diverses que créatives. En particulier, le recours à la parodie des bandes dessinées et des caricatures offrait un puissant outil d'illustration à la fois des imaginaires académiques, des façons dont les étudiants concevaient leur vie sur le campus et des façons dont ils se percevaient eux-mêmes. À l'aide de tels livres-souvenir, provenant de trois universités (Toronto, Alberta et Colombie-Britannique), nous étudions des représentations visuelles qui révèlent des intentions sous-jacentes de commenter, de marginaliser, de ridiculiser ou de mettre en valeur des groupes d'étudiants en fonction de structures hiérarchiques imposées ou autogènes, ou encore de codes d'attentes et de comportements. D'un établissement à l'autre, la satire visuelle est homogène au niveau du ton et de l'image, exposant à la fois le rôle historique des activités des étudiants dans la jeune université et dans la société, la formation concomitante d'identités étudiantes et la nature de la poursuite des connaissances et des diplômes chez les jeunes Canadiens du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.*

A part from beds of intellectual inquiry and institutes of advanced research, universities in Canada have long been social institutions characterized by shifting interpersonal politics, diverse cultures, discourses, and allegiances. Students were the integral historical agents on campus who inhabited academic spaces for three or four years before moving on to other endeavours, almost all of which were off campus and into life-long occupations and careers. As part of this passage, students produced annual yearbooks as repositories of memories of their experiences and perspectives on campus. The yearbooks were intended as “souvenir remembrances.” More than pseudo-official institutional texts, yearbooks re-inscribed normative definitions and specific understandings about youth and in some cases “family.” Through the intermingling of textual and visual production that interpreted the students’ progress from childhood to adulthood — signalled by achieving the goal of a university degree — the yearbooks helped shape how students ultimately valued their undergraduate years. Although mainly the province of the graduating class (Seniors), yearbooks provided all students with possibilities to imagine new identities other than those they already held or were assigned by others.

Yearbooks were not static nor could they be considered merely encyclopaedic. Their content was historically significant, revealing subtlety or explicitly the social relations among young people aspiring to personal and professional advancement. The yearbooks were replete with humorous poetic

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odes, rhymes, short stories, and skits, as well as condescending images of Freshman (and “Freshettes”), Sophomores, Juniors, and occasionally even self-serving Seniors. Initiation rhymes, such as: “The Seniors were born for great things; [t]he Sophs were born for small; But it has never been recorded / Why the Freshmen were born at all,”<sup>2</sup> indicated the tone of students’ discursive social relations and practices over the four years of their undergraduate degree. Specific satirical literary representational strategies, made acutely resonant by visual images, were used to distinguish and order the various years. Descriptions of the years, including that of the Senior class, were inextricably intertwined with notions of academic progress, cognitive learning, and social and intellectual growth. These understandings, intertextually supported through campus newspapers and journals, were also manifest in Freshman initiations, hazing, and other competitive and élite practices, enacted to keep educational and social margins in place.

In this paper, we draw on *Torontonensis*, the University of Toronto’s yearbook (1898–1966), the University of Alberta’s *Evergreen & Gold* (1921–1971), and the University of British Columbia’s *The Annual* (1915–1925) later renamed *Totem* (1926–1966),<sup>3</sup> between the years 1898–1930, to examine how fourth-year Senior students — the group of students largely entrusted with the production of the yearbook in their graduating year — visually represented and textually narrated their place and that of their less-advanced peers in the university.<sup>4</sup> We focus on the key features of these representations, specifically highlighting how self-identities of the graduating class were woven into the fabric of official memory, and especially the intransigence of fixed divisions and characterizations of the different academic years as they were ordered and legitimated by a select number of mostly upper-level students. Critically analyzing how visual texts were subject to contextual, institutional, and cultural

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2 “Freshette Initiation Highly Successful,” *The Ubyssy* II, no. 1 (9 October 1919), 1.

3 The University of Alberta’s *Evergreen and Gold* evolved from “magazine” editions of the *Annual Graduation Gateway* of the student newspaper, *The Gateway*. With increasing costs and the possibility of non-publication of this special issue, the Senior class undertook to “follow the custom of other universities by producing an elaborate and distinctive Year Book.” *The Gateway*, XI, no. 8 (22 November 1920), 2. The University of British Columbia’s premier issue in 1915 was presented as the “official record of student activities ... faithfully and adequately present[ing] student life.” “Editorials,” *Annual* (1915,) 7. On the origins of *Torontonensis* and its founding, see E. Lisa Panayotidis, “Constructing ‘Intellectual Icebergs’: Visual Caricature of the Professoriate and Academic Culture at the University of Toronto, 1898–1915,” in *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada*, eds. Paul Stortz and E. Lisa Panayotidis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 299–331.

4 The universities discussed in this paper were selected for their regional diversity: the University of Toronto was in a large central urban centre, University of Alberta was situated in a relatively large prairie city, while the University of British Columbia was established in a growing port city. As part of a broader on-going study, University of Saskatchewan, Queen’s University, and Dalhousie University will be brought in for further comparative analysis.

variables,<sup>5</sup> we illustrate some of the constructed understandings of their producers and the readers/viewers within the framework of early twentieth-century higher education student experiences.

We also seek to understand how yearbooks highlighted the shift of ideas about an educational life cycle metaphorically expressed as childhood/first-year student; adulthood/upper level student. Multiple and shifting subjectivities, identities, and the politics of student cultures are vital to any study of yearbooks. We are interested in understanding how identities arose and visual images are forged to construct categories of students who were said to exhibit particular social and intellectual traits, behaviors, and knowledge in keeping with their assigned educational rank.<sup>6</sup>

The yearbook images provide a fruitful forum for critical study of student cultures and the way contemporary agents interpreted their place in the academy, and indeed that of others. Each university yearbook we examined, from its inception in the late nineteenth century to 1930 — the year chosen to end this study because of a shift in meaning and aesthetic representation brought on by the emergence of documentary photography — was uniquely evocative. A material artifact in its own right, yearbooks boasted their own organizational logic and aesthetic layout, educational values, and perspectives. Visually, supported by textual caption and reference, with some contextual and idiosyncratic variances, we noticed that the volatile and gendered relations and experiences among students in diverse undergraduate years as depicted in the yearbooks of all three universities were starkly similar. Despite their regional differences and their year of establishment (in chronological order: Toronto, 1898; University of British Columbia, 1915; and Alberta, 1921), we were struck by shared discourses among all the yearbooks about how students envisioned university life. The continual repetition of educational themes, debates, and aesthetic tropes, suggested the powerfully sustainable potency of these conventional images. Although changes over time within and among the yearbooks encompassed items such as the inclusion of new faculties, organization of sections, style of the front and end matter, advertisements, the content of student biographies,

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5 Concurring with Dónal O Donoghue and other scholars, we conceive of “all learning [as] ... emplaced ... and embodied.” See Dónal O Donoghue, “‘James Always Hangs out Here’: Making Space for Place in Studying Masculinities at School,” *Visual Studies* 22, no. 1 (April 2007): 62–73. See also Elizabeth Kenworthy Teather, *Embodied Geographies: Spaces, Bodies and Rites of Passage* (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), and E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, “Intellectual Space, Image, and Identities in the Historical Campus: Helen Kemp’s Map of the University of Toronto, 1932,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 15 (2004): 123–52.

6 The contemporary notion of identities as in flux and in a state of *becoming* seems an apt way to conceive of how students in different years might have experienced their university education. See Jane Danielewicz, *Teaching Selves: Identity, Pedagogy, and Teacher Education* (New York: State University of New York, 2001), xii.

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presentation of student club and faculty listings, and the cartoonists themselves,<sup>7</sup> the surprising resemblances and consistency of student satire drew our attention.

The genre of literary texts reveals undercurrents of irony and ambiguity, allusions, metaphors, symbols, innuendo, parody, and analogies. In the yearbooks, these shaped the ideological and social contexts of educational life cycles as a student proceeded from one year to the next. As important and elucidatory components of the yearbook, cartoon captions were a bridge that spanned the written word and the image: the textual described while the visual expanded. The caption embellished the image as effectively as the image placed the textual. In attending to the visual, we situate our work within the interdisciplinary field of visual culture's broader debates around visibility and vision and questions about the inextricable relationship between text and image. We are interested in the complex and contextual historical network of relations from which images arise, to what they are responding, and their ultimate effects. Visibility was a mode of seeing and looking that was neither innocent nor fixed but organized around the reader's/viewer's interpretive understandings.

Contemporary theories of pictorial representation and visual culture are grounded in the premise that, similar to language, images, artifacts, and spatial environments are powerful in shaping attitudes, prejudices, and identities. Visual culture is not a reflective and transparent backdrop to our experiences; rather it is crucially theorized as an active mode of learning about the world.<sup>8</sup> Visual texts, as in the case of cartoons and drawings in the historic yearbook, did not embody essential meanings, but were informed by the interests and desires of the reader/viewer and by the social relations between the perceiver and the perceived. Yearbooks functioned as "iconotexts" or "imagetexts" in a

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7 For an expanded discussion on the use of cartoons as a particular mode of expression and the student and professional artists who were enlisted to provide caricatures for *Torontonensis* in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Panayotidis, "Constructing 'Intellectual Icebergs.'" Unfortunately, substantial source material that would uncover backgrounds and biographies of cartoonists for the University of British Columbia and University of Alberta has been scarce. As well, for these two universities, documentary evidence is elusive as to how exactly cartoonists were chosen by the yearbook staff.

8 Some of the more compelling work in the expansive field of visual culture studies include: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1992) and *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2001); Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Hal Foster, ed. *Vision and Visuality* (New York: New Press, 1998); Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (London: Routledge, 2001); Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College: University Press of New England, 1999); and Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay, eds. *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

rich interplay — “a dialectic of language and vision,”<sup>9</sup> — between the visual and the textual.

The visual, specifically cartoons and caricature, uncovered and interrupted seemingly innocuous official remembrances and allowed us to question the yearbooks’ manifold shifting subjectivities, the intentions of their content, and their constructions of students’ social and academic understandings. As Gillian Rose has suggested, strict appeals to definitive authorial and artistic intent were not always possible nor desirable: “Since the image is always ... seen in relation to other images, this wider visual context is more significant for what the image means than what the artist thought they were doing.”<sup>10</sup> Viewers become powerful. They are not a *tabula rasa*; rather memory and experience shape the way one views images.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, texts and cartoons in the yearbooks did not merely iterate prevailing values and ideologies, but they continually mediated competing beliefs, often bringing forth new issues and debates. Students consciously and subconsciously, explicitly and subtly, created and interpreted text and images in diverse ways based on their class and academic year, social and cultural backgrounds, gender, age, religion, personal and political aspirations, and intellectual and philosophical predispositions and interests. Whether the editors and editorial boards knew the extent of each cartoon’s impact, however, is debatable.<sup>12</sup>

As part of the wider historiography on universities and students, research has uncovered shifting cultures of intense and capricious relationships on campus. Ideas and practices of “youth” in the university forged the evolving nature of historical academic cultures. Students spoke in particular ways to their intellectual worlds, many of which were affected temporally and spatially with difference and power.<sup>13</sup> We are contributing to this scholarly literature by looking at how students were “seen” through self-renderings of character and appearance. Using an interdisciplinary “critical practice around the use of

9 See Peter Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts: From Swift to the French Revolution* (Chicago: Reaktion Books, 1997) and W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 70.

10 Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (London: SAGE, 2007), 23.

11 Richard Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 7.

12 Little if any information exists from early editorial boards indicating their specific understandings about and the intent of visual communication. By the 1940s, however, *Torontonensis*’ editorial board minutes demonstrated a conscious and deliberate use of visuality in the yearbook. See E. Lisa Panayotidis, “‘Picture-Prose Panoramas’: Visuality and the Work of Memory in Historical University Yearbooks.” Paper given at 15th Biennial Meeting of the Canadian History of Education Association, Sudbury, Ont., October 2008.

13 Work on the mostly English-Canadian history of student cultures in higher education include Catherine Gidney, *A Long Eclipse: The Liberal Protestant Establishment and the Canadian University, 1920–1970* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), Charles M. Levi, *Comings and Goings: University Students in Canadian Society, 1854–1973*

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visual imagery [as] a source material,” we see the rich, multifaceted visual cultures of universities conveying ways of seeing and understanding the world. New theoretical possibilities arise from what Antonio Novoa called “a historiographical renewal,” by illustrating how images “reshape the remembering-imagining.”<sup>14</sup>

As pieces of material history, as well as from its content, the university yearbook between 1898–1930 is instrumental in offering new and detailed interpretations of student cultures. Yearbooks were striking in their visual commentaries on student comportment. Through ubiquitous use of satire and parody, the yearbooks reflected a gendered and “youth” dynamic on campus that diminished students in the lower academic years as well as women, generally. Elaborate rites and initiations, also referred to as “hazing,” were related to this inequality in power and authority. Some studies have focused on the problematic competitive and exclusionary nature of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century North American university in relation to its links to athletic rivalries and the rise of fraternities and attendant rituals on campus.<sup>15</sup> Hank Newer noted

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(Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), and A.B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791–1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Two books on how student cultures related to youth in Canadian society are Paul Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class: Student Life in English Canada During the Thirties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990) and Paul Axelrod and John Reid, eds., *Youth, University, and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989). For French Canada, see Karine Hébert's *Impatient d'être soi-même: les étudiants montréalais, 1895–1960* (Montréal: PUQ, 2008), which looks at the on-going negotiation of student experiences at McGill University and Université du Québec à Montréal. Studies of student cultures can be found in most university histories, although they vary widely in terms of analytical depth. For the University of Toronto, see Martin Friedland, *The University of Toronto: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), especially chaps. 15, 17, 22, 23, and 25. For the University of Alberta, see Walter H. Johns, *A History of the University of Alberta: 1908–1969* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1981), chaps. 1–10. The University of British Columbia has yet to have a social history completed on its cultural and institutional growth, but useful discussions can be found in Lee Stewart, *It's Up to You: Women at UBC in the Early Years* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press for the UBC Academic Women's Association, 1990), Patricia Vertinsky and Sherry McKay, eds., *Disciplining Bodies in the Gymnasium: Memory, Monument, Modernism* (London: Routledge, 2004), and Peter B. Waite, *Lord of Point Grey: Larry MacKenzie of U.B.C.* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987).

14 Antonio Novoa, “Ways of Saying, Ways of Seeing Public Images of Teachers (19th–20th Centuries),” in “The Challenge of the Visual in the History of Education,” *Pedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 21.

15 For example, see Winton U. Solberg, *The University of Illinois, 1894–1905: The Shaping of the University* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), Hank Nuwer, *The Hazing Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), and Jay Mechling, “Paddling and the Repression of the Feminine in Male Hazing,” *Thymos: Journal of Boyhood Studies* 2, no. 1 (2008): 60–75. Mechling's psychoanalytic methodology is based on Freud's 1919 essay “A Child is Being Beaten.”



that historical (and contemporary) studies of initiations “reveal the destructive patterns of organizational life ... [and] how they socialize new members.”<sup>16</sup> Indoctrinating students, albeit harshly, into unfamiliar cultures was essential in the initiations, even in light of their formal and overtly-constructed ritualistic and marginalizing practices. Paul Axelrod noted for the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that “initiations ... introduced new, frequently insecure students to campus culture and taught the importance of fraternity, hierarchy, and conformity.”<sup>17</sup>

Performances such as hazing illustrated how relations among students, the imposition of place and belonging, and acceptance were established and reproduced. Keith Walden paints a picture of the culture of student initiations as having a deeper purpose of reflection and anxiety about what transpired and what awaits after graduation. The university years were an unsettling and unusual time for students. “Initiations, for most students, were brief episodes of frivolity, but they were also important social dramas that marked the attainment of maturity, delineated the structure of campus life, and displayed concerns about past and future prospects.”<sup>18</sup> Walden’s examination of the University of Toronto between 1880–1925 exposed underlying political and social forces in the sometimes acrimonious student cultures.<sup>19</sup> We add to the studies about student rituals and initiations, and student socio-political cultures, by contending that the historical vicissitudes, relationships, quality, and character, as well as codes of behaviour, language, and appearance, of student life were front and centre and unabashedly exposed in the creative visual expression of the most obvious and wide-spread student media of the time.

## Representations of Campus Life

It is the special mission of *Torontonensis* to lessen the pain of parting. In the days to come [the yearbook] ... will speak to us like the voice of an old College friend, reminding us that ... though scattered, our family is unbroken; that we are not ... forgotten by our brothers ... nor by our Alma Mater.<sup>20</sup>

Mawkish assertions aside, the yearbook was an interpretive window on campus life. The images in the yearbooks focussed on professors, buildings, and, to a lesser extent, administrative personnel; but they were heavy on self-depiction.

16 Hank Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing and Binge Drinking* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), xiii.

17 Axelrod, *Making a Middle Class*, 17–18.

18 Keith Walden, “Hazes, Hustles, Scraps and Stunts: Initiations at the University of Toronto, 1880–1925” in Axelrod and Reid, eds., 116.

19 See also Keith Walden, “Male Toronto College Students Celebrate Hallowe’en, 1884–1910,” *Canadian Historical Review* 68 (1987): 1–34.

20 “To all Friends of ‘Varsity’, *Torontonensis* gives Greeting,” *Torontonensis* (1903).

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On the surface, perspectives on the harmonious nature of student life and culture seemed to enjoy an uneasy consensus. In appearance, behaviour, and speech, Seniors were drawn as more worldly, wise, and mature — indeed, in comparison to students in the lower academic years, more akin to the professoriate itself. Although the Senior class strove to represent itself as dignified, solemn, and reverential, their members were clearly not adverse to inter-class ribbing. Figure 1 shows a “typical” day in the life of a male Senior at the University of Toronto. While the image may have evoked the stereotypical figure of a student idling the day away, it may also have symbolized the advanced Senior who had earned for himself some necessary leisure from the heavy demands of his scholarly work.<sup>21</sup>

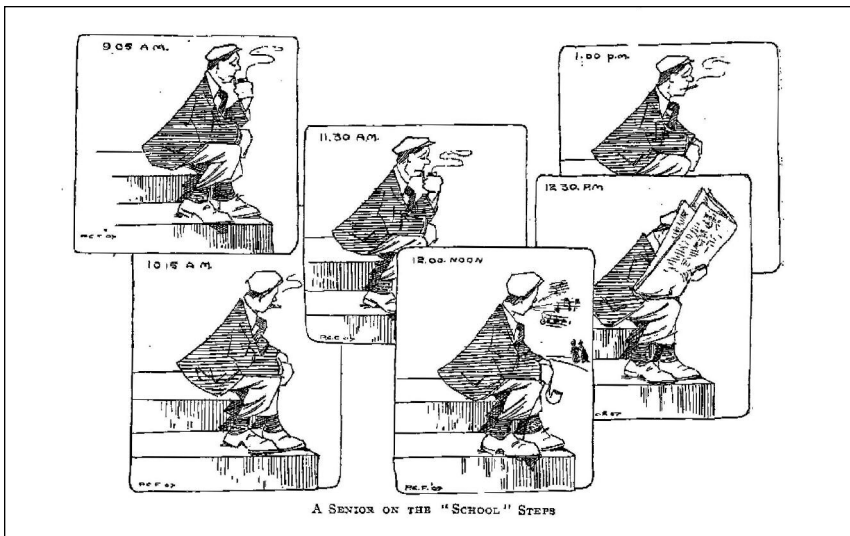


Figure 1: A Senior on the “School” Steps, *Torontonensis*, 1907

Visual images of Seniors often showed them as optimistic and confident graduates, as represented in a *Torontonensis* image, Figure 2. Against the backdrop of these images framed by conventional, recognizable symbols (the posture and accouterments — the pipe, the robes — of a professorial graduate of distinguished intellectual acumen, for example), students’ maudlin allusions to, and affection for, their *Alma Mater* took on a notable resonance. The year-

21 At the University of Alberta, “student watching” was recorded as a popular past time, where students would passively observe and critique their counterparts with particular attention to diverse types and differences among them. “University Types — A Study of Differences,” *The Gateway*, XI, no. 13 (2 February 1921), 3.

book constructed what appeared to some as an educational Valhalla, a nostalgic take on four years of challenging intellectual work. Valedictory addresses and “class histories” waxed poetic on the “glorious” time as an undergraduate. “The tie that will bind us to our university,” noted University of Alberta Valedictorian George Bryan, “will be one of the purest since it will also unite us with our youth.”<sup>22</sup> With varying degrees of success, such remembrances emotively tried to sanitize past struggles. Not everyone was partial, however, to these overly romantic constructions of university life. In his 1903 valedictory address, student and future University of Toronto professor Maurice Hutton bemoaned “traditional” and “conventional thinking” to see commencement as an ending and not a beginning.<sup>23</sup> In his honorary valedictory address in 1904, English Professor W.J. Alexander echoed Hutton’s questioning of how students sought to narrate the past in the present, noting that “we dwell on the past to gather its lessons, not to see ourselves in sentimental regrets .... It is a shallow view that represents our earlier years as the best or happiest part of our lives.” Having said that, Alexander partook of the conceptualization of the university as a place and a time in which (male) students were “carried ... from youth to manhood” and where “childish illusions be finally abandoned.”<sup>24</sup>



Figure 2: *Senior*, *Torontonensis*, 1903

Despite their official purpose, valedictory addresses were at times incendiary events, revealing an underlying tension that was reflected in image. Once published prominently in the yearbooks for wide readership, they became sites of contention. Perhaps, surprisingly, instead of reminiscences on educational hurdles breached, they could be biting attacks and accusations against the university and its practices, curriculum, and particularly its professors. Valedictory addresses and the yearbook itself provided Senior students with the power and opportunity to comment harshly on existing conditions and official institutional discourses, practices, and policies.

22 George Bryan, “University of Alberta Valedictory 1925,” *Evergreen and Gold* (1924–1925), 62. University of Alberta Archives, accession # 84-25.

23 Maurice Hutton, “Valedictory,” *Torontonensis* (1903), 284–5.

24 W.J. Alexander, “Valedictory,” *Torontonensis* (1904), 299.

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Fervently eschewing romantic and emotional appeals to varsity life and *Alma Mater*, University of Alberta Valedictorian Walter B. Herbert, for example, shattered conventional platitudes about leaving the university by delivering an acerbic indictment of its professors.

It is foolish for us to try to believe, at this late date, that all our lectures and “labs” and essays have been delightful, thought inspiring things ... [as well as] that we have been deeply impressed by the learning of our teachers, by their idealism and culture and their profound anxiety to help us increase in wisdom and stature and in favor of God and man. We have all had our views regarding professors and their lectures, and have frequently discussed them in no uncertain terms. It is a pity that our outpourings could not have been heard by ears that would have profited most of them.

Without mentioning names, but with enough detail to make clear to whom he was referring, Herbert followed with specific examples of various professors with their annoying and unprofessional characteristics and foibles. In assuming this critical position, Herbert illustrated a common perspective of the Senior class which experienced “well-defined places in that somewhat complete and care-free little world,” of varsity, and raised a direct challenge to the professoriate and their questionable pedagogy and curricular offerings.<sup>25</sup>

While some disagreement was expressed over sentimentalizing the university experience, the yearbooks concur, with few critical disputations by the student body and reader/viewership, that graduation was at once an august yet intimidating event. In the University of Alberta’s *Evergreen and Gold*, students were shown sailing in hot-air balloons or in ships on the high seas.<sup>26</sup> Turbulent waves on a seemingly endless sea were an interesting metaphor for a university situated in the prairies, signifying the turmoil and unpredictability of the virtual unknown outside of the university. Students in academic robes traversed the rough water in ships or balloons, perhaps in imagining their educational capital and privileges afforded them by a university degree. The university as a matriarchal caretaker was inferred in many of the images. In his valedictory speech in *Evergreen and Gold*, J.M. Cassels orated: “Playing, ourselves, on the sea-shore of truth under the watchful eye of our kind ‘foster mother,’ we have come, during the past four years, through a great period of transition in our lives. Growing from youth towards maturity we have developed inquiring disposi-

25 Walter B Herbert, “Valedictory 1926,” *Evergreen and Gold* (1925-1926), 70-71.

26 In the early years, the image of an eighteenth-century schooner was a leitmotif at the University of Alberta. It was repeatedly shown on the decorative banner (the flag replaced by the year of the graduating class), announcing the valedictory address. In the University of British Columbia’s *The Annual* in 1925, a less grand single-manned sail-boat was shown sailing away from a crying female personification of *Alma Mater*, who is dressed in an eighteenth-century garment (p. 43).

tions which urge us on in the quest of greater knowledge. We have heard the call of the sea.”<sup>27</sup> Clichéd images of educational learning as a “voyage,” “adventure,” or “heroic quest” signified by migration from the cosseted enclave of the university to the harsh realities of the “outside world” highlighted the grand scope of the students’ vision of their lives in the hopes of a successful and satisfying career and life. The degree in the form of parchment, grasped by the graduate, was prominent as a compass or a symbol for a ticket of passage. In one image, the degree was as fundamental as the sail with which to fly over “The Sea of Life” and breach the walls of “Success” (Figure 3).

Several images also suggested a sense of trepidation. By depicting risky technologies of travel over stormy seascapes, the drawings may be suggesting the vulnerability of graduating students to the unpredictable nature of the winds and waters of life. An image from *Torontonensis* showed a male student in academic robes aboard a pirate ship clutching his degree, being forcefully ushered onto the gang plank. A certain apprehension on the student’s face might have

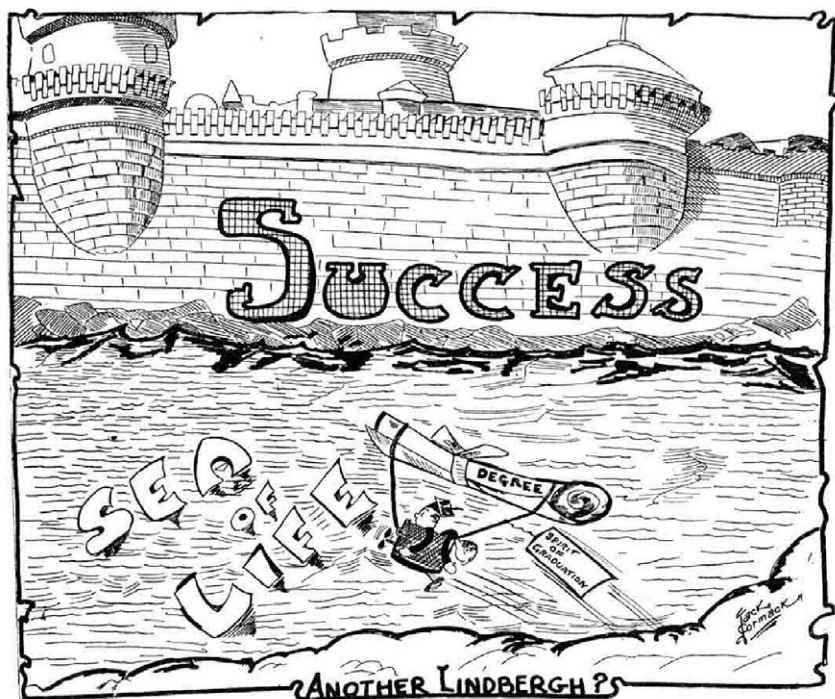


Figure 3: *Another Lindbergh?* Evergreen and Gold, 1928–1929

27 J.M. Cassels, “Valedictory,” *Evergreen and Gold* (1923–1924), 52.

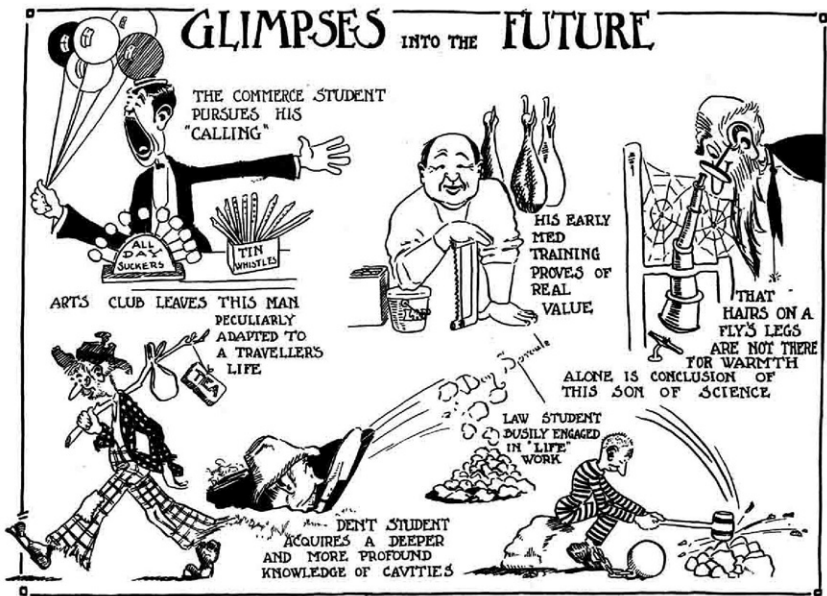


Figure 4: *Glimpses Into the Future*, Evergreen and Gold, 1925–1926

indicated that the joy and accomplishment of graduation is mixed equally with unease, fear, and anxiety. Upon successfully negotiating the transition out of university life, where did the students arrive? A 1925–1926 image (Figure 4) from *Evergreen and Gold* entitled “Glimpses into the Future” lampooned the feelings of uncertainty of future aspirations and career prospects. The practice of satire was applied by the yearbook to non-academic life, yet still related to the efficacy of the degree and “treasured” experiences on campus. Almost as a last act of bravado, the students targeted their possible future choice of profession as easily as the university itself.

### The Perceived Authority to Construct

“Torontonensis,” noted a 1903 yearbook “Greeting,” “is the peculiar property of ‘our’ graduating class ... our life together during the four short years [has] indeed been pleasant ... [e]ach year has drawn us closer together, made us more like a single family.”<sup>28</sup> This “pleasant” educational experience enjoyed by all was overly roseate. From their inception, university yearbooks from all three universities were fraught with conflict and contestation about how students

28 “To all Friends of ‘Varsity’.”

were represented and how their higher education experiences were made, and not made, meaningful. Individual and collective interpretations of the yearbook gave rise to vociferous debates that fractured the smooth recounting of memory, bringing into question who was allowed to “speak” on behalf of whom and what was acceptable to “say.” How might one be portrayed relative to their undergraduate peers and what were the implications of those depictions? Students on the yearbooks’ editorial boards traditionally authorized such representations with a dubious right — from the perspective of some other students not affiliated with the publication — to articulate the meaning of a university education.

In Toronto in the early years of the twentieth century, accusations of self-interest and self-promotion on the part of the yearbook’s editors, the membership of which was elected exclusively by the Senior executive of the graduating class, spawned a protracted debate over who had legitimate control over the content of the yearbook. While some rumblings were felt among the Toronto Seniors as to editorial control,<sup>29</sup> as early as 1904, editorials in the campus newspapers questioned the lack of participation of lower classmen. They acknowledged the vastly dissimilar experiences of students at different times in their university careers and the paucity of alternative student voices over collective self-representations and class histories. The fundamental issue was control over the reins of the official printed memories: Who should construct and disseminate interpretations of experiences on behalf of the entire student body? Appealing to precedents already set at McGill and Yale Universities where only Juniors, not Seniors, were responsible for the production of the yearbook, students outside of the select group of imminent graduates vociferously agitated for more direct editorial involvement, so that “the book, as a record of the year, would appeal to all the classes in the University, to Freshmen as strongly as to Seniors.”<sup>30</sup>

The editorial boards at both the University of Alberta and University of British Columbia were clearly more “democratic,” if student representation was taken into account. Both universities included students from lower years in addition to members of the Senior year, but Junior, Sophomore, and, particularly Freshmen editorial members were in the minority and carried less decision-making power — for example, as advertising assistants — in comparison to the Seniors. The Seniors ultimately held editorial imperium, directing the yearbook

29 For a closer examination of the lingering and bitter controversies that centred around *Torontonensis*, in particular intra-class fighting over who should have ultimate control over its narrations, see E. Lisa Panayotidis and Paul Stortz, “Contestation and Conflict: The University of Toronto Student Yearbook *Torontonensis* as an ‘Appalling Sahara,’ 1898–1910,” *History of Education* (UK) iFirst (7 November 2008): 1–18. <[http://pdfserve.informaworld.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/693397\\_770885140\\_905135144.pdf](http://pdfserve.informaworld.com.ezproxy.lib.ucalgary.ca/693397_770885140_905135144.pdf)>.

30 Critic, “To the Editor of the *Varsity*,” *The Varsity* XXIV, no. 5 (10 November 1904), 76.

to segregate Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors into remarkably similar satirical portrayals regardless of the university. Most editorial members of the yearbooks saw themselves as veterans distinct from a cohort of the less-experienced among the student body and felt deeply entitled to authoritatively depict the student cultures they claimed to have known so well. Emboldened by a sense of privilege, the legitimacy and educational purpose of a student was only realized once the student was ensconced as a Senior. The ultimate reward of the Senior class was the prerogative to define one's peers — and those peers were often regarded as undeserving of charitable expression in the yearbook.

### From Freshmen to Seniors

As sanctioned in the yearbooks, students were expected to unquestioningly adhere to the social and academic values and expectations within predictable and immutable stages of student experience. A 1898 “Greeting” in *Torontonensis*, for example, spoke about the “the fondness of a last sweet embrace to the quiet life ... [that Seniors] ... have known and loved for the four years,” while heralding “those who are passing through the middle stage of their metamorphosis in their junior year; to the Sophomores just awakening to the joys, the delights, the beauties, the charm of college life and to the Freshmen, the most fortunate of the most fortunate company.”<sup>31</sup> In the *Evergreen and Gold*, Valedictorian Cassels noted that “each stage in our metamorphosis from Freshman to Seniors ... [has] its characteristic color tone.”<sup>32</sup> The tone, however, was wildly interpretive according to a relatively small group of students. A yearbook image presented a socio-academic classification: “The Evolution of the Student” from *Torontonensis* (Figure 5) designated the “typical” student in each year. A series of student types are shown as participating in social and academic life, accompanied by humorous rhymes that revealed specific characteristics of each group. From “[t]he Freshmen, fearful and fatuous,” to “[t]he Senior, sage and sapient. The pride of all college,” these depictions conflated individual identities and differences, reducing them to stereotypes (note that the Senior in the bottom right panel is holding the key of knowledge).

In Figure 6, a more stylized approach was used to illustrate the seemingly fixed intellectual and social disposition of members of each year. Through the physiognomy of facial expression, the Freshmen is shown with his head down in a subservient pose while the Senior is imagined as an unapproachable élite with his nose contemptuously in the air. The Sophomore has a hesitantly curled grin, perhaps indicating an incipient confidence in his academic work and

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31 “Greeting,” *Torontonensis* (1898), 6.

32 Cassels, 51.



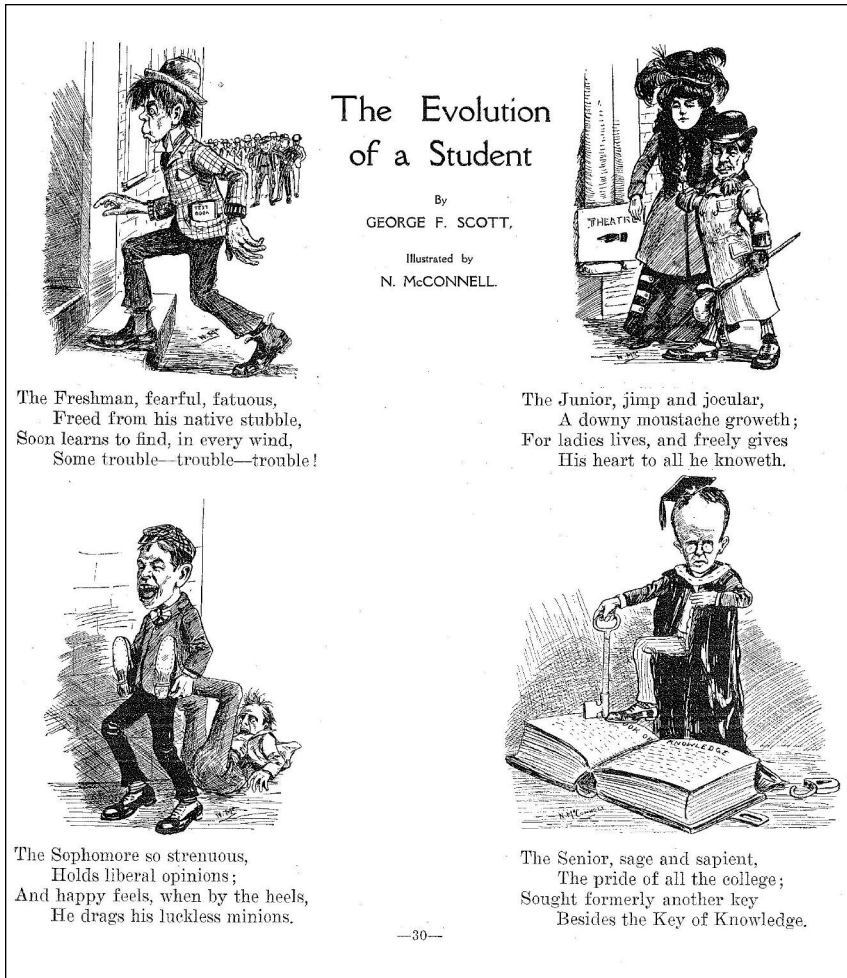


Figure 5: *The Evolution of a Student*, Torontonensis, 1904



Figure 6: *Editorial*. Evergreen and Gold, 1922

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growing social place on campus; the Junior's frown is diametrically opposite, perhaps suggesting an empty confidence after all — an anxiety towards university life. It may also indicate a creeping cynicism with academics brought on by classroom and fraternity experiences? This simple visual image forcefully registered the spectrum of educational types and the “cycle of regeneration” as envisioned by students, and indeed might represent a self-parody of the graduating class.<sup>33</sup>

As encapsulated by the vision of the editorial boards, the yearbooks gave the Seniors considerable leeway to label student “subordinates.” A 1903 *Torontonensis* class history noted:

At the beginning of each academic year an increasing large number of freshmen gather for the first-time in the halls of Varsity. They come from farm, from rural village, from country town. With how great anxiety are their first few days at college fraught .... They are awed by the arrogance of the sophomore, wounded by the studied neglect of the juniors, humbled by the condescending gravity of the seniors.<sup>34</sup>

The “metamorphosis” that formed a dominant theme in the yearbook of the journey from Freshmen to Senior was seen as a transformation not only of intellect and academic attainment but of personal maturity. From infant to adulthood in four short years, students in lower years were delineated in terms of “growing up,” of leaving the carelessness and naïveté of childhood to be later transformed into the relative wisdom of the independent and responsible citizen. The group most visualized and sardonically ill-treated in the yearbook was the first-year class. A quote from University of British Columbia's *The Annual* paints the freshmen as ignorant and oblivious to their fate as undergraduate students:

Alas regardless of their doom  
The little victims play;  
No care have they of ills to come,  
Nor care beyond today<sup>35</sup>

The Freshmen were drawn as a group of “newbies” hopelessly lost in the big-league world of the complex campus. As campus newspaper *The Ubyyssey* curtly noted: “It is an ancient University tradition that the Freshmen is a fair target for ridicule. Everybody accepts his ignorance as inevitable, — the professors do it, so do the other students, sometimes even a Freshmen with more humility rec-

33 The “cycle of regeneration” is discussed in the introduction of Kenworthy Teather, 13.

34 “History of the Class of 06,” *Torontonensis* (1903).

35 Verse attributed to Gray, *The Annual* (1918), 61. University of British Columbia Archives, catalogue #LE3 85 T6.

ognizes the fact.”<sup>36</sup> Freshmen (and “Freshettes” as the women were called) were consistently described and visually cast as “babies” or “small children” with all the accessories of early childhood: sun bonnets, sand and milk pails, and strollers. In one image, they are portrayed as lost or powerless in the face of the university. The structured and imposing order of campus was beyond them across a desolate field (Figure 7). Freshmen are shown crying (Figure 8),<sup>37</sup> needy, simple, playful, and, patronizingly depicted, curious but hopelessly clueless babies or “diminutive little freshies.” Figure 9 shows a little girl struggling to grasp a book — signifying knowledge — just out of her reach.

Following the lead of *The Annual*, *The Ubyyssey* seemed to relish reporting on the humiliating rituals that welcomed Freshmen every year, demonstrating a common campus culture of demeaning newly-enrolled students. Designed to intimidate and embarrass, to single out who was academically immature and needed to be put firmly in a social place, Freshmen were subjected to rituals that were physically and emotionally demanding. For example, in acknowledgment of the term used to denote a neophyte — “greenhorn” — early University of British Columbia students were forced to wear a green ribbons and ties in their first Freshmen term.<sup>38</sup> From its inception in 1918, the weekly *The Ubyyssey* gleefully chronicled such initiation activities on campus. To further the metaphor of Freshmen as children, according to *The Ubyyssey*, the University of British Columbia hosted what they called “kiddie parties,” where first year students were given “peanuts ... [played] hopscotch, hide-and-seek, ring-around-a-rosy [and finished off by ample servings of] ... molasses candy ... ice-cream and doughnuts.”<sup>39</sup> Mocking poems and rhymes likened first-year students to a bemused and entertaining pet or an irritating younger sibling. One 1919 verse (note that the Freshmen were reduced to an inanimate “it”) read:

36 “Our Infant Protégés,” *The Ubyyssey* V, no. 15 (15 February 1923), 4.

37 This image of the “crying baby” seems to have been a “stock” image of Freshmen as it also appears in University of Alberta’s *Evergreen and Gold*.

38 On the debates concerning the wearing of green ribbons and ties as a “distinguishing mark” by first year male and female students at the University of British Columbia, see “Thursday and Friday Big Days for Freshmen,” *The Ubyyssey* VII, no. 1 (2 October, 1924), 1; “The Wearing of Green,” *The Ubyyssey* VIII, no. 3 (16 October 1924), 4; “Regulations for Conduct of Freshmen Class Outlined,” *The Ubyyssey*, special issue, Freshman Number VIII, no. 3 (6 October 1925), 1; and “Green Bands,” *The Ubyyssey* VIII, no. 27, (12 February 1926), 2.

39 “Arts ’23 Holds Class Party: Feverish Frolics of the Frivolous Frosh,” *Ubyyssey* II, no. 18 (26 February 1920), 1. The *Ubyyssey*’s inaugural issue ran an article entitled “Freshman Reception: ‘Frosh’ have the Privilege of Shaking Hands with Important Personages” I, no. 1 (17 October 1918), 1, 3. The article suggested: “Now that initiation rites are over, and the Freshies really belong to the college, we thought that we could afford to spend a few hours ... being nice to them and trying to get them to be nice to each other,” 1.

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Figure 7: The Annual, 1916



Figure 8: The Annual, 1917



"FRESHIES, YOU ARE VERY  
LITTLE!"

Figure 9: The Ubysssey,  
16 October 1919

I have a little Freshie that goes in and out with me;  
 And what can be the use of it is more than I can see.  
 It is very loud and noisy from its heels up to its head,  
 And at noon it runs before me, in a hurry to be fed.  
 The funniest thing about it is the way it likes to go  
 Along with other Freshies, all walking very slow,  
 In large and compact masses, segregated in the hall,  
 Until there's hardly room for me, squeezed up against the wall.<sup>40</sup>

The Freshmen were not always personated as infants. They were openly susceptible to the debasing gaze of the Seniors even when satirized as adults. In an interesting reversal, *Torontonensis* depicted a first year male student as an older, somewhat dishevelled country bumpkin wearing ill-fitting clothes, a rube to the sophisticated ways of the campus. In Figure 10, the Freshman's father is shown holding hands with his innocent son, asking for the "Head Teacher." They seemed to be wholly out of their element.<sup>41</sup> "Self-conscious rustics" or "farmer lad," as one yearbook "Class History" referred to them, were "transformed" into "the glass of fashion and the mould of form."<sup>42</sup> The newness of the helpless infant converged with the senility of the aged. This eccentric image is also striking for its comment on the rural-urban divide in Canada, which at the turn of last century tended to separate country and city into drastically different social, political, and economic worlds. From the city, the country could be imagined as backward and simple; indeed, the image may also have reflected an intrinsic élitism of the university as an advanced institution of learning and culture, at least as seen by ambitious, upwardly-mobile students. For those students who had come from the country, the yearbook creators were perhaps actively shedding "...unwanted parts of their background and identities. In a self-parody (Figure 11), the Freshmen were interpreted from the perspective of various constituents as self-important, in one panel, and delusional, as a "big man on campus" (lower right) in another. Here, the student is initially (and unusually) seen as confident; the various interpretations were intended to belittle him, indeed literally in the eyes of Seniors (middle panel, lower row).

In the yearbooks, the success of Freshmen in navigating the rigorous intellectual and social requirements of the university was obviously underestimated. A common theme among the yearbooks in relation to first-year students was failure. Freshmen were faced with a Sisyphean struggle during their first few months on campus. The "Short Course at College for Freshies" was the typical length of time the Freshmen spent at the university (Figure 12). He (the protagonist would almost always be male) would be expelled by Christmas for

40 "A Freshie's Garden of Verse," *The Ubysey* II, no. 1 (19 October 1919), 2.

41 See *Torontonensis* (1903), 50.

42 W.E.B. Moore, "Class History," *Torontonensis* (1905), 32.

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FRESHMAN.

"WHERE'S THE HEAD TEACHER?"

Figure 10: Torontonensis, 1903

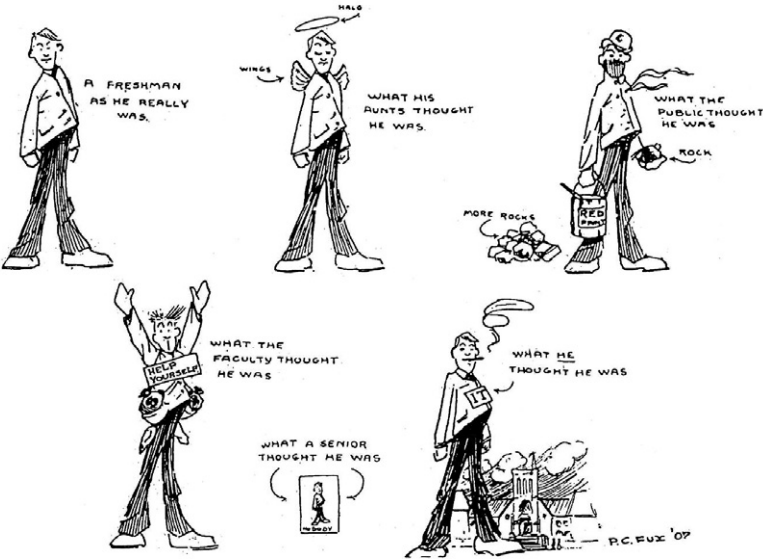


Figure 11: Torontonensis, 1904

*Evergreen and Gold*

Figure 12: Evergreen & Gold, 1930

failing to meet the stringent challenges of a university education by irresponsibly concentrating too much on extracurricular activities. Amid complaints of excessive hazing at the University of British Columbia in 1919, *The Ubyyssey* raised the possibility of a new category of student: “Some difficulty is experienced in finding a suitable title for those students who are repeating their first year. They are obviously not Sophomores, yet one would not insult them with the term Freshmen. It is suggested that a compromise might be effected in the expressive world ‘Freshmore.’”<sup>43</sup>

With each year completed, students assumed a new academic position, elevating their status and at least a modicum of esteem from Senior peers. On their new perch, they now became the Freshmen’s antagonists. The newly-minted Sophomores finally had a subaltern. In Figure 13, a Sophomore is seen disciplining a Freshmen, notably authoritative in both space and gender. The towering father figure is lecturing — note the aggressive posture — to what seems to be a confused and frightened little girl. From the image, the unequal and dichotomized gendered relations (masculine: strong; feminine: dependent) among the Freshmen and Sophomore class could be extrapolated.

43 “Here is a Good One,” *The Ubyyssey* II, no. 3 (23 October 1919), 1.

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SOPHOMORES



Figure 13: *The Annual*, 1918



Figure 14: *Torontonensis*, 1902

Having survived the hustles, hazing, and visual and literary insults and humiliations of the year before, and finally ascending to a more respectful “rank” of student, the Sophomores were still open to satire. Some yearbook commentaries and images equated the second-year students to first-year students, but slightly higher up in the educational evolutionary ladder. Sophomores were routinely depicted as indolent, cheeky, brash, and, as seen in Figure 14, lazy. The Sophomores were defined by rest, not work. They were also described as a chimera, or more scientifically, a Darwinian development. For 1921 University of Alberta class historian Margaret Villy, the “freshmen tadpole with monstrous head” gave way to the “sophomore tadpole just beginning ‘to get his feet’.” She added: “In the junior stage, having now a head of normal size, our friend the tadpole judiciously strikes out with his four feet into the enticing waters and mysterious depths of knowledge, to emerge from the pond next year, a serious-minded, fully developed, google-eyed frog.”<sup>44</sup>

The features of campus life of the Sophomore was laid out in an instructive image from the 1930 *Evergreen and Gold* (Figure 15). The collage included a rather explicit depiction of a hazing (“Ardent Sophs Preparing Their Big Reception For The Frosh”), while what appeared to be a Senior nonchalantly walking by blissfully ignoring the event. Sophomores are also seen in an intimate embrace, an exploding thermometer between them that likely represented the heat of undergraduate sexual passion. Included as well in *The Annual* and *Torontonensis*, depictions of women, often as sexual beings, suggested young romantic or sexual interests at the expense of academic study. Sophomore women were undoubtedly objectified. In this Figure, while a cultured, pipe-smoking Sophomore seemed to be supervising, and possibly approving the derisive cartoon, the cartoon’s space is anchored by an elegant co-ed, an unapproachable debutante “in a class by herself.” If not the centre of attention,

44 Margaret Villy, “Junior History,” *Evergreen and Gold* (1921), 97.



women were literally appendages. They were a conscious distraction to their male colleagues and serious-minded professors (lower centre). Academic ranks could be imbued with contempt where Sophomores were essentially the devil incarnate (left centre). A morbid panel was also part of the image. When Sophomores “hang together,” it was perhaps in reference to educational suicide or death of that cohort of students who were inadequate to the considerable task of academic achievement.



Figure 15: Evergreen & Gold, 1930

While Freshmen and Sophomores experienced their share of ridicule, the Juniors were not impervious to derision, although they were far less skewered than students in their first two years. They were often depicted as pseudo-serious scholars, progressing from the incompetent to the barely capable, still overwhelmed by conventional grown-up responsibilities. The Junior class was sketched as struggling under the burden of academic pressures and crushed by the heavy weight of knowledge (Figure 16). Due to their relatively advanced stage of higher education, however, they were offered one of their first mea-

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Figure 16: Torontonensis, 1902

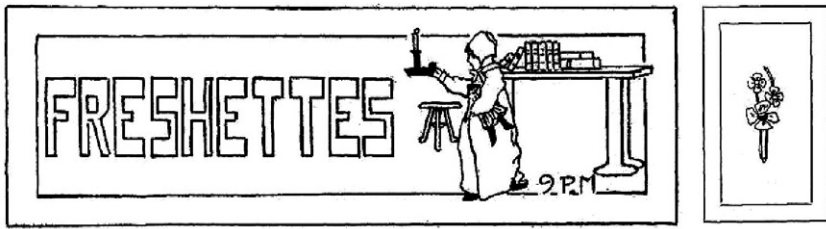


Figure 17: The Annual, 1916

sures of respect as the recurring visual trope used to represent them was the studious owl. In going from Sophomores to Juniors, class historian Minnie J. Wershof wrote in the 1922 *Evergreen and Gold*: “[G]one were the care free days, and more serious thoughts and matters claimed attention.”<sup>45</sup>

Gender, and its attendant notions of femininity and masculinity, was unambiguously ordered in all three yearbooks. Men occupied the lion’s share of space in most of the illustrations of students. The quintessential student was the infant, child, young rube, or bumpkin who woefully lacked knowledge and experience, the majority of whom were male or constructions of masculine character. Women were the “other.” Apart from the stereotype of a desirable sexual object of the young male student, similar to men, they were often embodied in caricatures as young children or infants. In Figure 17, for example, in a banner that introduces the biographies of first-year women students, a young girl with a doll safely tucked under her arm heads to bed promptly at “9 P.M.” possibly after a study session. The feminized vision of the child is embellished by the adjacent panel of a bouquet of flowers, something that would very likely not be present if the image were of a male Freshmen.

45 Minnie J. Wershof, “The History of the Class of 22,” *Evergreen and Gold* (1922), 60.

Where women were included in the cartoons, the finely-wrought delineation of the various grades in part vanishes. Women were more cohesively rendered as a gendered category as opposed to an academic one. Gendered humor and allusions to sexual innuendo were dissymmetrical between men and women. Socially-produced, masculinities and femininities were forged and regulated through a continual series of repetitive viewing(s). Contemporary historiographical writing about female voice in the university has offered elucidating accounts of how women's identities were historically created on campus and how they were variously represented by themselves and by male students.<sup>46</sup> These representations were inextricably linked to debates about coeducation and access of women to higher education.<sup>47</sup> Echoing the over-arching semiotic descriptions of the various academic years that categorized students into phases of biological and emotional growth, women students were dictated through caricature by their desire to marry, a sign of social, not intellectual, advancement and success. Higher education for women was trivialized in the patriarchal world of male students. Figure 18, for example, was a *Torontonensis* take on coeds whose primary purpose at the university was not to support each other academically, but to come together as a sorority devoted to finding husbands. The stereotype, undoubtedly driven by wider prescribed social roles of women off campus, was naturalized through the yearbook satire.

### Rites of Passage and the "Joking Relationship"

Despite attempts by the Senior class and a select group of other students to impose its vision of the educational world on others, students who were portrayed in unflattering ways might have been somewhat complicit in their own making. Through repetition and socially-accepted regulation, the circulation of cartoon images was persistent. The victims of the parodies were never deserving of their satirized fate, but the continued acceptance of initiation practices that replicated social borders between students was powerfully driven by tradi-

46 For example, see S.J. Aiston, "'A Woman's Place ...': Male Representations of University Women in the Student Press of the University of Liverpool, 1944–1979," *Women's History Review* 15, no. 1 (March 2006): 3–34.

47 The University of Toronto had a particularly vociferous debate over coeducation. See Sara Z. Burke, "Women of Newfangle: Co-Education, Racial Discrimination and Women's Rights in Victorian Society," *Historical Studies in Education / Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 111–34; and "'Being unlike Man': Challenges to Co-Education at the University of Toronto, 1884–1909," *Ontario History* 93, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 11–31. See also Anne Rochon Ford, *Path Not Strewn With Roses: One Hundred Years of Women at the University of Toronto, 1884–1984* (Toronto: Women's Centenary Committee, University of Toronto, 1985). For discussions about the academic conditions of women students in the 1920s in Vancouver, see Stewart, *It's Up to You*.

# SORORITIES

CASE '13



*Figure 18: The Ring, Torontonensis, 1915*

tional agendas. Humorous remembrances were imagined within the consensual structure of behavioural expectations and academic programmes inhabited by all students. The images in the yearbook could be seen as a self-parody, an integral element of the creator's identities and experiences at the university, as well as a penetrating commentary on the unsophisticated and immature mindset of the undergraduate dividing his time between learning the ways of campus/the world and his leisure and love lives. Particular expectations were attached to students in each year, and the members of each cohort were constrained to act in specific ways to successfully graduate from one status level to the next — a practice agreed upon as part of student life and culture. An educational cycle of intellectual and emotional growth was created by students as much as it was imposed on them.

As demonstrated in the yearbook, proceeding through the undergraduate years was considered by upper-level students as a “rite of passage.” This rite, which could be connected to initiation and hazing, was interpreted for wide readership. As early as 1909, in his seminal book of the same name, French ethnographer and anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) coined the term “rites of passage.” Van Gennep's theory was based on change: “A person passes through a series of ... clearly defined positions ... and ritual is the pri-

mary means of safely navigating the rapids.”<sup>48</sup> Van Gennep used a three-stage model to explain all rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation (originally, he used the terms preliminal, liminal, postliminal). As applied to undergraduate students in Vancouver, Edmonton, and Toronto, the student cohort was clearly separated through course and programme registration; in transition, graduating from one year to the next was equated with the crib to maturity; and incorporation finally took place once the student entered his final year and graduated. These “rites” were ubiquitous in the yearbook visual and textual images.

The rites of passage in the academy as analogous to the life experiences of youth was intended not only as biting critique, but was also, at its base, meant to be humorous. The use of humour had deep implications. “Like other aspects of language, humour is a way in which people show their allegiance [or disapproval of] to a group.”<sup>49</sup> British social anthropologist Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) defined “joking relationships” as when “one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence ... which in any other social context ... would express and arouse hostility.” He continued that such relationships “enter the social structure at points of stress ... where some aspect of the relationship involves both disjunction and conjunction by the participants.”<sup>50</sup> In our study, the communication practices between years of students were part of complex group dynamics, situated on a continuum of “friendship and hostility” with “non-optional” status; in large part, students were beholden to their surroundings and cultures populated by various political and social agendas. Yearbook

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48 Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 103. Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. M.B. Vizedom and G.L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960 [*Les Rites de Passage* (Paris: Noury, 1909)]), Nicole Belmont, *Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), Thomas A. Leemon, *The Rites of Passage in a Student Culture: A Study of the Dynamics of Transition* (New York: Teachers' College Press, 1972), Steven Zeitlin, “The Life Cycle: Folk Customs of Passage,” *Rites of Passage in America: A Traveling Exhibition Organized by The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies*, 22 June 1992–2 January 1995. <<http://www2.hsp.org/exhibits/Balch%20exhibits/rites/lifecycle.html>>.

49 Alison Ross, *The Language of Humour* (London: Routledge, 1998). Contemporary social historians have also made an important link between humour as enacted through language and visual images, social protest, and the formation of collective identities. For example, see Marjolein't Hart and Dennis Bos, eds., *Humour and Social Protest*, vol. 52, supplement 15 (Amsterdam, 2007), and Joseph Boskin, *The Humour Prism in 20th Century America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

50 Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, “On Joking Relationships” in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York and London: Cohen/West, 1965 [1940]), 90–104. For an expanded discussion of Radcliffe-Brown's work, see Jerry Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994).

humour not only illustrated the tenuous and tension-filled social relations among students, but also explained how such wholesale images and textual references can become mainstream for many students.<sup>51</sup>

Humour was seen, either explicitly or implicitly, as an obligatory part of student culture. In its multiple expressions, yearbook humour provided propitious occasions for joking relationships to categorize the “self” — the producers of the images — and the “other” — the subject and viewers of the yearbooks, and especially women. Such relations and practices were not homogeneous nor collectively generalizable to all students at all times. As *Torontonensis*’ Valedictorian Blanche Ketcheson noted in 1905: “[T]he students of the various colleges and departments cannot share very much in one another’s life.” She inferred that competition among the different years was “natural,” being, according to academic attainment from one year to the next, simply an “exercise of one’s moral and intellectual faculties.”<sup>52</sup> The yearbook images and associated captions and poems were notable but, to contemporaries, not surprising.

## Conclusion

Yearbooks were more than mirthful nostalgic souvenir remembrances. They were potent vestiges of unequal and gendered social relations on campus. Although attempting to control the meaning of a university education, Senior students unwittingly forged yearbooks as on-going sites of struggle for authority to interpret. The university was seen as a life-cycle, a “natural,” “acceptable,” or even a “desirous” metamorphosis, where students within the three universities and four years of undergraduate work were slotted into categories based on perceived experience, skill, understandings, and expectations. This perception revealed an ageist culture, where simply being “too young,” as the first year students were deemed, was an exclusionary stamp of naïveté. Only when the student advanced in academic years could he or she be seen as growing older and wiser in the ways of the world.

While these satirical images and texts had the potential to amuse, they more importantly raised intriguing historical questions about social relations, academic and personal identities, educational hierarchies, the meanings of “progress” of working towards a degree, and, in the main, deeply contested student cultures based on power and knowledge. In the yearbooks, representational boundaries of academic attainment and personal status were solidified — they both constructed and reflected stereotypical appearances and behaviours. Overt strategies of marginalization were practiced, as, for example, seen in the

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51 Palmer, 15.

52 Blanche Ketcheson, “Valedictory,” *Torontonensis* (1905), 386.

yearbook quotation of an upper-classmen at the University of Alberta reflecting on his earlier years: "How green we were, and how the Sophs' mouths watered at the sight of us."<sup>53</sup> These cultures of difference had considerable power to label and separate. A rhyme in the 1918 *The Annual* showed unyielding prescribed identities according to year:

Freshman — Freddie  
 Sophomore — Fred Law  
 Junior — Frederick Law  
 Senior — Frederick Law Esq ...<sup>54</sup>

The upper level students esteemed themselves through the satirical subordination of others. They prejudicially slotted students younger than themselves into a homogeneous whole. This seemed to be the case among all three universities despite their geographical location, the provincial jurisdictions in which they were funded and served, the local communities in which they resided, and the composition of the editorial boards and the year in which the yearbooks were produced.

A study of yearbook representations integrally provokes debates over the co-ed experience, and how women were marginalized and objectified. The universities in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century (with echoes up to the present) were patriarchal in terms of administrative policy, demographics, authority of authority of the professoriate, and the liberty of behaviour enjoyed by male students vis-à-vis the far more strict regulations applied to coeds.<sup>55</sup> The yearbooks maintained a sanctimonious perspective towards women, making coeds more of a prize or siren than a colleague. Sexist renditions were rife, as seen in one class history: "The blue-stockings can talk as eloquently with her eyes as with her tongue."<sup>56</sup> Student cultures in the first decades of the twentieth century were very much a masculine world. A *Torontonensis* "Greeting" remarked that a "college course, the firm foundation of the Temple of Culture[, made possible] the molding of a common life ... full in hope and rich in the possibilities of opening manhood."<sup>57</sup>

Part of this gendered structure was contingent on the social expectations of men. Depending on the student, males went to university for intellectual ful-

53 "History of 25," *Evergreen and Gold*, 1924–1925, 64.

54 *The Annual* (1918), 116.

55 For example, see Sara Z. Burke, "New Women and Old Romans: Co-Education at the University of Toronto, 1884–95," *The Canadian Historical Review* 80, no. 2 (June 1999): 219–41; and Gidney, chap. 2, "'Training for Freedom': Moral Regulations in the University from the 1920s to the 1960s."

56 Moore, 32.

57 "Greeting," *Torontonensis* (1904). See also Paul Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

fillment — “knowledge for knowledge sake” — but also to gather credentials as someone with potential to secure a stable income and living. Much was at stake. The disparagement of feminine and youthful identities was tantamount to an academic subjugation; self-aggrandizement was helpful in a competitive capitalistic workforce. From the heady times of pre-World War I, through the war, to the unsettled postwar reconstruction (and arguably re-entrenchment) of a mostly “conservative” society, this over-riding pursuit of a profession by many male students went unabated (Figure 19).<sup>58</sup>

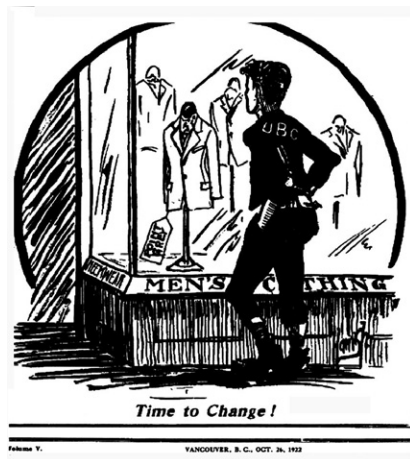


Figure 19: *Time to Change*,  
The Ubysey, 1922

In many media, late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century visual images served as vital forms of education and popular entertainment.<sup>59</sup> Yearbook cartoons can be similarly classified, but the caricatures served multiple professional and personal agendas based on individual and collective interpretative practices. Students knew that it was the time of their lives where they, in most cases, as young adults felt for the first time a sense of independence to express personal ideologies and visions couched in promises of a successful graduation and life beyond campus. In the yearbooks, Seniors took advantage of this liberty in imagining their auspicious

destinies while adjudicating other, relatively less favourable horizons of the students in the years below them.

Student cultures and identities, and the social development of youth, were inextricably linked. Yearbook images had the power to subjectively transform how students and readers/viewers made sense of themselves and the world around them. Narratives, such as those of Freshmen and women, were often trivialized. As articulated in the yearbooks, other perspectives became dominant. Depictions in the yearbooks deepen our understandings about the historical and cultural links among material practices, visibility, the contingent and contextual use of language, and the unequal and unequivocal purveyance of power among historical agents in higher education. Looking at the yearbook

58 Axelrod discusses the impact of the rise of professions in Canadian society and higher education in *Making a Middle Class*. See especially chap. 4, “Professional Culture.”

59 See Vanessa Toumlin and Simon Popple, eds., *Visual Delights—Two: Exhibition and Reception* (Eastleigh, UK: John Libbey Publishing, 2005).



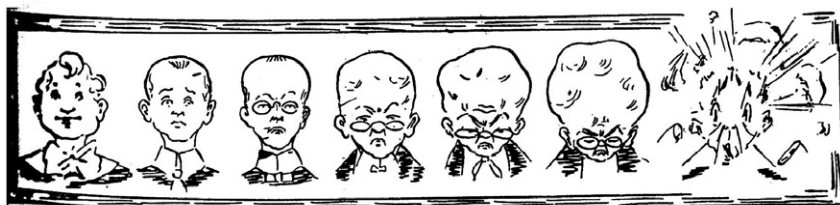


Figure 20: Torontonensis, 1906

also introduces challenges to the ideas of a “golden era” of universities, of the romantic and idealized form of advanced education that was predicated on apparently harmonious student relations. The production of the yearbooks could provoke conflict among students within and between years, and this formed a culture that was in perpetual and contested change. In the end, the argument that university education was a good thing was far from consensual. Academic advancement could indeed lead to intellectual devolution, as expressed dramatically in Figure 20. A Freshmen learns too much as he progresses through the academic ranks to an unfortunate conclusion. Visions of student cultures in the yearbook were myriad and complex, and, as rendered through satire, were tumultuous, cynical, and undeniably farcical.

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**E. LISA PANAYOTIDIS** is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Calgary, where she teaches courses in fine arts, visual culture, and spatiality in education. She is co-editor of *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada*, and is founding co-editor of *History of Intellectual Culture*, a peer-reviewed on-line journal. Her current research, supported through a SSHRC standard grant, examines the historical connections among visual and discursive representations in university student media, particularly yearbooks.

**PAUL STORTZ** is an associate professor in Canadian Studies in the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary. His research is on the history of the professoriate and ethnic, gendered, and political contexts and narratives of socio-academic cultures in Canadian higher education. He is co-editor of *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada*, and is founding co-editor of *History of Intellectual Culture*. He is currently compiling an edited collection on the history of Canadian universities and war.

**E. LISA PANAYOTIDIS** est professeure agrégée à la Faculté d'éducation de l'Université de Calgary, où elle enseigne les beaux-arts, la culture visuelle et la spatialité dans le domaine de l'éducation. Elle a codirigé la publication de

l'ouvrage *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada* et est la corédactrice fondatrice de *History of Intellectual Culture*, une revue en ligne soumise à l'évaluation des pairs. Sa recherche actuelle, financée par une subvention ordinaire du CRSHC, porte sur les connexions historiques entre représentations visuelles et discursives dans les médias étudiants universitaires, en particulier les livres-souvenirs.

**PAUL STORTZ** est professeur agrégé en études canadiennes à la Faculté de communication et de culture de l'Université de Calgary. Ses travaux portent sur l'histoire du professorat et les contextes et récits ethniques, sexués et politiques des cultures socio-universitaires au sein des établissements canadiens d'enseignement supérieur. Il a lui aussi codirigé la publication de *Historical Identities: The Professoriate in Canada* et est corédacteur fondateur de *History of Intellectual Culture*. Il compile actuellement un recueil sur l'histoire des universités canadiennes pendant la guerre.