



Andy Gordon: Or, the Fortunes of a Young Janitor

Horatio Alger

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Horatio Alger Jr. (1832–1899) was a prolific 19th-century American author, best known for his many young-adult fiction novels about impoverished boys and their rise from humble backgrounds to lives of middle-class security and comfort through hard work, determination, courage, and honesty. His writings were characterized by the "rags to riches" narrative, which had a formative effect on America during the Gilded Age.

Essentially, all of Alger's juvenile novels share the same theme, known as the "Horatio Alger myth": a teenage boy works hard to escape poverty. Often though, it is not the hard work itself that rescues the boy from his fate, but rather some extraordinary act of bravery or honesty. The boy might return a large sum of lost money or rescue someone from an overturned carriage. This brings the boy—and his plight—to the attention of a wealthy individual.

Alger secured his literary niche in 1868 with the publication of his fourth book, *Ragged Dick*, the story of a poor bootblack's rise to middle-class respectability. This novel was a huge success. His many books that followed were essentially variations on *Ragged Dick* and featured casts of stock characters: the valiant hard-working, honest youth, the noble mysterious stranger, the snobbish youth, and the evil, greedy squire.

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