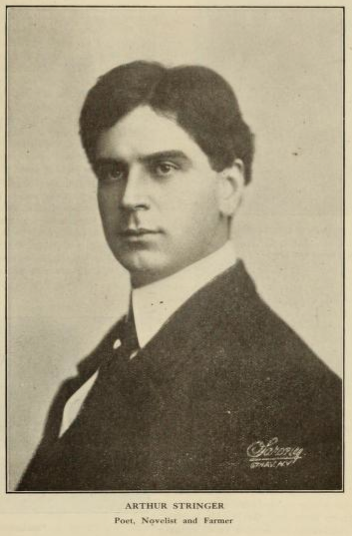
**Stringer, Arthur John Arbuthnott (1874-1950)**

Sarah Galletly, James Cook University

**SUMMARY**



Arthur Stringer was a prolific Canadian author who gained great popular success by breaking into the American publishing scene in the early twentieth century. A novelist, poet, journalist and screenwriter, he is perhaps best remembered today for his *Prairie* trilogy (1915-22), one of the earliest sustained examinations of a woman’s experience of moving out to the Canadian West to start a family and live off the land. He also wrote extensively in the fields of crime and adventure novels, producing notable works such as *The Silver Poppy* (1903), *The Wire Tappers* (1906) and *Phantom Wires* (1907). Although much of his writing and poetry was initially overlooked due to its more generic elements, he is now recognised by critics for his poetry collection *Open Water* (1914), which is believed to be the first book by a Canadian poet to utilise free verse.

**Arthur Stringer (circa 1909)**

(url: <http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-zYitdAS1BOw/UGz4H4inOpI/AAAAAAAAIkY/XucS3B7l9mo/s1600/Arthur+Stringer+August+1909.png> ) - unclear where this picture is originally from)

**MAIN ENTRY**

Arthur Stringer was born on the 26th February 1874 in Chatham, Ontario, to Hugh Arbuthnott Stringer and Sally Delmege Stringer. The Stringer family moved to London, Ontario, in 1884, where Arthur attended the London Collegiate Institute. The family’s extended residence in London during his adolescence is believed to have provided the materials for his novel, *Lonely O'Malley: A Story of Boy Life* (1905). He attended University College at the University of Toronto from 1892 to 1894, where he became known as a rugby star but did not graduate, before studying at the University of Oxford for one academic year. Alongside his academic work, Stringer’s poems began appearing in Toronto’s *Saturday Night*, the *Canadian Magazine* and Goldwin Smith’s *Week.* These successes led to the publication of his first collections of verse, *Watchers of Twilight and Other Poems* (1894) and *Pauline; and Other Poems* (1895).

Following his year at Oxford, Stringer returned to North America and began his first job in the car-record office of the Père Marquette Railway at Saginaw, Michigan. His steady writing output earned him a post with the *Montreal Herald* as a reporter and editor in 1895, and by 1898 he relocated to New York to work for the American Press Association. During this period he was contributing writing and verse to magazines such as *Harper’s* and *Atlantic* Monthly and befriended other notable Canadian poets such as Bliss Carman and Charles G. D. Roberts. Indeed, by 1901 he was in a position to give up his editorial post and focus solely on his writing.

Stringer’s career as an author of popular fiction, initiated by the publication of *The Loom of Destiny* (1899), a collection of prose sketches, was cemented in 1903 with his first novel, *The Silver Poppy*, which went through multiple printings and further elevated his literary celebrity. In 1903, Stringer also married Jobyna Howland, an actress now considered the original ‘Gibson Girl.’ Howland is believed by some to be the inspiration for Stringer’s actress-heroine in *The Wine of Life* (1921), one of his more psychologically complex characterisations. The newlyweds purchased a farm at Cedar Springs, Ontario, and divided their time between New York and their northern homestead with regular overseas trips to Europe and North Africa to escape the harsh North American winters. Building upon his experiences in New York, Stringer began producing a series of crime and adventure novels, many chiefly written for serial publication, beginning with the publication of *The Wire Tappers* (1906). He later expanded his oeuvre to include wilderness narratives based on his travels around the Canadian North.

Among Stringer’s prolific poetic output, *Open Water* (1914) is his only collection to gain sustained critical attention, largely due to its use of free verse and non-rhyming stanzas and its direct engagement with the emerging modernist movement in the foreword. At a time when free verse was still considered largely experimental, Stringer argued for its uptake, viewing it as a natural evolution in poetry rather than the more common view of the form as an oppositional, more reactionary response to its predecessors. Stringer stated that ‘all art, of course, has its ancestry’ and that poetry should remember this ‘ancestry’ while attempting to move forward. Seeing his collection as a ‘mere effort towards emancipation’ he claimed that ‘poetry is capable of exhausting one particular form of expression, of incorporating and consuming one particular embodiment of perishable matter and passing on to its newer fields.’ This foreword is considered one of the earliest documents supporting attempts to liberalise Canadian poetry in both form and content.

Stringer invested in the Turner Valley oil boom of 1914, purchasing a wheat-growing ranch in the Symonds Valley, Alberta, a decision which may have affected the end of his marriage to Howland in that same year. Shortly thereafter he married his cousin, Margaret Arbuthnott Stringer of Chatham, with whom he later had three sons. Stringer was unable to make a success of his new farming venture, but his short residence on the prairies gave him valuable materials to help produce the first novel in his *Prairie* trilogy, *The Prairie Wife* (1915). Stringer’s contemporaries were quick to praise *The Prairie Wife* and its sequels – *The Prairie Mother* (1920) and *The Prairie Child* (1922) – for its perceptive insights into feminine psychology and the social and economic issues surrounding prairie homesteading. It has since been reclaimed as an early prototype for the bleak, psychological prairie realist novels of Canada’s 1930s and 1940s.

**Frontispiece by H.T. Dunn for the 1915 Curtis Publishing Co. edition of *The Prairie Wife***

(url: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18875/18875-h/images/fpiece.jpg> )

In 1918, Stringer spent a year in Hollywood, where he wrote screenplays, many of his popular adventure and crime novels also later being adapted into films. In 1921 Stringer sold his farm in Cedar Springs, making the decision to permanently relocate to the United States. He purchased property in Mountain Lakes, New Jersey, spending his time leading camping expeditions in the woods, and travelling extensively while continuing to produce an impressive amount of writing, in a wide variety of forms and genres, throughout his later career. Stringer officially became an American citizen in 1937 and was awarded an honorary D.Litt. by the University of Western Ontario in 1946. He died on the 13th September 1950.

**List of Works**

Fiction

*The Loom of Destiny* (1899)

*The Silver Poppy* (1903)

*Lonely O'Malley: A Story of Boy Life* (1905)

*The Wire Tappers* (1906)

*Phantom Wires* (1907)

*The Under Groove* (1908)

*The Gun-Runner* (1909; revised and abridged edition, 1923)

*The Hand of Peril: A Novel of Adventure* (1915)

*The Prairie Wife* (1915)

*The Door of Dread: A Secret Service Romance* (1916)

*The House of Intrigue* (1918)

*The Man Who Couldn't Sleep: Being a Relation of the Divers Strange Adventures which Befell on Witter Kerfoot When, Sorely Troubled with Sleeplessness, He Ventured Forth along the Highways and Byways of Manhattan* (1919)

*The Prairie Mother* (1920)

*Twin Tales: Are All Men Alike? and The Lost Titan* (1921)

*The Wine of Life* (1921)

*The Prairie Child* (1922)

*The City of Peril* (1923)

*The Diamond Thieves* (1923)

*Never-Fail Blake* (1924)

*Empty Hands* (1924)

*Power* (1925)

*In Bad With Sinbad* (1926)

*Night Hawk* (1926)

*White Hands* (1927)

*The Wolf Woman* (1928)

*Cristina and I* (1929)

*The Woman Who Couldn't Die* (1929)

*A Lady Quite Lost* (1931)

*The Mud Lark* (1932)

*Marriage by Capture* (1933)

*Man Lost* (1934)

*Tooloona: A Novel of the North* (1936)

*The Wife Traders: A Tale of the North* (1936)

*Heather of the High Hand: A Novel of the North* (1937)

*The Lamp in the Valley: A Novel of Alaska* (1938)

*The Dark Wing* (1939)

*The Ghost Plane: A Novel of the North* (1940)

*Intruders in Eden* (1942)

*Shadowed Victory* (1943)

*Star in a Mist* (1943)

*The Devastator* (1944)

Written with Russell Holman:

*Manhandled* (1924)

*The Story Without a Name* (1924)

Poetry

*Watchers of Twilight and Other Poems* (1894)

*Pauline; and Other Poems* (1895)

*The Woman in the Rain, and Other Poems* (1907)

*Irish Poems* (1911); republished as *Out of Erin (Songs in Exile)* (1930)

*The Shadow* (1913); republished as *Open Water* (1914)

*A Woman at Dusk, and Other Poems* (1928)

*Dark Soil* (1933)

*The Old Woman Remembers, and Other Irish Poems* (1938)

*The King Who Loved Old Clothes, and Other Irish Poems* (1941)

*New York Nocturnes* (1948)

*The Woman in the Rain, and Other Poems* (1949)

Drama

*Hephaestus; Persephone at Enna; and Sappho in Leucadia* (1903)

*Alexander Was Great: Greek Burlesque in One Act* (1937)

*The Cleverest Woman in the World and Other One-Act Plays* (1939)

Non-Fiction

*A Study in King Lear* (1897)

*Red Wine of Youth: A Life of Rupert Brooke* (1948)

**Further Reading**

Dudek, Louis, and Michael Gnarowski (1967) ‘The Precursors: 1910-1925,’ *The Making Of Modern Poetry In Canada,* eds. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski. Toronto: Ryerson.

Garvin, John (1916) ‘“Arthur Stringer” [Arthur John Arbuthnott Stringer] (1874-1950),’ *Canadian Poets*, ed. John William, Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, Publishers, 313-322.

Harrison, Dick (1990) ‘Arthur Stringer,’ *Canadian Writers, 1890-1920*, ed. William H. New, *Dictionary of Literary Biography* Vol. 92, Detroit: Gale.

Karr, Clarence (2000) *Authors and Audience: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000.

Lauriston, Victor (1941) *Arthur Stringer: Son of the North,* New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

Lauriston, Victor (1941) *Postscript to a Poet,* Chatham, Ont.: The Tiny Tree Club.

Moran, Roger. ‘Arthur John Arbuthnott Stringer,’ *Canadian Encyclopedia*, Dominion Institute.

Porter, McKenzie (1963) ‘The Purple Prose and Purple Life of Arthur Stringer,’ *MacLean's* 76 (9 February 1963), 26-30.