

BOYS NEED GIRLS: GENDER NORMS FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY

BOYS' PERIODICALS TO *PETER AND WENDY*

by

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Introduction

Early on in J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), Peter Pan declares, "Wendy, one girl is more use than twenty boys" (Barrie 33). In a story filled with adventurous boys, Peter is the epitome of boyhood. He is the leader, braver than the lost boys, and the best at every game. The narrator illustrates Peter's nature when he insists, "The others were all brave boys, and they must not be blamed for backing from the pirate captain . . . But there was *one* who did not fear him" (Barrie 95, italics mine). From the beginning of the story, though, this strong and courageous boy admits that he needs a girl. The question of how boys need girls also appears in the nineteenth-century boys' periodicals that were popular during J. M. Barrie's youth. The *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, two very popular but distinctive Victorian boys' periodicals, both work to promote particular ideologies of boyhood and girlhood. Both papers, along the way, show how femininity is essential to understanding and producing ideal manly boyhood. By examining these boys' magazines in conjunction with *Peter and Wendy*, I demonstrate how Barrie includes these conversations about gender norms, absorbed in his own youth. The characters of Peter Pan and Wendy Darling both reflect middle-class Victorian expectations of gender, but, at the same time, the narrator's interjections often undermine these norms. In *Peter and Wendy*, J. M. Barrie draws on the nineteenth-century gender norms expressed in such magazines as the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, but also undercuts these norms through an intrusive and unknowable narrator.

I have placed my examinations of gender in *Peter and Wendy* in conversation with an exploration of girls' and boys' roles in two Victorian boys' magazines. The first is the *Boy's Own Paper*, mostly read by middle-class boys, and the second is *Boys of England*, popular among lower-middle and working-class boys. Both periodicals were weekly magazines that cost only one penny per issue, and both sold hundreds of thousands of copies over multiple decades. The *Boys of England* (*BE*) and the *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*) included multiple articles in each issue, particularly adventure stories and school stories. The novel, *Peter and Wendy*, was first published in 1911, seven years after the initial performance of J. M. Barrie's hugely popular theatrical version of the same story, *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up*. Barrie's story has been adapted into several movies and other books; even those in the western world who have never read or viewed a story about Peter Pan likely still recognize the character's name. *Peter Pan* is also a mainstay in children's literature criticism, the subject of many books and journal articles. The issue of how boys need girls in *Peter and Wendy* reveals the value of using gender studies in the critical examination of children's literature. By connecting children's literature studies (*Peter and Wendy*) and periodical studies (the *BE* and the *BOP*) with gender studies (boyhood, girlhood, and motherhood), my project expands the possibilities of all three areas of study.

Periodical Studies

My study of the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* begins with the insight, first made by Margaret Beetham in *Investigating Victorian Journalism* (1990), that each periodical "article, each periodical number, was and is part of a complex process in which writers, editors, publishers and readers engaged in trying to understand

themselves and their society; that is, they struggled to make their world meaningful” (Beetham 20). Periodicals are a resource for understanding nineteenth-century ideologies, but a complex resource. For example, the *Boy's Own Paper (BOP)* was published by the Religious Tract Society, which sought to transmit moral and spiritual values to its young readers. At the time of its inception, early reviewers hailed the *Boy's Own Paper* as an instructive and wholesome magazine that would keep boys' interest while also preserving them from the unhealthy, sensational papers. The individuals involved in making the *BOP* sought to make meaning through the magazine and to promote a particular conservative, Christian, and middle-class British ideology. Thus, children's periodicals such as the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* provide fertile and available material for exploring the complicated messages about gender in mass culture aimed at children. Despite these meaning-making goals, periodicals are also consumer products, produced and marketed to a specific audience in order to make a profit (Beetham 21). This economic aspect played a significant role for the *BOP* and the *BE*, since both periodicals were among the most popular boys' magazine of the nineteenth century (Banham). As children's literature, these magazines needed to appeal to the adults who held the purse strings, as well as to the children who presumably read the magazine. The *Boy's Own Paper*, in particular, marketed itself towards middle-class parents who wanted to be sure their children had wholesome reading material. By contrast, the *Boys of England* was sometimes read by middle-class boys in secret, since their parents deemed it unhealthy (Drotner 75, Richards 5).

Laurel Brake, in her discussion of Victorian periodical criticism in *Subjugated Knowledges* (1994), emphasizes “the ways in which criticism is shaped to a greater or

lesser extent by the specific periodical in which it appeared” (Brake 8). Though Brake is discussing nonfiction criticism rather than children’s periodicals, it is still important to remember that the nature of a specific periodical, its class and genre positioning, provides an important context for every article within its pages. Though the *BOP* claimed to be a magazine for all boys, evidence suggests that its readers were primarily from the middle class, while the *BE*’s readers were lower-middle and working-class. Thus, the conservative moral positioning of the *Boy’s Own Paper* also involves class positioning. Periodicals also exist within the context of “the critical debates in other periodicals of the day” (Brake 8). For children’s periodicals of the late nineteenth-century, the genre of sensation fiction, particularly the penny dreadful, was one such critical issue. Penny dreadfuls were cheap and sensational magazines that “provided sex, violence, sensation, and escapism to an audience that by the 1860s was increasingly youthful” (Nelson 126). Working-class children usually read these magazines, and many among the Victorian middle-class feared that the penny dreadful might have a degenerative effect on the working class (Dunae 22, 23). Upon its initial publication in 1879, the *Boy’s Own Paper* explicitly sold itself to middle-class adults as an antidote to the sensational penny dreadfuls (“Literature and Art” 24). The *Boys of England*, however, has much closer ties with the sensation genre. The full title of the *BE* originally included the word “sensation,”¹ and even after its title change the *BE* maintained relatively sensational content. In *The Dynamics of Genre* (2009), Dallas Little identifies four key traits of sensation fiction, and the *Boys of England* routinely

¹ The full original title was: *Boys of England: A Magazine of Sport, Sensation, Fun, and Instruction*. It was later changed to *Boys of England: A Journal of Sport, Travel, Fun, and Instruction*.

exhibits three of these four key traits: fluid identity, psychological deviancy, and unstable authority.² The only trait the *BE* does not include is home-like settings. Instead, the *Boys of England* features exotic, far-off locales. In addition to the sensational traits Liddle describes, the *BE* also includes many young and attractive female characters and hints at heterosexual male desire in its heroes. Understanding the *BE*'s connections to the sensation fiction genre provides us with critical context for our understanding of these two nineteenth-century children's periodicals, the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England*.

The construction of the periodical, a reoccurring but forever new text, and the variety of people involved in its production affects our understanding of these magazines. Beetham describes how "each number must function both as part of a series and as a free-standing unit which makes sense to the reader of the single issue" (Beetham 29). Both the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* needed a consistent identity in order to appeal to a coherent audience each week (Beetham 28), but they also needed to interest and excite their readers each week with new stories. Because the periodical form requires that a text be continuously "open," without an ending or "close," Beetham suggests that the periodical is "potentially disruptive" (Beetham 27). Another critic, focusing specifically on serialized sensation stories, identifies "a cycle of pleasure and torment, consumption and hunger" (Wynne 22). Readers of serial stories such as those found in the *BE* and the *BOP* are continuously fed new segments but

² These traits of sensation fiction are found in Dallas Liddle's discussion of the sensation fiction genre in "The Clergyman's Tale," a chapter from *The Dynamics of Genre*. As example of sensational traits, the *Boys of England* includes many characters who temporarily change their identities, many violent and sex-crazed villains, and many situations where chaos supplants authority.

always left “hungry” for the next part of the story. Within the magazine, the identity and goals of the individual authors and editors play a significant role. Laurel Brake also suggests that “revision, even extensive revision by the editor, for many Victorian critics, must have been a common experience which they accepted as one of their conditions of work” (Brake 15). Edwin J. Brett, for instance, had great personal influence as the creator and long-term editor of the *Boys of England* (“*Boys of England*”). The *Boy’s Own Paper*, though, went through several editors and therefore lacked a central, consistent editorial influence.

Children’s Literature Studies

My above discussion of how authors, editors, publishers, and adult buyers influence boys’ periodicals demonstrates how much influence adults have in literature for children. Perry Nodelman, in his *The Hidden Adult* (2008), insists that “the values texts most frequently support are ones that benefit those with the power to produce and distribute the texts” (Nodelman 90). This fits with another critic’s assertion that “periodicals written for adolescents by adults attempted to foster conservative norms of class and gender” (Holt 84). My thesis takes into account the class and ideology of these influencers, always remembering the authors’ and editors’ status as adults. Nodelman recognizes this problem when he suggests that, in children’s texts, pleasure and freedom are “a mask for something else—often . . . a statement against pleasure . . . and the freedom is deceptive” (Nodelman 36). An early review of *The Boy’s Own Paper*, in *Capital and Labour*, describes this boys’ magazine as “intended to comprise tales, sports, travel, adventure, and a variety of reading for amusement and instruction, so as to neutralize the pernicious literature which abounds in the present day” (*Capital and*

Labour, Issue 255). This review acknowledges that the “amusement” is a sugarcoating to make the healthy reading go down easier for boys. However, this review does not tell the whole story about the *BOP* or about children’s periodicals, generally.

I base some of my understanding of the relationship between the adult and the child in children’s literature on Jacqueline Rose’s *The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984). Rose suggests not just that adults use children’s literature to transmit their own values, but also that, within children’s texts, “the child can be used to hold off a panic, a threat to our assumption that . . . sexuality . . . will eventually take on the forms in which we prefer to recognize” (Rose 10). Rose takes J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* as her primary example of this idea that children’s literature has more to do with adult desires, impressed onto the idea of the child, than with actual childhood. She suggests that “literature for children is, therefore, a way of colonising (or wrecking) the child” (Rose 26). While I agree that adults have great influence on children’s texts, my project will challenge the idea of children’s literature as colonization by showing how destabilizing gender norms are in *Peter and Wendy*, which, unlike the play, is not easily understood as a novel for children. Barrie encourages child readers to question and evade imposed norms. Indeed, the play form, *Peter Pan*, may well have become popular because it offered an “escape” from the expectations of “polite society” (Kidd 84).³

By her own acknowledgment, Jacqueline Rose’s text is not about what children desire as they read, but rather about what “adults, through literature, want or demand of the child” (Rose 137). Rose insists that, in children’s texts, “the child is constantly set

³ “*Peter Pan* found quick and enduring popularity in England and the United States because it resonated with an existing fantasy of escape from ‘civilization,’ or adulthood, marriage and polite society” (Kidd 84).

up as the site of a lost truth and/or moment in history, which it can therefore be used to retrieve” (Rose 42). According to this argument, the child in children’s literature represents either the past or a lost ideal that adults are trying to recover. Carolyn Steedman’s *Strange Dislocations* (1994) builds on Rose’s argument by suggesting “that child-figures, and more generally the idea of childhood, came to be commonly used to express the depths of historicity within individuals” (Steedman 12). Steedman insists that as the adult searches for his or her own lost self, the child comes to embody that which was lost (Steedman 174). Catherine Robson makes this argument more specific in *Men in Wonderland* (2001) when she discusses the relationship of the older Victorian male with the little girl. Robson suggests that “little girls represent not just the true essence of childhood, but an adult male’s best opportunity of reconnecting with his own lost self” (Robson 3). Robson also turns her argument to a romanticized ideal of the child as she shows how this relationship between the adult and the child imagines childhood “as a paradise of innocence and purity” that is the opposite of the “guilt and gloom” of adulthood (Robson 8).

Anne Higonnet, in *Pictures of Innocence* (1998), describes how the Romantic period of late eighteenth century England produced an idea of the “Romantic child,” which continued to be important through the nineteenth century. She focuses on non-discursive representations of children from the last few centuries to demonstrate this idea. Higonnet writes that “the Romantic child makes a good show of having no class, no gender, and no thoughts – of being socially, sexually, and psychically innocent” (Higonnet 24). The Romantic child is innocent, unconscious, and the binary opposite of the adult (Higonnet 24, 28). Another argument can be made for the origins of the

Romantic child, however. As the nineteenth century progressed, more children survived childhood, and children therefore became “increasingly sentimental objects for the parents” (Horn 209). Horn, comparing the 1890s to the 1830s, argues that “the position of the child had moved from that of being one of the least regarded members of society to one accorded a degree of protection through the vulnerable years of immaturity” (Horn 209). Increased legal protection for “working youngsters” may partly explain this shift (Horn 119). Nevertheless, Higonet’s Romantic child, as in Steedman’s and Robson’s texts, represents an ideal for adults that is crucial for understanding how adults write about children in children’s literature.

With this conception of childhood innocence in mind, we can see that Barrie is far from accepting the child as pure or as ideal representation of the past. Though he repeatedly describes children as “gay and innocent,” this phrase, the final sentence of the novel, concludes with “heartless,” leaving readers with a representation of childhood that is unconscious and uncaring of the feelings of others.⁴ *Peter and Wendy* does, however, suggest that childhood is a time of great potential and of flexibility for the characters, when they are not bound quite so closely to the expectations that govern adults. Wendy and Peter’s relationship complicates gender in as much as they are children, not just female and male. The narrator uses Wendy’s childhood to show that she is more than just a future mother and to gently call into question her “motherly” tendencies. Because Wendy is still a child, therefore, she can move beyond the restrictions conferred by norms of femininity. At the same time, this book also connects adults to their childhoods at the moments when they step outside the boundaries of

⁴ The narrator concludes by saying, “and so it will go on, so long as children are gay and innocent and heartless” (Barrie 153).

gender. For instance, at the outset of Barrie's novel, we learn that Mrs. Darling has been withholding one kiss from her family, to whom she is supposed to give everything. The subversiveness of this kiss reveals itself when, every once in a while, the Darling children danced around their nursery, "And gayest of all was Mrs. Darling, who would pirouette so wildly that all you could see of her was the kiss, and then if you had dashed at her you might have got it" (Barrie 12). Only when she is behaving like a young girl does Mrs. Darling's kiss, which she has withheld from others since she was a girl, stand out. When Peter Pan visits the Darling house on the night of Wendy's return, Peter "took Mrs Darling's kiss with him. The kiss that had been for no one else Peter took quite easily. Funny. But she seemed satisfied" (Barrie 169). The subversive kiss becomes more apparent when she is behaving like a girl, rather than a grown woman and a mother, and she only gives the kiss away to the one child who would never grow up.

In her *Artful Dodgers*, Marah Gubar sets up a way of thinking about points in children's literature (such as Mrs. Darling's kiss) where authors encourage young readers to subvert the norms supported by adults. Gubar discusses several authors of Golden Age children's literature and suggests that they "carefully acknowledge the tremendous power that adults and their texts have over young people while still allowing for the possibility that children—immersed from birth in a sea of discourse—can nevertheless navigate th[r]ough this arena of competing currents in diverse and unexpected ways" (Gubar 32-3). Gubar uses the term "dodging" to illustrate the way that children in these texts deal with the influence of adults and develop agency. She insists that these "texts often promote a kind of active literacy aimed at enabling children to become more artful dodgers of adult influence" (Gubar 207). The idea of

dodging allows Gubar to see points of dissonance within the dominant discourses. Gubar's text shows that children are not entirely limited by adult desires if the adults themselves (the authors) encourage their child readers' agency. As I explore the relationship between gender in childhood in *Peter and Wendy*, the *Boy's Own Paper*, and the *Boys of England*, I am also looking for moments where children are encouraged, perhaps unexpectedly, to "dodge" adult demands and expectations. I demonstrate how Barrie encourages children to question normalized characteristics of both genders, through the relationship between Peter and Wendy and through the interactions of adults of both genders. Unlike Gubar, I focus entirely on how the texts provide moments where children can dodge norms, rather than bringing in the responses of actual children, which is simply not feasible for this project.

Gender Studies

In their "Introduction" to *Women's History: Britain, 1700-1850* (2005), Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus describe how, for mid-century middle class Victorians, "femininity become decisively equated with the private sphere of the home, family, and emotion, while masculinity was linked to the public sphere of work, politics, and power" (Barker 5). Developments in Darwinian theory at the turn of the century may have even encouraged this division of gendered spheres, since Darwinianism might have "supported the idea of the fundamental opposition of maleness and femaleness" (Nelson 53). In her *Uneven Developments* (1988), Mary Poovey illustrates how this binary gender model "underwrote an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at midcentury" (Poovey 8). Poovey's text highlights the constructedness of this gender system, while tracking the tensions and anxieties that developed out of this

ideology (Poovey 199). Mary Poovey discusses these public/private gender values when she asserts that, in Victorian England, threats to gender norms “seemed to threaten the most fundamental principles of the social and natural orders” (Poovey 199). The division of labor and spheres of the sexes was discussed as “natural” because any less-secure description would have seemed dangerous for society as a whole. In her essay in *Girls, Boys, Books, Toys*, (1999), Mavis Reimer brings girls into this discussion when she suggests that, “like working middle-class women, schoolgirls threatened the stability of domestic ideology when they moved into the public sphere of school” (Reimer 47). This led to representations of girls as threatened, and Reimer highlights the importance of publications such as W. T. Stead’s series on child prostitution, “The Maiden Tribute,” which emphasized the need for girls to be protected (Reimer 47). While Barker and Chalus describe gender norms that we can clearly observe in *Peter and Wendy* and the periodicals, their research also suggests that the most effective method of questioning gender norms may well have been a subtle one. Wendy, for instance, eagerly anticipates her future feminine role as a mother, so that the novel’s breaks from these gender norms are not immediately apparent. Barrie creates characters that subscribe to the “natural” gender order that Poovey discusses, but these same characters relate to the opposite sex in surprising (but subtle) ways.

My thesis considers whether girls like Wendy fit the Victorian gender molds, using feminist lenses such as Poovey’s to understand historical concepts of gender. At the same time, I intend to avoid using dehistoricized twenty-first century concepts of gender to simply replace old norms with new ones. In the essay mentioned above, Mavis Reimer critiques children’s literature critics for failing to complicate and question

their own gender values in literature. As an example, she insists that “much of the criticism of the late-nineteenth-century school stories of L. T. Meade, the ideal girl implicitly is assumed to have no traits that might be considered stereotypically feminine and most of the conventionally masculine qualities and aspirations” (Reimer 42). Reimer makes the important point that feminist criticism of children’s literature must avoid assuming that the ideal girl is essentially a boy. The ideal girl may, like Wendy, have some combination of the traditional traits of both genders, and any conception of the “ideal” must really be put into its historical context.

Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall, in their “Introduction” to *Writing Women’s History* (1991), show how “conceptual dualisms” such as public/private and nature/culture are not adequate “to explain the histories of the societies out of which they emerged” (Offen xxxiii). Not only are such binaries inadequate now, Linda M. Shires suggests in her “Afterword” to *Rewriting the Victorians* (1992) that the ideologies and representations of the Victorian era were unstable at the time and that these are “defining characteristics of the age” (Shires 185). The ideal of the submissive, domestic woman existed and influenced British society, but it is not the complete explanation. Examining the real life experiences of nineteenth-century British women reveals that “there were certainly areas of practice in which women failed to conform to the ideals of women as passive and desexualized” (Harvey 94). In the *Boys of England*, similarly resistant girls exist, who take part in the central action of *BE* stories. Female resistance and action do not necessarily deter the ideology of gendered spheres, however. In fact, according to Tanya Evans, “as the period progressed, women increasingly drew on the language of domesticity to justify their intervention in the

public, political world” (Evans 71). Although such dualisms are common in Victorian descriptions of gender, these feminist critics insist that they were fundamentally unstable, even at the time.⁵ Mary Poovey explains “that the middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction” (Poovey 3).

My thesis will also be examining the very notion of binary gender difference. Poovey suggests that the “binary representation of sex as the fundamental definition of difference was unstable partly because it depended on other conceptualizations^{s?} of difference whose importance it seemed to supplant” (Poovey 199). Like Poovey, I will also be examining how class, race, and national identity inform ideas about gender (Poovey 200). The middle-class Britishness of *Peter and Wendy* is important to establishing key points of slippage in gender norms; my examination of female Indians and mermaids in the novel will necessarily take into account the relationship between race, ethnicity, and gender. My discussion of periodicals deals with more of these complications. The *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* represent middle-class and working-class values, respectively, and both periodicals deal with characters of different racial and national identities.

Another key idea for my thesis comes from Ida Blom’s chapter, “Global Women’s History” (1991), in which she describes how the ability to produce life necessarily distinguishes women from men (Blom 138). Although ideas about motherhood are diverse and complex, motherhood remains a crucial aspect of gender for my study. In *Peter and Wendy*, Mrs. Darling primarily acts as a normative maternal figure, which

⁵ “The uncomplicated distinctions that are conventionally maintained between the male ‘public’ and the female ‘private’ are therefore clearly in need of scrutiny” (McCormack 6).

makes the moments where she acts outside of this role – whether to dance around with her children, or to withhold her special kiss -- especially prominent. Finally, Ida Blom also calls for historians to focus on how gender affects men and “how changes in the conditions of one gender affect the conditions of the other” (Blom 140). She specifically mentions the importance of how men might depend on women, as a way to look beyond the power that males had over females (Blom 140). I perceive Peter’s gender in just this way: as overtly masculine but also surprisingly dependent on the feminine.

Claudia Nelson explains why the ideological effort to promote manliness is especially critical to middle-class Victorian thought. She draws out an important contrast whereby “mid-Victorian commentators saw womanliness as so powerful that it controlled the nature of femaleness, while manliness had a harder struggle against maleness” (Nelson 2). While drawing on this “struggle” over manliness, I try to remember that even widespread gender norms are not universal but “temporally and spatially specific” (Roberts 123). Beginning with the idea that nineteenth-century “womanliness” was essentially seen as inevitable, Claudia Nelson makes the case for a mid-Victorian idea of manliness that draws on middle-class feminine norms (Nelson 2). She focuses especially on the middle-class understanding of woman as the domestic “Angel,” promoting the virtues of “gentleness, feeling, community, mutual respect” (Nelson 4). Nelson uses this understanding of mid-century gender norms to describe an ideal of boyhood in mid-nineteenth-century Britain that contained both masculine and feminine characteristics. Manliness, in this ideology, was not the opposite of femininity. Kelly Boyd also adds support for Nelson’s theory by describing how Victorian “‘muscular christianity’[sic], which initially married the spiritual with the physical, by

late century had altered its balance away from the moral” (Boyd 46). Boyd’s description of muscular Christianity invokes a middle-class, conservative, and Christian ideal of manly behavior that held sway in nineteenth-century Britain. Nelson depicts a similarly conservative idea of manliness that includes both athleticism and virtue, but this view of masculinity began to decline as nineteenth-century culture developed and shifted. This same shift becomes apparent in my study of boys’ periodicals, which emphasizes particular (but also divergent) ideas of manly boyhood. For instance, the *Boy’s Own Paper*, a solidly middle-class periodical, strongly promotes this virtuous and somewhat feminine model of boyhood, even in the last decades of the nineteenth-century.

According to Kelly Boyd, a late-nineteenth-century idea of masculinity in Victorian boys’ story papers “focused on individualism, arrogance and mastery of the people around you” (Boyd 45). This “new ultra-virile masculinity” suggests that the ideal boy is “well-born, athletic, adventurous and successful” (Boyd 49, 51). This self-confident and physically capable manly boy is not concerned with the virtues of the earlier, more androgynous boy. Instead, building character, in this context, is a “code” for developing masculinity” (Boyd 49). Boyd also suggests that the ideal masculine hero, according to this late-nineteenth-century model, is from the middle-class. She points out that the British middle-class was growing, and that middle-class individuals were working to solidify their class identity at this point in time (Boyd 46). Finally, this later hyper-masculine model stressed heroes’ “patriotic love of country,” suggesting British superiority and “acceptance of the English right to dominate and exploit the earth” (Boyd 46, 68, 55). This imperial mindset plays a role in earlier models, as well as this late-century model, but it is important to notice the “element of gender prejudice . .

. wherein enemies were characterized in discourse as having feminine failings” (Boyd 68). Boyd’s later and more secular ideal of masculine boyhood appears in the *Boys of England*, a lower-class boys’ magazine that I examine in the next chapter.

Summary

Chapter one of my thesis argues that the *Boys of England* and the *Boy’s Own Paper* portray two different versions of masculinity through male interactions with femininity. This chapter sets up two recognizable ways of thinking about boyhood and girlhood in the late nineteenth-century, highlighting contested aspects of manly boyhood. The second chapter of my project draws on the tensions around idealized boyhood and its connections with girlhood, established in the first chapter, applying them to J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*. This chapter argues that Barrie invokes gender norms found in the previous chapter but also draws out the flaws of these norms, undermining the ideals of boyhood and girlhood established in late nineteenth-century children’s periodicals. This second chapter shows how Barrie specifically uses the narrator of his novel, whose conflicting commentary creates instability and uncertainty. *Peter and Wendy* ultimately suggests that nineteenth-century gender norms are relevant but not certain, and always open to question.

Chapter 1: Competing Models of Boyhood in the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*

Periodicals are a critical, if understudied, part of nineteenth-century children's literature because popular weekly magazines influenced the ideas and values of Victorian children. For feminist critics, such publications provide especially valuable insight about competing or contradictory messages about gender circulating in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, two popular and long-running magazines for boys, offer insight into Victorian understandings of gender, while also showing us the variations in gender norms along class lines. Comparing the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper* allows us to tease out commonalities as well as differences in periodicals aimed at boys of different social classes, revealing that no one set of norms is universal.

I examine two periodicals in this chapter in order to establish two significant voices in the discourse about boyhood and girlhood in the late-nineteenth century. Periodicals connect closely with culture, both representing and seeking to impact their contemporary gender values. Periodicals are not a direct window into the past, of course. They are, rather, part of a "complex process" where individual participants in the production of periodicals seek "to understand themselves and their society" (Beetham 20). This ephemeral genre thus had a wide audience and a lasting impact on British values and ideology. In fact, each of the periodicals I discuss sold hundreds of

thousands of copies, and each of these copies “actually circulated among two or three readers,” so their readership is likely twice the number of copies sold (Dunae 23). The *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper* enjoyed wide popularity and a proportionally significant influence on the construction of social values, which is why it is important to understand what messages these magazines sought to impart. Though periodicals are indeed a consumer product, they are also part of the process of “meaning-making,” so that reading one of these magazines *produces* meaning for the reader (Beetham 21).

Although Victorian gender norms were hardly universal, even within the British middle-class, they still provide an important lens through which to understand how texts position themselves in relationship to society and to their readers. As discussed in the Introduction, Mary Poovey argues that the idea of binary difference in gender is not natural or given. Rather, middle-class Victorians “mapped this opposition onto the ‘natural’ difference between men and women” (Poovey 199). Though this middle-class Victorian ideology was “always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations,” it still had tangible effects on the lives of Victorian men and women, and it is always being worked out in Victorian texts, including the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* (Poovey 3, 2). Indeed, Claudia Nelson has suggested that “the socializing of gender” was often the “primary responsibility” of authors of Victorian children’s fiction (Nelson 2). It is important to be aware of the “model of binary opposition between the sexes” and the idea of separate, gendered spheres that this model produced: the domestic sphere for females and the public sphere for men (Poovey 8). The *BE* and the *BOP* dedicate a lot of space to promoting normalized

masculinity and the ideal relationship between boyhood and girlhood. Along the way, these magazines draw on the binary model of gender differences.

Both the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper* were 16-page weekly magazines with large black and white illustrations, aimed at audiences that ranged from young boys just starting school to young men in their late teens (Skelding 39). These magazines featured short fiction and non-fiction features, as well as longer, recurring serial stories. The stories were aimed at boys, but girls definitely read these magazines as well, even winning the reader-contests⁶. Though the *BOP* included more nonfiction articles than the *BE*, both magazines provided many adventure and school stories to their readers. These magazines led the way for other children's periodicals, and Troy Boone writes that this combination of "public-school story and imperialist adventure tale" became a trend in later Victorian penny magazines (Boone 70). Both the *BE* and the *BOP* ran for many years and had a large circulation,⁷ suggesting mass cultural influence. As this chapter will argue, the *Boys of England* (*BE*) and the *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*) catered to distinctive readerships and, consequently, reflected differing attitudes towards gender norms. While the *BE* was read mostly by lower-middle class and working-class Victorian children, other media historians suggest the *BOP* was purchased by middle-class children and their conservative parents.

The *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, perhaps the most influential nineteenth-century British boys' magazines, work to teach their readers how to be manly boys. Surprisingly, both periodicals also teach a different lesson: boys need girls.

⁶ One example occurs in the March 15, 1879 issue of the *Boy's Own Paper*, where Rebecca Isabel Wilson ties for second place in an essay contest with Edward S. Pope.

⁷ According to the *Waterloo Dictionary of English Newspapers and Periodicals*, the *BE* had a circulation from 150,000 per week in 1866 to 250,000 per week in the 1870s.

Each of these magazines explores the idea that boys need girls in different ways, in order to promote gender ideologies valued by particular social classes of readers in Victorian Britain. The *BE* and the *BOP* depict boys who need girls in order to promote to their child readers the gender ideologies most valued by the individuals who created and supported the magazine. For the *Boy's Own Paper*, these stakeholders are the adults involved in the Religious Tract Society, who espoused conservative, middle-class, and Christian values in nineteenth-century Britain. The Religious Tract Society sought to instill its spiritual beliefs and conservative gender norms in the next generation, through the *BOP*. The *Boys of England*, on the other hand, was established and run by Edwin J. Brett, who leaned towards the radical in his political beliefs and who entered the arena of publishing for economic profit. Different audiences and aesthetic influences produced different ideas about gender: the *Boys of England* adhered to a newer idea of the hyper-masculine boy, while the *Boy's Own Paper* pushed back against this change by promoting a manly boy with feminine virtues, such as kindness and thoughtfulness. Each of these periodicals needs the feminine to instruct boys about masculinity, which is the publications' ostensible focus, and each of these periodicals has a different way to discuss a common theme: that boys need girls.

This chapter focuses on short features and serial fiction published in both *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper* in the year 1879. This year turned out to be a significant one for each periodical: while the *BE* (established in 1866) had already been in circulation for over a decade, 1879 marked the year that *BOP* began publication and sought to wrest influence from the sensational, popular *BE*. Focusing on 1879 also

allows me to explore two periodicals that shaped the boyhood imagination of J. M. Barrie, who was still on the brink of manhood, at age 19 in 1879.

The Boys of England

The one-penny *Boys of England* (1866-1899) was a weekly Victorian periodical that catered to lower-class boys but also reached some middle-class readers. Edwin J. Brett (1828-95) edited the *Boys of England* (*BE*) during most of the magazine's history. The *BE* was "an instant success," reaching a weekly circulation of 250,000 by the 1870s (Drotner 73; Dunae 25, Boone 71), and it continued to have wide appeal until the end of the nineteenth century. Brett's readers held lower class status than the audience of the *Boy's Own Paper*, since the *BE* had its "greatest following among lower-middle-class and working-class adolescents" (Drotner 75). The *Boys of England* had the "sensational style" common to penny dreadfuls,⁸ which middle-class parents often deemed unhealthy (Drotner 75). At the same time, "many middle-class boys" enjoyed *BE* precisely because it "was nerve-racking and because it was almost invariably banned by conscientious parents" (Drotner 75). Jeffrey Richards, in his *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, includes excerpts from the memoirs of the middle-class Havelock Ellis, who remembers reading the *Boys of England* in secret as a boy, since his mother had forbidden it (Richards 5). Above all, the *BE* entertained young readers.

While the *Boys of England* made claims of morality and respectability, it continued to include the sensational narratives that drew in its young audience. The

⁸ The sensational "penny dreadfuls" were read mostly "among working-class youths," and the possible degenerative effect of the penny dreadful on the working class was a serious concern among the mid-century British middle-class (Dunae 22, 23). Claudia Nelson describes how "the penny dreadful provided sex, violence, sensation, and escapism to an audience that by the 1869s was increasingly youthful" (Nelson 126).

original subtitle of the *Boys of England* – “Sport, Sensation, Fun, and Instruction” – highlighted its sensational appeal; in 1879, it changed its subtitle to “Sport, Travel, Fun, and Instruction,” though it continued to publish melodramatic stories (Dunae 25). This change in subtitles may reflect increasing criticism from middle-class adults about sensational reading material. While advertising a new publication in 1879, Brett, the editor of *BE*, specifically addresses parents when he encourages them to “look through this, you will find nothing that can lessen your son’s veneration for the creed in which he has been brought up . . . but much that shall put pure thoughts and manly ideas in his head” (Brett 143). The magazine does actually include boy heroes that show a general sort of masculine virtue. The content of the *BE*, however, remains fairly sensational, and the periodical often promotes a subversive aversion to established authority and truth, which was common to sensation fiction. In fact, the fiction in the *Boys of England* regularly displays three of the four traits common to sensation fiction: fluid identity, psychological deviancy, unstable authority, and, the one exception, settings close to home.⁹ The *Boys of England* also allows hints of sexuality within its pages, as well as surprisingly strong and active female characters. Although some critics accept Brett’s claims of *BE*’s moral content, I share Claudia Nelson’s assessment that editor Edwin J. Brett merely adds “a half-pennyworth of morality” to dilute “his intolerable deal of shock” (Nelson 126). While the *BOP* resists sensationalism, the *Boys of England* incorporates it.

⁹ These traits of sensation fiction are found in Dallas Liddle’s discussion of the sensation fiction genre in “The Clergyman’s Tale,” a chapter from *The Dynamics of Genre*. As example of sensational traits, the *Boys of England* includes many characters who temporarily change their identities, many violent and sex-crazed villains, and many situations where chaos supplants authority.

In order to demonstrate how the *Boys of England* depicts masculine boyhood, as well as ideal girlhood, at this point in the century, I focus especially on one piece of serial fiction that models the patterns I found in the *BE*'s treatment of gender roles. "English Jack Amongst the Afghans, or, the British Flag—Touch it Who Dare!" first appeared in the *BE* in November of 1878 and ran through the first few months of 1879. Though the magazine lists no author for this story, "English Jack Amongst the Afghans" embodies many common traits of *Boys of England* stories. "English Jack" takes place in an exotic location, involves significant violence, includes an attractive female character, and features a young male hero set against a crazed and evil villain. Because "English Jack" represents a pattern in this magazine, I have chosen it as the key example that I examine in depth. I will, however, refer to other *Boys of England* stories that ran at the same time, when relevant.

Manly Boys Need Girls in the *Boys of England*

In its adventure stories, the *Boys of England* establishes the model boy as hyper-masculine: athletic, courageous, and strong. Yet, despite this repeated model of self-reliant masculinity, each story reveals its character's dependence on girlhood for the opportunity to access virtue. In "English Jack Amongst the Afghans," a serial that ran for several months of 1879, we meet Jack Vere, a young officer abroad with the British army who encounters various adventures, particularly in his quest to rescue Rose, a young British girl captured by the evil Ackbar Khan. Jack is the boy hero, "barely seventeen" ("English Jack" 2), who displays all of the manly virtues required of the ideal boy. The author describes him as "handsome . . . gay, lighthearted, chivalrous, and brave" ("English Jack" 2), with precocious authority and leadership skills. No one in the

story complains when he orders his companion Rose to “Retire into yonder corner and commence your toilette, then” (“English Jack” 138). Jack’s courage, physical prowess, and adventurous life demonstrate Nelson’s claim that “heroes of adventures typically suggest that if a boy leads an exciting life, he needn’t be obsessed with virtue” (Nelson 117). The emphasis is on excitement, courage, and leadership in this model of the masculine boy. For Jack Vere, the typical *Boys of England* hero, girls provide an opportunity for him to demonstrate masculine characteristics, such as courage.

Boys need girls in the *BE* so they can save the girls, thereby proving their manliness through feats of bravery and athletic ability. In “English Jack Amongst the Afghans,” the hero, Jack, puts himself between Rose and danger repeatedly. When Rose, the girl he is attempting to rescue, urges him to leave and save himself, Jack responds that he would “be hacked into ten thousand little bits, rather than leave this tower except in your company, dear Rose” (“English Jack” 123). Jack’s unwillingness to leave Rose, even at the cost of his own life, shows both his honor and his courage. He throws himself in immediate danger when he sees “the flash” and “immediately interposed himself between it and his companion” (“English Jack” 138). The need to protect Rose also provides Jack with an opportunity to demonstrate his prowess in battle. While trying to escape a group of attackers, Jack grabs a “long lance” and “thrust at a camel-rider who was in the act of leveling a matlock at Rose, and ran him right through” (“English Jack” 154). Jack proves that he is courageous and physically capable even under pressure, and his phallic weaponry, the “long lance,” underscores his masculinity. Young Jack does eventually rescue Rose, proving the point that the ideal boy of Victorian periodical fiction must “be well-born, athletic, adventurous and successful”

(Boyd 51). Other examples of this pattern include “The Schoolboy Poacher,” in which Kit Campion proves his manliness by saving the young and beautiful Cora from a violent physical attack.

Though the *Boys of England* did not overtly work to further the imperial project, the magazine does tacitly promote imperialism through elements of xenophobia and Orientalism in the *BE*'s concept of the ideal boy. Kelly Boyd is not alone in insisting that periodical stories such as those in the *BE* and *BOP* “were roadmaps to manliness, helping a reader to understand his manly, his British, and sometimes, his imperial role in the world” (Boyd 48). Many of the villains that the British boy heroes battle against are exotic foreigners, such as the crazed, violent Ackbar Khan of “English Jack Amongst the Afghans.” Stories such as these use exotic villains to elicit courage and physical prowess in British boys. The *BE* also engages in national stereotypes and jingoism within “English Jack,” when the British face a fierce, desperate battle against the Afghans and Jack claims that “a hundred men to one is rather heavy odds against us, but still, Murphy, we are Britons, remember, and they are but Afghans” (“English Jack” 155). Fighting the Afghan “savages” is supposed to highlight British martial superiority. Though most of the *BE* does not have the clear imperialist themes of “English Jack,” the *BE* still has a lot in common with the *BOP* in the way it elevates the British over the exotic Other.

By including young female characters with significant roles in its stories, the *Boys of England* resembles the sensational penny dreadfuls more closely than it does middle-class magazines such as the *Boy's Own Paper*. Girls in the *BE*, however, provide heteronormative training for the magazine's readers by allowing hints of sexual desire

in its ideal boy. In her discussion of children's periodicals, Kirsten Drotner insists that most nineteenth-century magazines for boys sought to avoid sexuality entirely in their publications. Drotner suggests that "this taboo was exercised chiefly by excluding from the action all women or at least all under the age of forty. The sexual references in the *Boys of England* therefore merit closer examination" (Drotner 108). In contrast to periodicals such as the *Boy's Own Paper*, which generally followed the over-forty rule, the *Boys of England* included both young, attractive females and references to heterosexual desire and sexual violence. These references to male desire again highlight the masculinity of *BE's* heroes. It may also be the case, as Drotner suggests, that the *BE's* hints of heterosexual desire stem from its ties to the penny dreadfuls.¹⁰ In addition, the *BE* still included many norms of British femininity, such as virtue and purity, reinforcing the idea that boys should both desire and work to protect such virtuous girls.

In the *BE's* adventure stories, boys need girls because their attractiveness reinforces heterosexual male desire. The girls in the *Boys of England* are virtuous, but the text focuses more on their beauty. The central girl in "The Schoolboy Poacher" is Cora, who is around fifteen years old. The first time that the boy hero meets Cora, the story describes her as having "surpassing beauty" (131). She has "dimpled cheeks," a "tall and charmingly symmetrical" figure, and "massy clusters of raven hair" ("The Schoolboy" 131). As the story continues, the author drives home her attractiveness by

¹⁰ "The relative explicitness on sexual matters . . . clearly a reminiscence of the penny dreadfuls and the romantic novelettes. Perhaps its presence also indicates that romance, if not sexuality, was deemed a necessary ingredient to wean a more worldly and less educated audience from their traditional literary fare" (Drotner 111). Keep in mind, though, that the *BE* was really about entertainment and selling issues. The idea that Edwin J. Brett attempted to "wean" any reader off of more exciting reading is rather dubious.

referencing “the beautiful young girl” and “the lovely young girl” (“The Schoolboy” 131). In “English Jack Amongst the Afghans,” Rose, whose name signals both purity and Britishness, is one of the protagonists, and she too appears “as pure and interesting as she was lovely” (“English Jack” 51). The boy characters in the text of the *Boys of England* take overt notice of the girls’ beauty. Jack, for instance, notices Rose’s good looks immediately and thinks “to himself. ‘How I do long for a glimpse of light in order to catch sight of her again. I hope that we’ll escape, if only for her sweet sake” (“English Jack” 51). The author also emphasizes Rose’s prettiness by reminding the reader of “the exquisite face and form of the girl” (“English Jack” 51). The sexuality in the *BE*’s many descriptions of feminine beauty is worth noting. After describing Cora’s figure, “The Schoolboy Poacher” goes on to say that “under the simple but coquettish little sun-hat she wore, were massy clusters of raven hair that had but to be loosed from their fastening to fall below her waist” (“The Schoolboy” 131). Though Cora’s hair is respectably fastened up, the narrative imagines the private, distinctly sexual image of Cora’s hair being let down. Another brief story, “El Cebado,” includes a description of Anita as she emerges from the river, in which the narrator writes that she is “dripping like an Indian Venus newly born” (“El Cebado” 158). The difficulty of this image of the wet, nearly nude female body can be at least partly explained, though, by the fact that Anita is not English. As an Oriental Other, her sexiness does not detract from the image of the pure, British girl that the *BE* works to reinforce.

Boys in the *BE* particularly need *desirable* girls so that they can prove their own manly character and simultaneously reinforce the theme of heterosexual desire. The loveliness and sexual appeal of the girls in the *Boys of England* also attracts the interest

of villains, making these girls vulnerable to male desire and male violence. Ackbar Khan, the Afghan villain in “English Jack Amongst the Afghans,” captures Rose and keeps her “because her features happen to be cast in a pleasing form” (“English Jack” 122).

“English Jack” strongly indicates that Ackbar Khan intends to rape Rose. Khan admits that his attraction to Rose is purely physical, based on her beautiful appearance. When Rose falls ill, Khan tells the priest who comes to cure her that “if her cure leaves her less lovely than she was before she took the accursed stuff, you may let her perish for all that I care” (“English Jack” 122). The pattern of a male villain attempting to rape a pretty and virtuous young girl occurs again and again in the *Boys of England*, in stories such as “The Schoolboy Poacher” and “Richard and Robin.” Having a girl in the story provides the hero with a chance to prove his worth. The *BE* frequently thrills its young readers with threats of sexual violence averted by capable boys, who heroically rescue attractive girls from the clutches of evil villains. This recurring plot, which would have horrified the middle-class parents who purchased the *BOP*, apparently does not offend the children who purchased the *BE*.

Boys Need Active Girls in the *Boys of England*

If girls function as objects of desire or triggers for heroism in many of the *BE*'s short fiction, they also take significant action in the main plot of the story, possessing agency and the same putatively manly traits of courage and physical prowess.¹¹ The *BE*

¹¹ Some examples include Cora in “The Schoolboy Poacher” who stands up to a boy named Chetwynd, when he attacks her. Cora confronts Chetwynd verbally and struggles with him physically, though the hero Kit intervenes before we learn whether Cora could have escaped on her own (“The Schoolboy” 163-4). In “El Cebado,” seventeen-year-old Anita shows violent determination and strength when a vicious alligator kills her husband. Anita decides to kill the beast and avenge his death, and she succeeds in the course of the story (“El Cebado” 158).

exemplifies Kelly Boyd's claim that heroines in Victorian periodicals "had often been self-sufficient and generally portrayed as the heroes' equals" (Boyd 166). Boyd insists specifically that "Brett's [the editor of the *BE*'s] female characters were vigorous women who could look after themselves in almost any situation" (Boyd 159). Though many girls in the *Boys of England* show courage, agency, and self-sufficiency, Rose in "English Jack Amongst the Afghans" is one of the most exceptional girl characters among the many stories published in the *BE* in 1879. Not only does Rose possess courage to stand up against the villains, but she also has the physical strength to pull it off. Jack first meets Rose when she shoots an elephant that was attacking him and his friends. Jack tells Rose that her "shot was a deadly one—it has killed the monster. I vow you are a regular little Joan of Arc, and have saved all our lives" ("English Jack" 51). Rose may well be permitted to act with violence and power because the situation is an exception to the typical rules of gender. The story takes place at a time of national crisis when Britain's forces stationed in the Afghan region are under serious threat. Nevertheless, by saving Jack from the elephant, Rose gives lie to Kelly Boyd's claim that "never, in any of the stories, did the heroine play saviour to the hero" (Boyd 158). Much later in the story, when the Afghans are pursuing them, Jack tells her she "must help fight, comrade. I know you're a good shot," and Rose readily agrees ("English Jack" 153). Rose "drops" several of her enemies with her shooting ability, and the narrator describes how she "soon . . . had a chance in turn of paying a little delicate attention to the camel and the dromedary riders, with her brace of pistols" ("English Jack" 154). The femininity of the phrase "delicate attention" emphasizes the contrast between the norms of girlhood and Rose's ability to shoot. Rose demonstrates that she is

independent, courageous, and capable in these passages, a girl capable of saving herself and others. In another story, “The Giant Outlaw,” Myrtha takes a stand to protect an enemy giant who has collapsed on the beach. When a group of people comes to kill the giant: “Their knives flashed in the air,” but Myrtha protects the giant “with a determination her native gentleness seldom allowed her to display” (“The Giant Outlaw” 141). The story emphasizes her feminine “gentleness” but still permits her agency and physical courage. Like other girls in the *BE*, Myrtha acts with determination and eventually achieves “her will” (156).

The *Boys of England* suggests that sometimes boys need girls to save them, even to lead them on occasion. In “English Jack Amongst the Afghans,” Rose shows leadership and intelligence as she makes decisions and helps herself and her friends to escape. When Rose first meets Jack and his friends, she leads them to safety, since they do not know the way (“English Jack” 51). When Ackbar Khan imprisons the two young people, Rose suggests that they “try to think upon some plan of escape,” rather than simply wait (“English Jack” 137). After her initial plan is successful, Jack asks her “what do you suggest doing now,” and they continue to follow her advice. Not only is Rose capable of leadership and planning, but her male companions also expect it of her. Later, when they are holed up in an abandoned British fort, Rose deploys her feminine training to scare off their Afghan attackers (“English Jack” 155). As the Afghans approach, she is “struck with a sudden and bright idea,” and she begins to play “a wild fantasia as hard as ever she could thump the keys” (“English Jack” 155). Rose’s plan successfully scares off their enemies, and the author inserts a footnote to say that, though “this incident may be thought improbable . . . one almost identical with it really did occur on the

departure of the British from Cabul" ("English Jack" 155). This footnote gives more credibility to the idea that a girl like Rose could actually save her friends through a feminine musical accomplishment.

Often times the boys in *BE* need girls to spur them on to greater virtue, which fits safely in the Victorian model whereby women protect and uphold virtue in their households. For example, in "English Jack Amongst the Afghans," Rose encourages Jack to be optimistic and to plan ahead, rather than to give up in despair. When Ackbar Khan imprisons Rose and Jack, she encourages the boy hero to help her think of a plan to escape. The text describes how Jack agrees "to humour her . . . though he failed to see how by any means they could succeed in escaping" ("English Jack" 137). Jack and Rose do escape, proving that Rose is right to encourage the hero towards greater optimism. This pattern also occurs in "The Schoolboy Poacher," where young Kit breaks off his association with an unsavory boy named Chetwynd when he observes Chetwynd trying to kiss a young girl named Cora against her will ("The Schoolboy" 164). Kit's friendship with Cora provokes him to stand up against a "bully and a coward," as Kit puts it ("The Schoolboy" 164).

In the *BE*, boys ultimately need girls to reinforce the binary model of gender norms. Though female characters occasionally demonstrate their capability in the *Boys of England*, the story frequently emphasizes girls' dependency, diminishing the potential for reading female characters as subversively self-sufficient. In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey suggests that "the representation of woman not only as dependent but as needing the control that was the other face of protection was integral to the separation of spheres and everything that followed from it, because this image

provided a defensible explanation for inequality” (Poovey 11). Dependency, then, becomes a key indicator of girlish virtue, so that even the strongest girl characters must be represented as dependent on men. In “English Jack Amongst the Afghans,” Jack consistently helps Rose in minor physical tasks. When their small party escapes from the villains on the back of an elephant, Jack “was the first to alight from the fallen elephant, and his first act was to help Rose down, and then over the riven fragments of the smashed-up gate” (“English Jack” 154). Jack does not assume that the other, younger boys will need help; his assistance of Rose implies her physical weakness and dependency. This is especially striking since Rose shows herself to be more than capable at several points in the story.

The Boy’s Own Paper

The similarly-priced one-penny *Boy’s Own Paper* (1879-1967) arrived on the scene a decade later and was published weekly by the Religious Tract Society as an anecdote to sensational boys’ fiction, such as the *Boys of England*, that was already in circulation. Although the *Boy’s Own Paper* (*BOP*) inherits much from earlier adventure and school fiction written for boys, which would include the *BE*, the *BOP* specifically sought to distance itself from sensational magazines like the *BE*. The *Boy’s Own Paper* is widely recognized, to this day, as one of the most influential British youth magazines (Dunae 22, Richards 5, Drotner 123). From its outset, the *BOP* was extremely popular, claiming a weekly circulation of more than 500,000 by the 1880s and 1890s, which would give *BOP* double the circulation of the *BE*.¹² It is important to remember, though,

¹² Critics such as Kelly Boyd maintain that “Brett’s publications [such as the *BE*] were far more popular than the *Boy’s Own Paper*” (Boyd 8).

that these numbers may not be entirely trustworthy.¹³ Further, if the *BOP* circulated more copies than the *BE*, it does not necessarily follow the *BOP* had more influence on boy readers, since many of *BOP* copies were sold to enthusiastic parents rather than boy readers (Boyd 34). Ostensibly written for the betterment of boys of all classes, anecdotal evidence and the *BOP*'s own advertisements suggest that the *BOP* was mostly purchased and read by those in the middle class, and it made its middle-class moral values clear from the outset. At the same time, Edward Hutchinson, the “*de facto* editor,” worked to include “adventure tales and other features which would appeal to boys,” so that *BOP* could collect a larger audience (Boyd 31). The publishers of *BOP* attempted to balance the appeal of adventure stories with what Boone describes as an “abundance of moralizing,” so that the *BOP* might appeal to boys without offending middle-class parents (Boone 70).

In contrast to the *BE*, early reviews and advertisements display the firmly middle-class, anti-sensational goals of the *Boy's Own Paper*. In an 1879 advertisement posing as an article about the *BOP*, the middle-class *Capital and Labour* described the *BOP* as containing “reading for amusement and instruction, so as to neutralize the pernicious literature which abounds in the present day”¹⁴ (“Literature and Art” 24).

¹³ “The *Boy's Own Paper* claimed to have sold 200,000 issues each week in its inaugural year, with circulation climbing to 500,000 in the 1880s and 650,000 in the 1890s, but these figures are suspect. Unfortunately the stated respectability of the *Boy's Own Paper* meant that boys were less fond of it than were their parents” (Boyd 34). The *Waterloo Dictionary of English Newspapers and Periodicals* is also unclear. According to *Waterloo*, the *BOP* had a circulation of 160,000 in 1879, rising to 200,000 or 500,000 in later years.

¹⁴ *Capital and Labour* was first published in January of 1869 and was published by the National Federation of Associated Employers of Labour. Its first issue suggests that it is reacting against the unionizing of labor. It was most likely aimed at middle-class employers, who opposed radical political movement. The same issue (January 8, 1879 Issue 255) of *CL* that contained both a review and an advertisement of *BOP* also contained an article entitled

This review shows how the *Boy's Own Paper* viewed itself as a corrective to the penny dreadfuls, cheap periodicals that aimed to excite their readers rather than educate them. The article goes on to urge employers and other adults to purchase this for any "lads" they know ("Literature and Art" 24). *Capital and Labour* is clearly a publication for middle- and upper-class readers, since it emphasizes the interests of employers rather than employees. Besides this review, the same issue of *Capital and Labour* also featured an advertisement for the *BOP*, clearly designed to draw its readership from the middle class. This advertisement underscores the idea that the *Boy's Own Paper* is "wholesome, elevating" and directly contrasts the new boys' magazine with "injurious" reading, which would have included the popular *Boys of England* magazine, with its sensational storytelling and adventurous, attractive girl characters. Other reviews in *John Bull* and *Aunt Judy's* reiterate the description of the *Boy's Own Paper* as interesting and beneficial. The *BOP* is clearly a middle-class magazine for boys, setting itself up in opposition to dangerous, and usually lower-class, sensational reading, while claiming to remain interesting for boy readers.

The *Boy's Own Paper* actively and forcefully opposes the sensationalism of the penny dreadfuls through its own content. The *BOP* avoids the common traits of sensation fiction, according to Dallas Liddle's description of the genre, except for its many home-like settings. The *Boy's Own Paper* also emphasizes truth and realism, through non-fiction and realistic stories, as well as overt didacticism on the importance of truthfulness. For example, the *BOP* reacts against sensational fiction with articles that insist that "quite enough really wonderful things have been done in this world that are

"Factory and Workshop Act Exemptions," which discussed exemptions to the Factory and Workshop Act of 1878.

true to read about without the folly of stories in which boys of ten go out as detectives or highwaymen" (*BOP* 6). This emphasis on "true" or at least realistic stories contrasts sharply with stories in the *Boys of England* (*BE*), such as "English Jack Amongst the Afghans" and "The Schoolboy Poacher," both of which include the kind of fantastic plots that *BOP* opposes.

In the *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*), girls serve to reinforce the binary model of gender that formed the basis of middle-class Victorian gender norms. The middle-class *BOP* boy also needs females to model gentler virtues, such as thoughtfulness. Serials in the *BOP* may conclude, quite traditionally, with marriage for the protagonist, but girl characters play little to no part in the adventure of the story. In this way, the *BOP* emphasizes the female roles as wives, through the marriages, and as mothers, through the motherly characters who play significant roles in the action. The main characters in most of the stories of *BOP* are either boys or men that boys might wish to emulate. Like the *BE*, the *BOP* advocates a capable, courageous ideal boy, but the *Boy's Own Paper* also encourages some supposedly-feminine traits, such as gentleness and Christian kindness, in its boy characters. Unlike the *Boys of England*, the *Boy's Own Paper* lives up to its promise of clean content, centered on Christian theology, which would have pleased the conservative middle-class parents who often purchased the *BOP*.

The conflicting models of boyhood in the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper* stem from different audiences: children, usually from a lower class read the *BE*, but middle-class parents often purchased the *BOP*. One of the points of discussion in children's literature criticism is that literature for young people is in many ways written

for *adults*, as well as for children.¹⁵ Adults are usually the ones who buy the literature their children read, and adults almost always write, edit, and publish these texts for children. We can see the same process and the same challenges of adult power in Victorian periodicals written for boy readers. The *BOP* claims that it is healthy for boys to read, and its early reviews and advertisements insist that it is not boring or preachy.¹⁶ However, the *BOP* frequently focuses on what adults want to hear, which meant that the paper often broke out in moralizing didacticism and that it resisted changing ideas about gender. The goals of *BOP*'s publisher, The Religious Tract Society, were also complicated by a "choice between making profit to do good later, or forgoing profit to do good in other ways" (Fyfe 183). In other words, the Society wanted to appeal to readers and their parents so that the proceeds from *BOP* could help fund other projects, but it also sought to spread its message of "gospel truth" directly through the *BOP* (Fyfe 183). Unlike Edwin J. Brett and his *Boys of England*, which sought simply to sell as many issues as it could, the Religious Tract Society needed to balance morality with marketability in *BOP* (Drotner 124).

The Ideal Boy in the *Boy's Own Paper*: Manly and Kind

The ideal middle-class hero in the *Boy's Own Paper* is physically strong, like the *BE* boy, but he is also mentally or spiritually strong, suggesting feminine virtues. For instance, in a story about Jacob and Esau called "The Two Brothers," author Rev. Pearse

¹⁵ This is the topic of Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, and Marah Gubar's *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children's Literature*.

¹⁶ A short announcement under "Miscellaneous Notices" in *John Bull* describes the *BOP* as "healthy," but it insists that "there is nothing of that goody goody or preaching tone" (*John Bull*). A review in *Aunt Judy's*, a children's magazine, describes the *BOP* as "full of interest and adventure, and unexceptionable as to teaching" (*Aunt Judy's*).

initially claims that he likes Esau best because “I like boys to be bold and strong and clever at all outdoor sports, and very much more because I like, and everybody likes, generous and goodhearted boys” (Pearse 43). Pearse begins with Esau’s more obviously masculine traits, but he eventually puts the emphasis on Esau’s goodness and generosity. The author further distances himself from the late-century normative ideal boy by saying that he also likes the other brother, Jacob, because of his gentleness, kindness, “and most of all because he loved his mother with a tender, thoughtful love” (Pearse 43). In another non-fiction story, which aimed to provide a real-life role model for readers, the author tells the story of Rob Roy, “the true Christian traveler, brave and fearless, yet tender and true-hearted” (“A Stirring” 21). This combination of masculine physicality and feminine spirituality also appears in the example of Sir Charles Napier, who is described as a “great soldier” (“Military Glory” 46). Though Napier is quite famous for his military exploits, according to the author of the story, Napier reputedly insists that, if he could go back home to his wife and daughters, “it would be more to me than pay, glory, and honours” (“Military Glory” 46), suggesting that Napier needs girls and their feminine influence more than he needs more masculine adventures.

The absence of girls as main characters in the *Boy’s Own Paper* forces boys to need girls in other ways. Without girls to express feminine virtues or encourage boys to virtue, boys in the *BOP* have to channel girls’ characteristics in their own character. The *BOP*’s manly but virtuous boy, as suggested by these articles, complicates Claudia Nelson’s idea of the exciting and adventurous boy by suggesting that middle-class boys should indeed be concerned with virtue (Nelson 117). In fact, much of the action of the

serial fiction of the *Boy's Own Paper* combines masculine and feminine traits in the boy hero.

In order to understand how the *BOP* portrays the ideal manly boy during its first year of publication and how boyhood relates to girlhood in the *BOP*, I have chosen a serial story that appears in the magazine throughout 1879. R. M. Ballantyne's "The Red Man's Revenge: A Tale of the Red River Flood" ran in 26 installments, beginning in October 1879. According to Jeffrey Richards, R. M. Ballantyne was among the ten most popular authors among schoolboys in 1888 (Richards 8). Ballantyne was also a favorite author of J. M. Barrie as a boy.¹⁷ Scholars agree that Ballantyne generally mixes adventure with spiritual instruction, a combination that matches both the general nature of the *BOP* and the general nature of the *BOP*'s ideal boy: adventurous but spiritual (Hannabus 57, Nelson 124).

In R. M. Ballantyne's "The Red Man's Revenge: A Tale of the Red River Flood," Ian provides a good example of the ideal *BOP* boy. Ian Macdonald is the young hero of Ballantyne's story, and the author describes him in great detail: Ian is strong, with a "plain but kindly face" (Ballantyne 2). Ian looks like "a rugged backwoodsman" but is actually the local schoolmaster for the Canadian colony on the Red River (Ballantyne 2). Ian's friend Victor insists that he is a "grave, sensible, good-natured, matter-of-fact, unsentimental, unselfish fellow" (Ballantyne 3). In short, Ian is a typical *BOP* hero, strong and manly, but also intelligent, kind, and unselfish. Kindliness and unselfishness are traits usually applied to the Victorian female, who was supposed to care for her

¹⁷ From J. M. Barrie's *The Two of Them*: "About fifteen years ago I heard that R. M. Ballantyne lived in Edinburgh. Then I wanted to see Edinburgh. Though a dozen years at least have passed since I read any of his books, I could sit down to-day and write out the story of nearly every one" (Barrie 198)

family in a gentle and selfless way. Thus, R. M. Ballantyne embeds feminine virtues in an overtly masculine hero.

Besides acting as a silent model for kindness and gentleness, the girl in Ballantyne's story provides a *reason* for the boy to act virtuously. However, in the *BOP*, Elsie does not actively push Ian to greater virtue, as Rose does for Jack in the *BE*. Early on in the *BOP* serial, Ian embarks on an adventure with a couple of companions to rescue Elsie Ravenshaw's little brother, who has been kidnapped. This extended rescue mission, along with his experiences during the great flood, gives Ian a chance to prove his manliness and win the hand of his love, Elsie Ravenshaw. While in the wilderness searching for Elsie's missing brother, Ian tries to and eventually succeeds in killing a grizzly bear, so that he can give Elsie a bear claw necklace. Ian goes through great trials and is seriously wounded in his attempts to kill a bear. The fact that Ian is not a good shot with a gun complicates his quest, but Ian proves that he is still quite admirable by building a trap for the bear and even using an axe to behead it. When Ian awakes after killing the bear and sees the prized bear claws, he "gazed in speechless admiration. It was not that he was vain of the achievement; he was too sensible and unselfish for that; but it was *such* a pleasure to think of being able, after all, and in spite of his bad shooting, to present Elsie with a set of claws that were greatly superior" (Ballantyne 12.3). Ian's encounters with bears prove his courage and strength, while his willingness to go after the kidnapped boy, even though it requires extended and dangerous travel, proves his goodness and unselfishness. Ballantyne also insists on describing Ian's other virtues, such as his refusal to smoke even in the face of peer pressure (Ballantyne 7.2). Despite his poor shooting, Ian is the ideal boy in Ballantyne's "The Red Man's Revenge."

Ian's accomplishments throughout his adventure, such as his triumph over the grizzly bear, give him the confidence to speak up about his love to Elsie and, finally, to win her hand in marriage.

Boyhood Through the Lens of Imperialism in the *Boy's Own Paper*

In these 1879 stories, the *Boy's Own Paper* uses the Other to establish the spiritual and moral character of its ideal middle-class boy, rather than to establish greater physical abilities or courage. The *BOP* describes encounters between British heroes and foreign Others in order to suggest the British boy's superiority in feminine virtues, such as gentleness. "An Amusing Rivalry," a brief "true-life" story in the *BOP*, is one of many short non-fiction pieces that appeared regularly in the *BOP*. These stories often featured upright British men who did something noteworthy or travelled somewhere exotic. "An Amusing Rivalry" describes how a village in the South Sea Islands discovered whitewash through a missionary and began whitewashing everything they could get their hands on, including themselves. The author describes them as "yelling with delight at the superior beauty of their white-washed infants" ("An Amusing" 46). "An Amusing Rivalry" suggests British superiority by painting this Other, non-European group as childish and silly, as well as naturally desirous of pale, whitewashed skin. The text others these non-European characters to provoke amusement and to make the Europeans, in this case a missionary, seem more "civilized" by contrast (Said 46, 67). In another supposedly-true story in the *BOP*, "An Afghan Robber," Diláwar becomes enamored with Christianity because of the "gallant and brave" British soldiers who invade his land but still manage to demonstrate Christian "humility and gentleness" ("An Afghan 5). The Afghan thief and murderer, Diláwar, is

initially brutal and greedy, so that the young male British soldiers shine out all the more righteous by comparison. The author of this story makes a point to mention that these soldiers were not all good examples, but the essential contrast between British virtue and the moral weakness of the Other still stands.

In a similar way, in R. M. Ballantyne's story, Ian and his companions stand out in contrast to the Native American characters, who are frequently depicted as lazy or villainous. Although he follows the general pattern in the *BOP* by suggesting "the superiority of European intellectual, religious, commercial and military power," Ballantyne also tries to draw out the humanity of one Native American character in "The Red Man's Revenge" (Hannabuss 59). At several points in the story, Ballantyne describes Petawanaquat's interest in Christianity, suggesting that he eventually will convert:

Petawanaquat had made the acquaintance of young Sinclair . . . Both were earnest men, intensely desirous of finding out truth—truth in regard to everything that came under their notice but especially in reference to God and religious. This grave, thoughtful disposition and earnest longing is by no means confined to men of refinement and culture. (Ballantyne 371)

Ballantyne seems to break down a small bit of the boundary between the white and the Native American male in this passage, but the description of "men of refinement and culture" emphasizes to readers that Petawanaquat is still not as sophisticated and advanced as the Westerner. Further, Ballantyne still engages with the idea of the "savage" as the villain, since Petawanaquat kidnaps a child at the beginning of the serial. This plot thread, however, comes to a peaceful conclusion when Petawanaquat finally

agrees to return the child and decides to learn more about Christianity. There is a strain of imperial “evangelicalism” in the *BOP* and in Ballantyne at this point in the nineteenth century (Mackenzie 152, Richards 5). Ballantyne emphasizes peaceful solutions and spiritual conversion over violence, but he still reinscribes racist ideas about Native Americans by including lazy, drunk, and violent, Native American characters.

How Boys Need Girls in the *Boy's Own Paper*

Girls in the *Boy's Own Paper* appear occasionally to serve as passive objects to be saved or won, eliciting manly athleticism or bravery in their boy heroes. Nevertheless, girls feature rarely in the *BOP* stories, and they normally play small, static roles in the plot. This absence usually allows the *BOP* to avoid the issue of male desire. A girl character may appear briefly in order to be saved by a courageous male, as in the “Boys of English History,” but, unlike in the *BE*, that is all such girls do for the plot. Girls in the *BOP* are thinly drawn and static. For instance, in R. M. Ballantyne’s “The Red Man’s Revenge,” the central girl, Elsie, appears primarily at the beginning and the end of the story, as an object for the male protagonist to idolize and win over. Again, she does not take part in the central actions of the plot, and the narrator does not describe her appearance or personality in great detail. In the same story, Ballantyne presents us with a young Native American woman whose role as a mother seems to supersede her “savage” nature, but she, too, plays a very minor role, leaving the only active female role in Ballantyne’s story to a tough elderly woman. Desire, in the *BOP*, is only hinted at through stories of boys saving desirable girls, stories that focus mainly on the courage and goodness of the boy heroes.

The passive roles that girls play in the *BOP* allow boys in the magazine to prove their virtue and courage by saving these girl characters. Stories of boys saving or attempting to save girls from death are fairly common in the *Boy's Own Paper*. Unlike similar stories in the *BE*, girls in the *Boy's Own Paper* are vulnerable only to physical danger, rather than sexual violation. The *BOP* also plays down the sexual attractiveness of these girls. They may be beautiful, but the *BOP* does not emphasize it as the *BE* does. The boys in the story show self-sacrificial courage, while the girls demonstrate virtue and helplessness. In one part of a *BOP* series entitled, "Boys of English History," Adela is sailing with her brother Prince William in a race along the coast of Normandy at night. Adela's brother sends her to bed in the ship below, while he and the crew are celebrating. Unsurprisingly, considering their risky sailing, the ship hits a rock and begins to sink. The prince escapes on a lifeboat, only to realize when he hears "the piercing shriek of a girl" that his sister is still on the sinking ship (30). The prince orders the crew to row back, even when the crew warns him that it "is certain death!" (30). The story comes to a climax when the prince makes it back to his sister and tells her to, "throw yourself into my arms!" She did so, but alas! at [sic] that moment, fifty more, in the desperation of terror, jumped too, and the little boat, with all that were in her, turned over and was seen no more" ("Boys of English History" 30). For the *BOP*, this is a story of bravery, strength, and sacrifice that other boys should emulate, despite the fact that the prince gets quite a few men killed in his attempt to save his sister. The important fact seems to be that the ideal boy always goes back for the defenseless girl, in this case, the little sister. The *Boy's Own Paper* also includes stories of boys saving other boys or grown men from death, but the stories of boys saving girls seem to appear

more frequently and also stand out for their emphasis on sacrifice. As in the example of William and her sister, stories of boys saving girls in *BOP* usually lack the sexual overtones present in similar stories in *BE*. “The Omadthawn,”¹⁸ for instance, tells the story of a mentally challenged young man named Pat who sacrifices his own life to save young Peggy Rose from a fire (“The Omadthawn” 249). By emphasizing Pat’s mental difficulties and his unsuitableness as a suitor to Peggy, the story plays down the romance of this rescue and highlights Pat’s courage.

The *Boy’s Own Paper* reinforces the binary model of gender, which focuses on females as mothers, by suggesting that boys often need motherly women, rather than young girls, to help them. The most compelling physical difference between the sexes is undoubtedly woman’s ability to produce life. Mary Poovey, in *Uneven Developments*, describes how Victorian ideology translated this biological sexual difference into a conception of binary gender difference (Poovey 7). Poovey cites “maternal instinct” as an idea that “came to be considered woman’s definitive characteristic” (Poovey 7). The theory of “maternal instinct” makes the woman’s supposedly “self-sacrificing and tender” nature seem natural and necessary for ordered society (Poovey 7). Poovey goes on to describe Coventry Patmore’s ideal of the “Angel in the House,” a “‘naturally’ self-sacrificing and self-regulating . . . domestic deity” who “radiated morality because her ‘substance’ was love, not self-interest or ambition” (Poovey 8). In this model, women are supposed to be naturally caring and gentle, virtues that the *BOP* also encourages in its ideal boy.

¹⁸ The story explains that Omadthawn “is Erse for fool or idiot” (“The Omadthawn” 249).

Although the *BOP* largely excludes young female characters, the magazine does allow older, motherly women to play significant roles in many of its plots, encouraging feminine virtues such as selflessness and loving-kindness. These women serve an opposing purpose to the active, somewhat subversive young girls in the *Boys of England*. In Elizabeth Eiloart's "Jack and John," Mrs. Carstone, a middle-aged mother, and Jenny Flint, her elderly friend, occupy the central female roles in the story, speaking frequently and taking part in the action. Both women concern themselves with caring for children and men (Eiloart 39-40). Another particularly strong example of this pattern in the *Boy's Own Paper* is R. M. Ballantyne's "The Red Man's Revenge." The most prominent female character in Ballantyne's story is an older woman called Liz who acts as a caretaker. Shortly after Ian and his companions return from their adventures, their valley experiences the worst flood in known history. Most of the residents have to flee their homes to seek higher ground, but some people, such as old Liz, do not make it out of their homes. Liz is an older woman with "indomitable energy; utterly regardless of herself, and earnestly solicitous about every one else" (Ballantyne 242). Even though Liz is actually taking care of two very elderly people, including her father, she still acts as a motherly figure, self-sacrificially caring for their needs and comforts no matter what happens. As the floodwaters rise, old Liz's house takes on some water inside but eventually lifts off the foundation and drifts away. Ballantyne describes how "the old hut floated admirably" (Ballantyne 242). Liz has to keep her two ancient charges from getting too wet or from realizing that they are in serious trouble (Ballantyne 242). Against all odds, she keeps all three of them safe and even climbs up a chimney to flag down their rescuers, once the rains cease.

Changing Models of Manliness in the *BE* and the *BOP*

The contrast between the *BE*'s ideal masculine boy and the *BOP*'s boy with both masculine and feminine traits reflects developments in Victorian gender norms at the end of the nineteenth-century. While mid-nineteenth century manliness included feminine attributes, focusing on principles and not merely muscles, later nineteenth-century ideas of manliness involved "a rejection of qualities associated with femininity" (Nelson 50). In *Boys Will Be Girls*, Claudia Nelson suggests that manliness "at least until the last quarter of the century (and in many cases later still)" carries "overtones of androgyny and antimasculinity" (Nelson 40). According to Nelson, late-nineteenth century boys' stories "spend more and more time dilating on the width of the hero's shoulders and less and less on the depth of his principles. Manliness becomes less a state of mind than a state of muscle, and its new antonym is 'effeminacy'" (Nelson 49). Kelly Boyd insists that the Victorian idea of "manliness" evokes such characteristics as patriotism, achievement against all odds, "strength of character," "individualism, arrogance, and mastery of the people around you" (Boyd 45-6). Although Boyd mainly talks about more populist magazines, rather than the *BOP*, her description of manliness still serves to draw out the corresponding character traits of Nelson's description of physical manliness. The changing model of manliness that Nelson describes plays itself out in the conflicting ideals of boyhood embedded in the *BE* and the *BOP*.

The *Boys of England* enacts the newer anti-effeminate idea of manliness, and the *Boy's Own Paper*, reacting against the *BE*'s influence, pushes back towards the older idea of feminine manliness. While the *Boys of England* suggests that the ideal boy is strong, courageous, and clever, the *Boy's Own Paper* teaches its readers that boyhood should

blend physical strength with spiritual softness: the perfect boy is kind and gentle, as well as clever, courageous, adventurous, and capable. Whereas the *BOP* emphasizes more feminine virtues such as kindness and gentleness in its boy heroes, the *BE* focuses on masculine bravery and athleticism.

Conclusion

As widely read and long-running boys' periodicals, the *BE* and the *BOP* are significant cultural influences on child readers growing up in the final decades of the Victorian era. The magazines' suggestion that boys need girls encourages the idea that manliness has much to do with femininity. The genders are, therefore, not just defined by opposition but by what they have in common with each other. The conflict between the sensationalism of the *BE* and the anti-sensational didacticism of the *BOP* reflects a larger cultural struggle about the messages being sent to Victorian children. Similarly, the divergence between the overt narrative need for girls in the *BE* and the sublimated need for girls in the *BOP* reflects the development of and resistance to new norms of manliness. Middle-class British culture, as seen in the *BOP*'s publisher, the Religious Tract Society, resists the push towards masculinity expressed in the *Boys of England*. In the *BE*, boys sometimes even need girls for their *masculine* traits: girls can shoot guns and courageously protect their boy companions. By contrast, girls in their sublimated position in *BOP* even encourage boys to be more feminine. These conflicts concerning how boys need girls show up in the narratives of new generations, as we will see in our discussion of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Undermining Victorian Gender Norms in *Peter and Wendy*

When the *Boys of England* was popular and the *Boy's Own Paper* was gaining influence, in 1879, J. M. Barrie was still a young man, and his boyhood imagination was shaped by the same types of fiction aimed at lower-class and middle-class boys. These periodicals reflect the issues and tension that were circulating at a time when Barrie's own personal ideas were forming. By examining depictions of gender in Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*, I can trace ideas about gender from the *BE* and the *BOP*, published in 1879, to Barrie's novel, published in 1911. Although Barrie was a middle-class boy, according to Andrew Birkin, "Barrie also subscribed to various 'Penny Dreadfuls,'" which were commonly associated with the lower classes (Birkin 7). Furthermore, the main serial from the *Boy's Own Paper* discussed in the last chapter was *The Red Man's Revenge* by R. M. Ballantyne, and Ballantyne was one of Barrie's absolute favorite authors as a child (*The Two of Them* 198). As an adult, Barrie addresses the same topics found in late nineteenth-century boys' periodicals, such as the ideal masculine boy, the ideal domestic female, and the way that boys need girls, especially girls who act as mothers.

In *Peter and Wendy*, J. M. Barrie carefully constructs a text that both includes and challenges common gender ideas absorbed during his own childhood, while also drawing on the critical issue of ideal nineteenth-century motherhood. The novel ultimately suggests that boys need girls, especially girls as mothers, through a narrator whose destabilizing remarks about motherhood reveal an underlying anxiety about the solidity of the motherly ideal. The instabilities in narration also reveal the performative nature of both gender and age, undercutting the binary models that nineteenth-century periodicals, such as the *BE* and the *BOP*, sought to enforce.

While J. M. Barrie's stage play, *Peter Pan*, debuted in 1904, he did not publish the novel version of Peter Pan's story until 1911. The play, *Peter Pan*, as well as the novel, *Peter and Wendy*, occupy a prominent place in the field of children's literature, yet their place in the field has not been fully understood. Barrie's play was the subject of Jacqueline Rose's seminal work on children's literature: *The Case of Peter Pan: or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*. In her study, Rose takes Barrie's work as not merely an example of children's literature but "a metalanguage or commentary" on children's literature (Rose 84). Rose uses *Peter Pan* to demonstrate the way that the child in children's literature is used by the adult "to hold off a panic" (Rose 10). According to Rose, the story of Peter Pan demonstrates the tendency in children's fiction to construct the child as "the site of a lost truth and/or moment in history, which it can therefore be used to retrieve" (Rose 42). James R. Kincaid, in his *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, affirms the idea that *Peter Pan* is often viewed as a nostalgic "self-protective lament for the remoteness of the child" (Kincaid 279). Despite a commonly

accepted view of *Peter and Wendy* and *Peter Pan* as sentimental and nostalgic,¹⁹ Rose, Kincaid, and Nodelman argue instead that Barrie's play and novel break down this seemingly-unified image of the innocent, knowable child (Rose 143, Kincaid 286). Responding to Rose's claim that the ideal innocent child is manufactured for adults' benefit, Perry Nodelman insists that "adults can and do present complex visions of reality to children in children's books" (Nodelman 100). Marah Gubar continues the work of understanding childhood in Barrie's play in *Artful Dodgers*. Gubar addresses the accusation that adults use children's fiction to manipulate the image of the child for their own purposes, the accusation which Jacqueline Rose famously made. Marah Gubar suggests that authors such as Barrie who seem to buy into the "child as an innocent, helpless Other" actually allow children to have agency, to "annex and imaginatively transform" a text for their own purposes (Gubar 42). Despite the wealth of critical responses to Barrie's work, scholars have not addressed the connection between boys' periodicals and the attitudes about gender in the novel or the way the narrator creates instability and, in so doing, undermines any definite ideas of gender norms.

The uncertainty about who the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* is makes the reader more aware of the constructedness of the story,²⁰ lending instability to the ideas about gender expressed in the novel. We cannot be sure if the narrator is male or female, child or adult, though the narrator discusses children from a third-person perspective and

¹⁹ Blake describes this interpretation of Barrie's work succinctly: "*Peter Pan* is taken as representing the charming fulfillment of the desire for perpetual childhood, being as sentimental and even neurotic" (Blake 177). Instead, Blake insists that "Barrie was aware of and more than hints at the sterility and even morbidity, of the ideal of perpetual youth" (Blake 177).

²⁰ "In many ways, J. M. Barrie was forever straddling lines—betwixt and between in real life and as a narrator in his fictions" (Tatar xlvi).

includes himself in reflections on adulthood, using a lens of experience over time. For example, the narrator's use of pronouns reveals his affiliation with adulthood when he insists, "we too have been there [Neverland]; we can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more" (Barrie 9). The "we" in this sentence also excludes the possibility that some of his readers might be children. Just when we seem to have the narrator pinned down, however, he begins to discuss children with the inclusive "we" (Barrie 97). While discussing the children's selfishness, the narrator describes: "Off we skip like the most heartless things in the world, which is what children are, but so attractive; and we have an entirely selfish time" (Barrie 97). The narrator has now identified himself as both a child and an adult, and he (or she) never reveals his gender. Nonetheless, critics sometimes conflate the narrator with the male author, citing Barrie's challenging relationship with his own mother and with an older brother who, like Peter Pan, never grew up.²¹

The narrator's interjections and occasional participation in the scenes disrupt the appearance of narrative wholeness in the novel. The narrator destroys any pretence of pure, unencumbered truth in Peter and Wendy, reminding us that "it is pure dream, or game—arbitrary, conventional, made-up, literary" (Blake 173). For instance, as Mr. and Mrs. Darling race home to prevent their children from flying off, the narrator interjects with an aside to the reader: "Will they reach the nursery in time? If so, how delightful for them, and we shall all breathe a sigh of relief, but there will be no story. On the other hand, if they are not in time, I solemnly promise that it will all come right

²¹There is quite a history of associating the narrator with Barrie in scholarship on *Peter and Wendy*. J. M. Barrie's older brother, who died in childhood was also his mother's avowed favorite. His mother "remained melancholy for the rest of her life," after her son's death, and Barrie reportedly tried to make up for it and make his mother forget her loss (Zipes x).

in the end” (Barrie 34). Such narratorial interjections prevent the reader from accepting the story as unfiltered truth. The narrator also highlights the constructedness of the story by directly addressing the reader in the second person: “I hope you want to know what became of the other boys” (Barrie 142). By inserting these kinds of comments, the narrator turns himself into a storyteller with a circle of imagined listeners craning for the next bit of the story. Furthermore, when the reader encounters the inhabitants of Neverland for the first time, the narrator suggests, “Let us pretend to lie here among the sugarcane and watch them as they steal by in single file” (Barrie 47). The narrator continues to undermine his status as an omniscient, exterior narrator by establishing his physical presence within the text, becoming a visible and potentially-biased character in the story. Moments such as these weaken the idea that the reader can simply accept what the narrator says as the definitive truth about boyhood or girlhood.

The narrator’s frequent outbursts, particularly on the subject of mothers, create instability around the ideas about boyhood and girlhood in *Peter and Wendy*. The narrator in this story is forever on the outside looking in at the Darlings’ domestic circle, especially Mrs. Darling. Just after the narrator chastises Mrs. Darling for being too easy on her children, he begins to rant angrily that, “for all the use we are to her [Mrs. Darling], we might go back to the ship . . . That is all we are, lookers-on” (Barrie 136). On the same topic, the narrator also complains dejectedly that “nobody really wants us” (Barrie 136). The narrator seems to be looking on and missing Mrs. Darling, in particular, and the feminine, in general, and he expresses this through emotional outbursts. Such violent interjections cause the reader to distrust what the narrator says about mothers and gender norms in general.

J. M. Barrie uses the hyper-masculine boyhood found in the sensational *Boys of England* in his description of Peter Pan. However, he takes this masculine boyhood to such extremes in Peter that these characteristics start to seem both artificially constructed and dangerous. As discussed in the previous chapter, towards the end of the nineteenth century, “the ‘manly’ boy increasingly contains an admixture of the animal,” so that boys’ stories focused more on the hero’s physical abilities and appearance than “the depth of his principles” (Nelson 49). Kelly Boyd insists that boys’ fiction “suggested that manliness was linked to physical courage, and skill, an arrogant belief in one’s own superiority” (Boyd 68). Peter embodies these qualities: he is courageous, athletic, and proud,²² but the surfeit of masculinity in Peter allows the narrator to reveal the constructedness of this model. The narrator illustrates Peter’s nature when he writes, “The others were all brave boys, and they must not be blamed for backing from the pirate captain . . . But there was one who did not fear him” (Barrie 95). By making Peter so exceptionally brave, the narrator draws our attention to the way that Peter encapsulates a particular ideal of manliness, rather than a natural expression of boyhood. The narrator even says that Peter’s “courage was almost appalling,” when Peter casually invites John to go help him kill a pirate (Barrie 41). The narrator’s use of “appalling” emphasizes the awfulness of Peter’s extreme courage and casual violence.

Peter exemplifies the cleverness and arrogance of the masculine ideal we have seen in the *Boys of England*, yet the narrator also suggests flaws in this model. Peter is

²²Writing about the Boer War, Mark Spencer has suggested that “Britain’s boys were meant to read *Peter Pan* as a model for the courage and cleverness needed to win a war representing the sanctity of the homeland” (Spencer 96).

capable and largely independent, so that “there was almost nothing he [Peter] could not do” (Barrie 76), but Peter’s self-reliance begins to look like narcissism. The characteristic arrogance is carried to such an extreme that Peter forgets that Wendy helped him repair his shadow immediately after the repair happens. The narrator insists that “he had already forgotten that he owed his bliss to Wendy. He thought he had attached the shadow himself” (Barrie 26). Peter’s pride and cockiness actually override his memory, and we see how arrogance becomes destructive at its extreme. The narrator goes on to reveal the heartlessness at the center of the sensational masculine model. Peter is the lost boys’ clever leader, and he exults in his own abilities. When the children are flying with Peter to Neverland, they occasionally fall asleep and begin to fall into the sea. Peter dives down and catches them, “but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life” (Barrie 38). Again, the narrator wants us to see the absence of moral virtue in Peter’s extreme masculine characteristics. This is not just a result of Peter’s childishness, since Wendy and her brothers still feel the horror of Peter’s excessive arrogance and pride in his own cleverness. Peter is entirely missing the feminine virtues, such as kindness and gentleness, found in the *Boy’s Own Paper’s* more androgynous ideal boy.

Although Peter embodies the athleticism, courage, and cleverness of the sensational masculine boy, his youth prevents him from demonstrating the heterosexual desire commonly seen in the *Boys of England’s* masculine characters. Clive Barker, discussing his own experience with Barrie’s text, says that “the boy sexuality of Peter Pan is a very important part of who he is. The crowing, literally cock-crowing

aggressiveness is so much a part of who he is” (Winter 15). I disagree with Barker’s claim, however, since Peter does not actually demonstrate sexual desire. He does not respond to the romantic overtures of Wendy and Tiger Lily, and he is, after all, the perpetual child (Montgomery 6). Peter has not yet lost his baby teeth, and so, might reasonably be unfamiliar with romantic desire. According to one critic, “adult gender roles as they relate to sexuality and physical maternity/paternity equate to a kind of trap in Pan’s mind” (Brewer 390). Because of his rejection of these adult behaviors, Peter remains forever a young child and, therefore, does not have the desire for and appreciation of female beauty that characters such as “English Jack” show in the *Boys of England*. By refusing to grow up, Peter rejects the sexuality that other boys, in the process of maturation, embrace.

In *Peter and Wendy*, the narrator suggests a binary opposition between child and adult, constantly interacting with the female and male opposition.²³ He explains this early on when he suggests that it would be impossible to “draw a map of a child’s mind” because it “is not only confused, but keeps going round all the time” (Barrie 9). According to the narrator, then, children do not see the real world coherently, and their thoughts are not clear or consistent. He attributes magic and mystery to children, but this quotation also seems to belittle them in relation to adults. The author also imagines childhood and adulthood as separate worlds. Neverland, for instance, is the dominion of children. In addition, when the Darling children are about to run away from their nursery with Peter, the narrator describes how “their faces assumed the awful craftiness of children listening for sounds from the grown-up world” (Barrie 32). The

²³ “For the characters [of *Peter Pan*] range along two different axes, adult-child and female-male; the oppositions thus keep changing without notice” (Nelson 169).

grown-up world is separate from them, both in the recognizable London setting, where they spend their time in the nursery, and in Neverland.

Just as he does with motherhood, the narrator creates narrative instability by breaking down the seemingly-definitive idea that the adult is entirely separate from the child. Instead, the narrator reveals that the child is still a distant echo or a small remnant within the adult person. Thus, adults who can no longer visit the shores of Neverland “can still hear the sound of the surf, though we shall land no more” (Barrie 9). The narrator also shows Mrs. Darling as a little girl, not only a mother and a wife. Her kiss, which she denies to both her husband and children, represents her childhood self still present in her adult life. The narrator describes early in the novel how Mrs. Darling’s kiss stood out sharply when she would play and “romp” with the children. Her dancing and playing draws out her girlhood self (Barrie 8). At the end of the novel, the grown-up Wendy has this remnant, this same connection to her girlhood, and particularly to Peter. She must stay at home while her daughter goes off with Peter, but “something inside her [Wendy] was crying ‘Woman, woman, let go of me.’” (Barrie 149). Thus, the grown woman and mother still contain a trace of the girlish self, so that we cannot clearly separate the adult from the child. In the same way, Wendy contains a hint of her future, motherly self.

Despite the natural connection between children and the adults they will one day become, *Peter and Wendy* suggests that childhood still resists adulthood. As the eternal child, Peter opposes adult attributes, such as sexual desire and parenthood, even while he performs masculine boyhood. Peter plays at fatherhood, but he anxiously confirms with Wendy that “it is only make-believe, isn’t it; that I’m their father?” (Barrie

92). The narrator also insists that Peter has no use for mothers, though Peter's actions in bringing Wendy to Neverland challenge the narrator's claim (Barrie 70, 58). James R. Kincaid's interpretation of Barrie's work, *Child-Loving*, demonstrates that "resentment and danger" in Barrie's play are often focused on "the feminine and maternal" (Kincaid 286). However, Kincaid emphasizes childhood resentment of adulthood, privileging problems of age over those of gender. According to Kincaid, Wendy is dangerous because she wants to be an adult, not merely because she is female (Kincaid 286). She brings the threat of adulthood into Neverland, and Peter's refusal "to grow up means refusing to cede the rights to yourself to mere predecessors" (Kincaid 284). As the eternal boy, Peter Pan embraces hyper-masculine manliness but rejects the roles that adults pass down to children.

As in both the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, however, Peter needs Wendy to prove that he is strong and masculine. For instance, at their first meeting, Peter gives Wendy an acorn top, and Wendy wears it around her neck on a chain. Peter's token saves Wendy's life when one of the lost boys' arrows is stopped from killing her only by hitting the acorn top around her neck (Barrie 59). Peter also rescues Wendy from drowning and saves her, as well as the lost boys, from the pirates. These adventures allow Peter a chance to prove his boyish manliness by saving the girl. These situations make Wendy necessary for Peter, but they also turn her into a passive being who cannot save herself. Wendy depends several times on boys to rescue her, but the narrator also suggests that Wendy consciously performs the role of passive female at times. On one occasion, when Peter and the lost boys defeat the pirates, the narrator describes how "Wendy, of course, had stood by taking no part in the fight, though

watching Peter with glistening eyes; but now that all was over she became prominent again” (Barrie 132). Wendy cannot participate until the action is all over, presumably because she is a girl. The baldness of this statement: “became prominent again,” calls attention to the way that Wendy performs the passive role that was also allowed to her in middle-class magazines like the *Boy's Own Paper*. Again, the narrator’s “of course” subtly undermines Wendy’s seemingly-realistic performance by calling attention to how Wendy *must not* take part in the action if she is to conform to the gender norms expressed in the *BOP*, where young girls never take part in the action. The narrator is therefore mocking Peter and Wendy’s performance of middle-class gender norms by calling attention to it.

Boys also need girls as active partners in *Peter and Wendy*. Despite her performative passivity, Wendy also shows the “more-than-feminine” courage and agency of the sensational *Boys of England* heroine. At one point in the story, when she and Peter are about to drown on a rock in the sea, Wendy shows unquestionable bravery. When they see that only one of them can be saved, Wendy wants to share the same level of danger as Peter: “‘Let us draw lots,’ Wendy said bravely” (Barrie 98). Peter compels Wendy to safety because she is “a lady,” but Wendy repeatedly “clung to him . . . refused to go without him” (Barrie 84). Though Peter ultimately ties their kite to Wendy and forces her to save herself, she is willing to take on the same risk, to face the same challenge as Peter. To be clear, Wendy does not try to sacrifice herself, as a mother might sacrifice herself for her child, but she wants to share the burden of danger. Wendy therefore draws on models of girlhood from both sensational and didactic periodical models. In contrast to the narrator’s earlier assertion (Barrie 69)

that Wendy mostly stayed home, the narrator now tells us that “there were . . . many adventures which she [Wendy] knew to be true because she was in them herself” (Barrie 71). Wendy does indeed participate in the boys’ adventures outside the domestic sphere. She also makes decisions on her own, as when she chooses to go to Neverland and takes the lead in bringing her brothers with her. Although Wendy purposefully follows many nineteenth-century middle-class gender norms, especially concerning motherhood, she also has agency. This fits with the model of the dependent but sometimes active girl found in the *Boys of England*, which included strong female characters despite their association with the sensational (and lower-class) penny dreadfuls. In this case, the instability that the narrator creates reflects some of the conflicts in the idea of nineteenth-century femininity.

In *Peter and Wendy*, boys also need girls to provide companionship and a civilizing influence. Peter tells Wendy that he and the lost boys of Neverland “are rather lonely. You see we have no female companionship” (Barrie 37). Peter specifically wants Wendy for her feminine ability to tell stories, and he suggests that girls have particular value. When the lost boys begin building a house for Wendy, her oldest brother, John, exclaims, “You? Wendy’s servants!” (Barrie 72). Peter replies, “Yes . . . and you also” (Barrie 72). He even wins Wendy over early on by flattering her that “one girl is more use than twenty boys” (Barrie 26). Whether or not Peter or the narrator actually believe this is unclear, since Peter is obviously trying to coax Wendy out of a pout with his statement, and the narrator sets Peter up as a forgetful, unreliable character. Even if girls are not so much more valuable, the text does support the idea that boys need girls. Wendy, in particular, provides a “civilizing influence” on Peter and the lost boys

(Spencer 97), encouraging them to practice orderly virtues such as manners at the dinner table and diligent learning at school. The narrator does, at the same time, continuously undermine Wendy's attempts at domesticity, since the children are really just playing at school and middle-class British family life. Nevertheless, the boys of Neverland often need Wendy's influence in a way similar to how boys of the *Boy's Own Paper* need the virtuous, mellowing influence of females.

As indicated above, Peter also needs Wendy to tell stories, and the narrator emphasizes his own position as a storyteller.²⁴ Peter cherishes Wendy not for her potential to create life but rather her capacity to create stories. Just before the lost boys ask Wendy to be their mother, they sing to her that: "The babes are at the door, / We cannot make ourselves, you know, / 'Cos we've been made before" (Barrie 63). The lost boys, Wendy's "babes," were "made" by their own mothers, as they acknowledge in the song. The ability to write and tell stories represents a similarly creative act, creating figurative life through words. Peter, however, is interested not in procreation but in storytelling, which is what he wants most from Wendy. He rejects real mothers because they are adults but accepts girls like Wendy, who can tell stories and provide feminine comfort without the problem of adulthood. Peter came to the Darling house in the first place to hear Mrs. Darling tell stories, and Wendy entices Peter to take her away with him when she tells him, "I know such lots of stories" (Barrie 30). Peter then invites Wendy to "come with me and tell the other boys" because "I don't know any stories. None of the lost boys know any stories" (Barrie 31, 30). There is no indication that

²⁴ Rob K. Baum writes that: "Only motherhood survived the play, through equation with drama itself—the gift of language, the power of authorship, and the originary theft of masculinity" (Baum 72).

Michael or John, mere boys, could tell stories in Wendy's place, so story-telling helps to define Wendy as a feminine pre-mother and a valuable contributor to life on Neverland. Interestingly, the narrator also creates life, like Mrs. Darling and Wendy, through his stories. As the children rush home from Neverland, the narrator explains that he would like "to tell her [Mrs. Darling], in the way authors have, that the children are coming back" (Barrie 135). The narrator identifies himself as a creator of stories and thereby aligns himself (or possibly herself) with femininity, despite the way he [or she] works to undermine the role of motherhood.

In *Peter and Wendy*, boys especially need girls as comforting and caring mothers, and the narrator uses this need to undermine the solidity of Peter's boyish independence. Peter's intensely masculine, self-reliant exterior breaks down at several points, such as when he cries about his shadow in front of Wendy and then protests, "I wasn't crying" (Barrie 25). The narrator of *Peter and Wendy* shows Peter needing Wendy for her precocious motherly caring, especially since Peter sometimes has bad dreams, which could be "more painful than the dreams of other boys" (Barrie 110). The novel describes how Wendy would hold and soothe Peter in his sleep whenever he had these dreams, as if she were his mother (Barrie 111). The most telling description occurs the night after they finally defeat the pirates. Peter "had one of his dreams that night, and cried in his sleep for a long time, and Wendy held him tight" (Barrie 133). Peter is more dependent on Wendy than he will admit. He also repeatedly adopts a succession of pseudo-mothers from Wendy, to Jane and Margaret, who want to play at motherhood, though they are each girls when they accompany Peter to Neverland. When Peter comes back for Wendy and finds that she has a daughter named Jane, he

tells grown-up Wendy “she [Jane] is my mother,” and Jane answers that “he does so need a mother” (Barrie 152). On Neverland, Peter and the lost boys openly recognize their need for a girl to mother them, for “a lady to take care of us at last,” as the lost boys say (Barrie 56). When Wendy eventually decides to leave Neverland, Peter thinks to himself rather bitterly, “Not so much as a sorry-to-lose-you between them! If she did not mind the parting, he was going to show her, was Peter, that neither did he. But of course he cared very much ” (Barrie 98). Peter does his best to act cheerful and careless as Wendy prepares to go home, but the narrator’s description makes it clear that Peter merely performs the role of the independent, masculine boy (Barrie 101). The narrator undermines the ideal of the self-reliant masculine boy from the sensational *Boys of England*.

The narrator of this novel shows Wendy as a young girl who works to inhabit the ideal of nineteenth-century middle-class motherhood, but the narrator continuously undermines her motherly status by highlighting her as a precocious young performer. Wendy resembles the ideal girl of the *Boy’s Own Paper* in as much as she is motherly and domestic; as a pre-mother, Wendy is, the narrator suggests, naturally inclined to be self-abnegating towards the boys she views as her children. When Wendy takes her place as make-believe mother to the lost boys in Neverland, the narrator describes her routine: “When she sat down to a basketful of their stockings, every heel with a hole in it, she would fling up her arms and exclaim, ‘Oh dear, I am sure I sometimes think spinsters are to be envied.’ Her face beamed as she exclaimed this” (Barrie 81). Wendy is engaging in a typical domestic task to take care of her “children,” and she takes pleasure in this thankless feminine job. The narrator mocks Wendy by emphasizing the

contrast between Wendy's own words and her clear enjoyment of the domestic role. Further, when they are all in danger on the pirate ship, Wendy does not think of her own safety but of the boys' safety, because she is practicing to be a mother. We observe that "as the boys gathered round her she had no thought, of course, save for them" (Barrie 120). The "of course" in this statement reveals that the narrator is actually ridiculing Wendy for *acting* the part of the ideal, self-sacrificing mother when she is really a child herself. The narrator repeats this sarcastic "of course" in several scenes where the children play at adult gender norms.

The narrator's apparent ambivalence on the subject of mothers sets up a conflict over the idea that boys need mothers in *Peter and Wendy*. We learn, for instance, that the lost boys are supposedly not allowed to talk about mothers because it was "forbidden by him [Peter] as silly" (Barrie 51). Indeed, when Wendy first meets Peter and asks him about his mother, he replies: "'Don't have a mother,' . . . Not only had he no mother, but he had not the slightest desire to have one. He thought them very over-rated persons. Wendy, however, felt at once that she was in the presence of a tragedy" (Barrie 25). The narrator of *Peter and Wendy* underscores this rejection of mothers when he suggests that the lost boys "knew in what they called their hearts that one can get on quite well without a mother, and that it is only the mothers who think you can't" (Barrie 98). This seems to establish a binary between males, who assert a false independence, and females, including Wendy, who unwaveringly believe the opposite.

This dichotomy, between supposedly independent males and females who believe boys need help, quickly falls apart when Peter proves he does want a mother of some kind. The narrator says that Peter "had not the slightest desire to have one [a

mother],” but Peter comes to listen at the window of the Darlings’ home and eventually takes Wendy away with him to be the boys’ mother. Further, when Peter first sees the lost boys again on Neverland, he declares, “Great news, boys . . . I have brought at last a mother for you all” (Barrie 58). He overtly recognizes their desire for a mother in this quotation, proving the narrator’s claim that Peter did not want a mother false. Earlier in the story, while the lost boys are waiting for Peter to return, Tootles talks about how his mother must have been like Cinderella, and the narrator suggests that the lost boys frequently talked about their mothers when Peter was gone (Barrie 51). Again, at the end of the novel, when the lost boys ask to be adopted by the Darlings, they all look imploringly to Mrs. Darling. The narrator suggests that “they ought to have looked at Mr. Darling also, but they forgot about him” (Barrie 142). It is Mrs. Darling, not Mr. Darling, who is the desirable adult figure. Thus, boys need mothers, even though they do not seem to need adult men. There is a kind of forlorn longing at the end of the novel when Peter watches Mrs. Darling reuniting with her children, and the narrator says that Peter “was looking through the window at the one joy from which he must be for ever barred” (Barrie 141). The children, Peter, and the narrator all look longingly to Mrs. Darling because they need a mother.

The novel *Peter and Wendy* posits the ideal of motherhood as the highest and most natural role of women, an ideal that emphasizes self-sacrificial caring. As discussed in the previous chapter, nineteenth-century middle-class Britons identified motherhood as a central role for women, and the narrator of *Peter and Wendy* takes up this understanding of motherhood throughout the text. Strong “maternal affection” was, for much of middle-class British culture, viewed as natural. The relationship between

mothers and their children might then be seen by many members of this social group as more important than the relationship between fathers and their children. Barrie reinforces this particular mainstream Victorian understanding of motherhood in his descriptions of the nesting “Never-bird” in Neverland. Captain Hook sees the bird sitting on her nest as it floats in the water and tells his underling Smee, “that is a mother. What a lesson! The nest must have fallen into the water, but would the mother desert her eggs? No” (Barrie 78). Thus, the ideal mother devotes herself sacrificially to caring for her children, no matter what. The novel reinforces this lesson in maternity later on, when the Never-bird gives up her nest to save Peter from drowning.

The narrator critiques this ideal of motherhood, undermining the respect and appeal of motherly sacrifice, like that of the Never-bird. The narrator overtly associates the Never-bird with human mothers by commenting, “I can suppose only that, like Mrs. Darling and the rest of them, she was melted because he [Peter] had all his first teeth” (Barrie 85). The narrator implies that the Never-bird’s feminine instincts as a mother outweigh her animal instincts, making her sensitive to Peter’s childish appeal.²⁵ As a human child who still has his baby teeth, Peter apparently takes priority over even the Never-bird’s own babies (her eggs). By establishing motherhood as a common set of instincts between human mothers and their animal counterparts, the narrator diminishes the prestige of motherly sacrifice. The narrator of *Peter and Wendy* also draws out the dark side of motherly selflessness. He insists that children know “that mothers alone are always willing to be the buffer . . . and despise them for it, but make constant use of it” (Barrie 119). Mothers are virtuous and “natural” in as much as they

²⁵ One critic suggests that “Peter turns all women into nurturers, at least of him; even the Never Bird” (Gibson 178).

are selfless, but the narrator suggests that they are lower, despised and taken advantage of, in their selflessness (Barrie 119, 135). The narrator reinforces this point by claiming that even children despise their own mothers for this selflessness.

Mothers may not deserve the respect given to them in nineteenth-century culture, according to the narrator, who seeks to undercut mothers' importance. In one of his comments to the readers, the narrator says of the lost boys that "the silly moles had not the sense to see that they did not need a door apiece. That shows they have no mother" (Barrie 54). He directly connects motherhood with rationality and says that children need this influence. At the same time, the silliness of this example, when the lost boys make a different size door for each boy, means the narrator is probably being sarcastic. Children should not need a mother to tell them to just share a door. When Wendy first tells the lost boys she is going home, they panic and almost try to force Wendy to stay (Barrie 99). The lost boys eventually agree to just go with Wendy, but the narrator remarks snidely that they may have just wanted the "novelty" (Barrie 100). Later, when the boys are about to walk the plank, both the lost boys and "even the pirates were awed" by Wendy's farewell speech (Barrie 141). The exaggeration of the word "awed" shows that the narrator is mocking the boys' respect for Wendy, a pretend mother whose children are about to die. A few lines later, the narrator writes, "It is sad to know that not a boy was looking at her as Smee tied her to the mast; the eyes of all were on the plank: that last little walk they were about to take" (Barrie 142). The narrator emphasizes the shallowness of the lost boys' feelings for their pseudo-mother, since, in the end, they really care about their own selves.

Peter reveals the anxiety surrounding motherhood by contesting the idea that all mothers are eternally loving, that they will wait forever for their children to return. Peter tells the other children that “I thought like you that my mother would always keep the window open for me . . . but the window was barred, for mother had forgotten all about me, and there was another little boy sleeping in my bed” (Barrie 98). Peter provides the voice of dissonance, disturbing the view of mothers as permanently, unconditionally loving. The rejection Peter describes may well be the cause of his distaste for adulthood. The narrator quickly follows Peter’s speech with the comment that he is “not sure that this was true, but Peter thought it was true; and it scared them” (Barrie 98). Peter calls the ideal of natural, eternal motherhood into question, and the narrator allows this anxiety about mothers, and perhaps adult roles more generally, to remain by refusing to tell the reader what is true.

The narrator of Barrie’s novel suggests that motherhood may not be an essential, all-encompassing role for adult women. We see that there is more to Mrs. Darling than her motherly role because she is connected to Peter through her own girlhood. The narrator suggests that Peter “was very like Mrs. Darling’s kiss,” the one kiss in the corner of her mouth that her husband and children cannot get (Barrie 12). A few pages later, the narrator reinforces this connection when he describes how “Mrs. Darling never upbraided Peter; there was something in the right-hand corner of her mouth that wanted her not to call Peter names” (Barrie 15). The secret part of Mrs. Darling that is neither mother nor wife contains an affection for Peter, a special kiss just for him, and this affection prevents her from speaking ill of him. She knew him, or at least knew of him, as a little girl, since, as an adult, she can just remember “a Peter Pan who was said

to live with the fairies” from her childhood (Barrie 10). The narrator even points out that “she had believed in him at the time” (Barrie 10). Mrs. Darling’s girl self still makes up a small part of her adult self, via that special kiss. Only Peter can access this part of her because only Peter can get the kiss: “The kiss that had been for no one else Peter took quite easily. Funny. But she seemed satisfied” (Barrie 145).

Peter and Wendy’s narrator also undercuts the ideal “natural” nineteenth-century mother by playing down the importance of mothers, using Mrs. Darling as an example. Mrs. Darling focuses much of her energy on her children, carrying out the idea that mothers should sacrifice themselves for their children. The Darlings also employ a servant girl and a nanny (as much of one as they can afford), so that Mrs. Darling does not have to care for all of the menial tasks surrounding her children. Instead, Mrs. Darling mostly cares for their spiritual and mental needs, performing the role of middle-class motherhood. The narrator describes how Mrs. Darling put her children’s minds in order at night, because “it is the nightly custom of every good mother after her children are asleep to rummage in their minds and put things straight for next morning” (Barrie 8). The narrator undermines this ideal of genteel motherhood by commenting that, “if she [Mrs. Darling] was too fond of her rubbishy children she couldn’t help it” (Barrie 137). By undercutting the children, the narrator detracts from Mrs. Darling’s importance as an eternally-loving mother. Caring for her “rubbishy children” is now a weakness, something she cannot help.

While the children and the narrator all reveal their need for mothers, or girls who act as mothers, during the course of the novel, the narrator openly challenges the ideals about motherhood of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries. Claudia

Nelson has suggested that Mrs. Darling “is both what the novel yearns toward and what it abhors” (Nelson 169), but the narrator’s abhorrence is really a cover for his own need. When the narrator considers spoiling the children’s surprise return at the end of the novel, he hesitates because “Mrs. Darling would never forgive us” (Barrie 135). One page later, the narrator turns around to say of Mrs. Darling that, “the woman had no proper spirit” because she continued to wait selflessly for her children even though they had selfishly flown off to Neverland. The narrator goes on to declare that “I had meant to say extraordinarily nice things about her; but I despise her, and not one of them will I say now” (Barrie 136). The vehemence of the narrator’s statements is striking; whether his feelings are positive or negative, the narrator is invested in Mrs. Darling and all that she represents as a female and a mother. One page further on, the narrator turns back once more to have pity on Mrs. Darling. Seeing how she has changed and saddened with the loss of her children, the narrator writes, “I find I won’t be able to say nasty things about her after all” (Barrie 137). His emotions are strong, especially when he writes rather childishly, “That is all we are, lookers-on. Nobody really wants us. So let us watch and say jaggy things, in the hope that some of them will hurt” (Barrie 136). The narrator, like Peter, secretly longs for Mrs. Darling but mistrusts supposedly-loving mothers. Peter, after all, believes that his mother replaced him and stopped loving him. These challenges to the motherly ideal expose an underlying anxiety at the turn of the century about self-sacrificial, eternal motherly love.

Although Barrie did not publish the novel form of his story, *Peter and Wendy*, until 1911, the nineteenth-century tensions about boyhood, and the mixed messages about how boys need girls, still pervade Barrie’s novel. Barrie does not just write out of

his own anxieties about boyhood and mothers; he consciously draws on ideas about how boys need girls in nineteenth-century boys periodicals to both include and contest such models of boyhood and girlhood. Barrie purposefully creates a narrator who undermines common norms of motherhood and gender, drawing out the flaws in nineteenth-century gender models that propose a definitive idea about how boys need girls, particularly mothers.

Coda

By examining J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* in conjunction with the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, I show how Barrie's novel absorbs and reveals the ideas about gender found in nineteenth-century boys' periodicals. For example, Barrie invokes the norms of masculine, athletic boyhood and domestic girlhood. The *BE* and the *BOP* both suggest that boys need girls, but they express the idea that boys need girls through two different models of boyhood: the hyper-masculine boy and the more feminine boy. Despite wide differences in class and genre associations, however, both boys' periodicals show how the feminine is critical to instruction about boyhood. Published several decades later, Barrie's novel reflects these same tensions surrounding ideas about boyhood and girlhood in the nineteenth-century, reworking the question of how boys need girls. Barrie also adds the specific focus on motherhood, looking closely at Wendy and Mrs. Darling, and its connections with boyhood and girlhood. The narrator of *Peter and Wendy* draws on common middle-class norms of gender but continuously challenges these norms through his commentary, undermining apparently stable models of manly boyhood and nurturing motherhood.

There is, however, much more ground to cover in the discussion of nineteenth-century gender norms and golden age children's literature. Further studies on this topic might move in several directions, and I would like to propose some future directions, in hopes that this project will continue to develop. For instance, my study establishes a large space for scholarship that connects influential children's periodical literature to more widely known golden age children's texts. Ephemeral literature clearly has a long-term impact on culture. I would be especially interested in studies that examine how children's periodical fiction influences and forms popular nineteenth- and early twentieth-century genres of children's literature, such as the adventure story and the school story. Tracing the growth of such genres through children's periodicals and novels would also clarify the connections between these two different modes of literature: periodicals and novels.

In addition, I believe that a closer examination of the girl characters in boys' periodicals would be useful. My study largely focused on the presence of females in relationship to boys in two magazines. I hope in the future for a wider study, however, a study that looks exclusively at female characters and that includes a broader range of popular magazines. Such scholarship might also provide more in-depth research on the extent to which girls read boys' periodicals, highlighting the cultural goals and impact of these representations of femininity in boys' magazines.

Another, more specific avenue for further study would examine the impact of the narrator of *Peter and Wendy*. J. M. Barrie's narrator in this novel provides an important point of view on all aspects of the text, a point of view that has not been fully explored by scholarly criticism. I have discussed the way this narrator undercuts the discourse

about gender in *Peter and Wendy*, making seemingly-solid nineteenth-century ideas about boyhood and motherhood unstable. The narrator leaves the readers aware of common gender norms but unsure what to accept for themselves. As I discussed in the third chapter, some scholars conflate J. M. Barrie with the narrator, and I believe this stifles critical reflection on the narrator. More extensive studies might examine the way the story of Peter Pan changes between the play and the novel, *because* of the narrator's carefully constructed presence in the novel. How does such an intrusive and unknowable narrator impact the idea of the child in *Peter and Wendy*? How does this kind of narrator confront or allow nostalgia about childhood?

In this study, I have worked to show the continuance of gender norms from the *Boy's Own Paper* and the *Boys of England* to the later novel, *Peter and Wendy*. I believe this model could be usefully applied to a variety of children's fiction, illuminating the movement of ideas between genres of literature. It is my hope that scholars will further pursue these ideas about genre and gender in children's periodicals, opening up new ways to examine and understand golden age children's fiction.

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VITA

Avery Erratt Jones was born on November 27, 1988, in Bryan, Texas. She is the daughter of Bruce and Tamie Erratt. A 2006 graduate of Bryan High School, Bryan, Texas, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in University Scholars and a focus in English from Baylor University, Waco, in 2010.

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ABSTRACT

BOYS NEED GIRLS: GENDER NORMS FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY BOYS' PERIODICALS TO *PETER AND WENDY*

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My thesis shows how J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* uses nineteenth-century gender norms discussed in children's periodicals but undercuts these norms through the interjections of his conflicted narrator. My first chapter demonstrates how two widely known nineteenth-century boys' magazines, the *Boys of England* and the *Boy's Own Paper*, portray manly boyhood through the lens of the feminine. These periodicals present conflicting views of boyhood, but both suggest that boys need girls. In the second chapter, I argue that J. M. Barrie expresses these norms, absorbed during his own youth, in his novel, *Peter and Wendy*. This novel *also* suggests that boys need girls, employing the ideals of boyhood and girlhood expressed in the nineteenth-century boys' periodicals. The narrator's frequent and disruptive comments, however, undermine these gender norms, drawing attention to the fractures in late Victorian models of ideal boyhood and girlhood.