

## David and Jonathan—and Saul—Revisited

### *Homodomestic Patterns in British Boys' Magazine Fiction, 1880–1915*



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Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain offers an absorbing field of study for the historian of sexuality, in that it was at once aggressively opposed to behavior that it identified as “homosexual” and cordial to feelings that we would classify as “homoemotional.” In the homosocial world of school, army, business, and clubs that existed around the turn of the century, middle-class men’s closest relationships were often with other middle-class men; as Eric Trudgill points out, “Male friendship was a keystone of society.”<sup>1</sup> Boys’ fiction during this period likewise often appears designed to appeal to, or even help engineer, a reader who was most at his ease in a single-sex world.<sup>2</sup> Popular reading for male adolescents assured its audience that men might reasonably serve as the ultimate source and object of emotional drama and satisfaction in boys’ lives, celebrating, in Beverly Lyon Clark’s phrase, “a [male] bonding so effective that females are no longer necessary to enact the feminine.”<sup>3</sup>

Clark and other investigators of homoemotional—or, as many argue, homoerotic—imagery in Victorian children’s literature have understandably concentrated on the school story,<sup>4</sup> a fertile area for inquiry because romance in this genre necessarily comes from the exaltation of the passionate friendship between boys. But in focusing instead on adventure tales, the present essay seeks to change the terms under which such investigations are sometimes conducted by urging that we pay

more attention to two things we already know. First, the school story is, of course, not the only genre within turn-of-the-century boys' fiction to celebrate male bonding; we need to consider the possibility that different genres may turn their explorations of these passionate ties to different ends. And second, while today we tend to view male homoemotionalism, homoeroticism, and homosexuality as three points on one continuum (a homoemotional but celibate person, some would claim, is simply a homosexual with inhibitions), this way of thought was by no means universally accepted by the Victorians themselves. As Jeffrey Richards observes, Victorian "manly love" must be considered in the context of "a centuries-old tradition of strong non-sexual male friendships," regarded by many commentators even at the sexually self-conscious end of the century as pure, uplifting, and socially valuable—certainly not as culturally transgressive.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, homosexual behavior between men was often associated with what we now refer to as "cruising": the brief and even anonymous sexual encounter between men who have no long-term emotional investment in each other.<sup>6</sup> In these circumstances, homoemotionalism or passionate same-sex friendship was not a preliminary stage in homosexuality, but its antithesis.

I propose that in late-Victorian Britain, at least as regards the marketing of the boys' culture of the era, the opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality was less important than that between domesticity and antidomesticity—so that the marriage plot and "family values" could be validated even within dramas with an all-male cast.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, homosexuality, which was certainly a Victorian bugbear, was usually seen as antidomestic, as were self-serving activities such as stealing and cheating, all of which are often explicitly represented within boys' narratives as liable to damage the family. But homoemotionalism was not considered incompatible with domesticity, although we often see it in that light today, and for that reason it was more often celebrated than censured. For instance, as I have suggested elsewhere, homoemotionalism was the mechanism through which late-Victorian schools were consciously presented to the public as alternative "families" for the production of men, in which domesticity was to be translated into a male idiom rather than eradicated.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, even the male bonding that occurs within the adventure story, that apparently most antidomestic genre of Victorian boys' fiction, takes on a domestic cast.

Yet, unlike the school story, in which passionate friendship exists only between boys of the same age, the adventure typically constructs

a triangle (or even a quadrangle) involving both adolescent and adult males. Thus adventure tales do not only investigate homoemotionalism, whether by itself or in contrast with homoeroticism; they also comment, often unfavorably, on the father-son bond, offering a new vision of all-male domestic bliss that undermines older visions of patriarchal authority. In an era in which women were gaining ever more iconic force—writers lauded them as domestic goddesses, all-powerful mothers, and potential saviors of humankind—boys' fiction often offered its readers an alternative and potentially less threatening vision of the new family, imagining male emotional needs and ties as paramount. In this way, as Kenneth Kidd has suggested to me, such fiction may be said to constitute a liminal and idyllic space between the uncomfortable extremes of a feminized private sphere and a masculinized public sphere. Boys anxious about their incipient entry into the competitive and antidomestic world of moneymaking could find in adventure stories a reassurance that the supposedly separate spheres might be crossed to create a male homoemotional and domestic sphere that combined the best features of both its progenitors.<sup>9</sup>

During the period I will examine here—approximately 1880–1915—the adventure story was promulgated in a variety of forms, but particularly through the boys' magazine serial, in which it was the dominant genre.<sup>10</sup> Different magazines targeted boys at different social and educational levels, but even across class lines adventure stories tend to follow certain set patterns in their representation of homoemotional bonding: the conservative *Boy's Own Paper*, published by the Religious Tract Society, adheres to the same conventions that we see in lower-status, profit-oriented titles such as *The Boy's Journal* and *Pluck*. Three related narrative blueprints relevant to this investigation appear again and again and from magazine to magazine. One common story requires that an adolescent gradually win his father's regard by gaining the respect and love of an intermediary male or, more generally, by proving himself within his peer group. In the second, the protagonist frees himself from the clutches of a predatory "false father" (there is usually no biological tie) and turns to the healthier love of a boy his own age. And the third shows the boy transferring his loyalties from one adult male to another. While such tales may imply that passionate love between father and son precludes the formation of homoemotional ties outside the family, it is also possible to find stories in which, to draw upon a biblical paradigm, the love of David and Jonathan coexists with that of

David and Saul. In creating such spaces of coexistence, authors of adventures collectively suggest that for the boy reader of this period, homoemotionalism was, in a sense, the ultimate domestic value.

As homoemotional love stories, school stories often focus on the romance of sameness—the joys of bonding with someone of the same age, class, nationality, and race as well as the same gender. In *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, for instance, the narrator praises Tom and Arthur's love for each other but inveighs against friendships between older and younger boys, apparently because age differences are likely to lead to an overtly sexual exchange.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the adventure tale derives much of its interest from offering its readers various combinations of difference, whether defined in terms of race, class, nationality, or generation: Robert Louis Stevenson's Jim Hawkins, Long John Silver, and Dr. Livesey and Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain, Sir Henry Curtis, and Ignosi are representative. The idealized male figures who grace the covers and number heads of the popular boys' magazine *Chums*, for example, as Robert H. MacDonald notes,<sup>12</sup> are a mixture of young boys, older boys, and adult soldiers, perhaps celebrating the growth of the individual over time but more likely reflecting visually the same heterogeneity that the magazine's interior romanticizes. Indeed, it appears that the happy ending of the magazine-serial romance depends upon the elision of difference, which permits male individuals of wildly divergent backgrounds to dwell together in amity, just as more self-consciously "homosexual" texts of the period—E. M. Forster's *Maurice* (written but not published in 1913), say—often eroticize interclass or intergenerational bonds between men. What one narrator of 1890 decries as "the ugly barriers which the usages of society place between the gentleman and the workman"<sup>13</sup> often function as the real antagonist to be defeated.

Take, for instance, Gordon Wallace's serial "Cameron's Last Chance!" (*Boy's Journal* 1913), wherein a baronet, Sir Andrew Cameron, hires twenty-year-old Bart Elliott, who is poor but virile, to "make a man" of his effete nineteen-year-old son, Arthur.<sup>14</sup> Bart's task is explicitly to turn Arthur into a son of whom his father may be proud, so that Bart functions as a stand-in for Sir Andrew in the child-rearing process; that Bart's name is also the abbreviation for "baronet" is surely no accident. Over eight installments, and under Bart's guidance, Arthur achieves health, self-reliance, unselfishness, pluck, and domestic competence as an outback chef. He also finds gold deposits that might en-

able him to “shake off Bart Elliott and his cramping influences” and make him “independent of his father,”<sup>15</sup> but a fortunate amnesia saves him from an independence for which he is not yet ready, and his wind-fall is limited to 1,500 pounds surreptitiously bestowed upon him by Sir Andrew later in the story. Nevertheless, Bart is not only substitute father but also substitute brother and celibate spouse. In the final chapter, the three settle down in the outback as equal partners, the young men “like brothers” to each other and like “two sons” to Sir Andrew.<sup>16</sup>

Thus one of the serial's points is that being “bush-mates” in the single-sex world of the Australian outback erases the differences that separate men from each other in England, be they differences of class, as for Arthur and Bart, or differences of age, as for Arthur and Sir Andrew. Arthur, indeed, notes his desire to turn himself into Bart—“I've got to admire him so much that I've wanted to be like him for a long time”—to which his interlocutor replies that drawing closer to Bart means drawing closer to Sir Andrew: “No doubt your father would like to hear you talk that way.”<sup>17</sup> The final chapter equates Arthur's successful achievement of Bart-like heroism with the literal recovery of the father; foiling a kidnapping, Arthur rides a log down a logging slide at fifty miles per hour, only to discover that the rescued victim is Sir Andrew. At the same time, measuring up to the father's standards of manliness means escaping the father's dominance, at least ostensibly. When the baronet “discovers” that his son has become financially independent of him through his own secret gift, he exclaims, “Good heavens above! Have you passed out of my hands altogether?”<sup>18</sup>

The story's happily all-male domestic ending indicates, of course, that the answer to this question is no. Rather, one gathers that the drawback of the unreformed father-son relationship (that unmediated by the passionate friend here represented by Bart) is its insistence on hierarchy. Once status discrepancies are erased, men can join together, building families in which there is no need for women to keep the peace.<sup>19</sup>

Other stories published in the *Boy's Journal*, and in other periodicals, offer variations on this theme of the son proving his manhood via another man in order to win the grudging admiration of his father. For example, the Guy Rayner serial briefly cited earlier, which starts out as a school story entitled “Harry Stanton: A Story of Real Life” and ends eight months later as a pirate tale called “In the Land of Furze and Bloom, or, The Search for the Hidden Treasure,” focuses admiringly on the “more than brotherly love” shared by the adolescent heroes, which,

according to the clergyman father of the title character, is “the most precious thing you can possess.” It is this love that sustains them when the machinations of the school bully cause the clergyman to reject Harry and the fatherly headmaster to expel him from school, thus paving the way for the pirate adventure. Although Harry has earlier remarked of his father, “How dearly I love him. I would rather die than cause him trouble,” he nonetheless must fight his way back into his father’s regard, an effort that is facilitated by his ability to sustain a passionate friendship with a coeval.<sup>20</sup>

Another excellent example of this trope ran concurrently with “Cameron’s Last Chance!” This is Nelson Power’s “The Fighting Footballer; Or, The Sporting Chance,” in which the son of an antisport mill owner turns professional athlete in order to save his father’s fortune and effect a domestic rapprochement. Here the third member of the romantic triangle is of the father’s generation and is characterized as “thought[ful] and sympath[e]tic,” given to laying “a hand upon the young man’s shoulder” affectionately,<sup>21</sup> so that we might expect the hero to transfer his loyalties to this more understanding “father.” But in fact the story’s ultimate goal is again an all-male egalitarianism that includes the biological father, who must shamefacedly admit, “I’ve never understood you; only in the last few days have I come to realize that you’re a man, Jim—a man in the best sense of the word. But now we can let all the past be forgotten, and we’ll work together shoulder to shoulder, boy, like good chums.” This ending suggests that any form of male bonding is interchangeable with any other form: father and son *should* also be “chums.” Jim’s mentor tells father and son to “live happily ever afterwards!” and the narrator remarks that “if you go now to Rivermoor, you will find no more devoted couple than Arnot Steerman and his son.” What we have here is not only a father-son bond but also a companionate marriage.<sup>22</sup> As such, it recoups domesticity—but not patriarchy—for the male.

Such narratives imply that the relationship between fathers and their adolescent sons is fraught with difficulty and works best when it can be filtered through some other male. Male domesticity, in other words, is a delicate work of art more than a natural state. Patricia Barnett observes that the stories published in boys’ weeklies in the last third of the nineteenth century rely heavily on the romantic archetype of “the foster-child,” which requires the boy protagonist to search for his true father, occasionally having simultaneously to protect himself

against the figure of the “false father.” She suggests that “this theme reflects, psychologically, every child’s fantasy of having exotic and mysterious origins” and “encourage[s] the] identification of the average reader with a mystic and triumphing super-hero who is never the ordinary mortal he seems to be.”<sup>23</sup> My own inclination is to substitute for Barnett’s Jungian approach one grounded in the social history of the period. It is noteworthy that the late-Victorian era, as I have argued elsewhere, often “viewed fatherhood . . . with considerable ambivalence, anxiety, and even hostility” and obsessively sought to find ways to define, reform, and control it<sup>24</sup>—in fact, to “search for [the] true father.” While the foster-child paradigm is certainly as common within turn-of-the-century adventure serials as Barnett contends, we cannot afford to ignore the larger context of widespread concern about male parenting. Unable to find an uncomplicated and satisfying father-son relationship within the family as originally constituted, boys’ authors focus on other forms of manly love that either substitute for the flawed father or point the way to the discovery of the father who is not flawed.

Thus in considering examples of the second type of story that proliferates in turn-of-the-century boys’ magazine fiction, that in which a boy rejects a “false father” in favor of the love of another boy and thereby becomes reconciled with a “true father,” we may find that such tales continue the critique of the father that underlies “The Fighting Footballer” and, to a lesser extent, “Harry Stanton” and “Cameron’s Last Chance!” Sometimes, in fact, these stories treat the regeneration of the father-son bond in a rather cursory way, implying that the best kind of homoemotional domestic bliss is to be found in the more genuinely egalitarian bond that exists between hypermasculine and hyperfeminine boys. Such boys can serve each other as protectors and moral guides as well as loving companions, suggesting a relationship that is simultaneously that of parent and child and that of partners in a “marriage” that is asexual but nonetheless often characterized by physical expressions of affection.

Earlier adventure tales, such as the 1869 *Boys of England* serial “Mark Rushton,” may locate the hypermasculine and the hyperfeminine in a single admirable body:

So finely moulded were his form and features, so adolescent and even feminine in their grace, that the wags of the gun-room would sometimes venture to address him as *Miss Rushton*; but the taunt of

effeminacy always brought its practical refutation in the . . . swift and stinging bash of that strong little fist propelled by an arm, which, though as white and almost as delicately rounded as a girl's, was sprung with muscles of steel.<sup>25</sup>

Even the later stories, such as Gordon Stables's "The Rough Riders: A Story of the Rebellion in Cuba" (*The Captain*, 1899), may feature similarly androgynous heroes. Fifteen-year-old Arch is "handsome, certainly, but neither very tall nor very strong," despite his hidden muscles; still, on the battlefield "His shrill, treble, girlish voice inspired confidence." Arch's eighteen-year-old companion, Dod, is apparently in love not only with Arch's twin sister but with Arch himself, as "for the life of him Dod couldn't have told which he liked the better." The true father of this interesting ménage, replacing the biological fathers whose opposed political loyalties during the Civil War represent an early threat to their sons' mutual love, is Teddy Roosevelt, the "daring-looking and well-set-up king of the Rough Riders" who "loved his men, and was beloved by them."<sup>26</sup>

But a more typical ploy in the later narratives is the creation of a family constellation consisting of a criminal adult, a feminized boy of startling moral purity, and the adolescent protagonist who must decide between these rival models of masculinity—or, one might argue, between "bad" homoeroticism and "good" homoemotionalism. Thus while Louis Rousselet's "The Two Cabin-Boys" (*Boy's Own Paper*, 1881–82) features a worthy father, Pierre Riva, whose industry has made him "the most well-to-do man in the village" and whose "kindness, courage, and honesty [have] made him the most esteemed,"<sup>27</sup> it establishes as a more important character an adult who pretends to be driven by paternal feelings but who really has more dangerous drives to satisfy. Ostensibly this man's chief lust is for money, but in the context of sinister homosocial bonding it is interesting that the criminal, Dominique Martignes, endears himself to Daniel, the protagonist, by calling him "Ducky" and "my little one" and vowing eternal friendship: "Nothing annoys me so much as going on board without a companion. I won't take an engagement unless on the same ship as you."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Dominique is the second "false father" to captivate Daniel; the first has caused Daniel's real parent to disown the lad when Pierre discovers that while Daniel was on a tobacco-smuggling expedition with Mateo, the older man shot a revenue officer. Intense bonds between

predatory men and young boys, in other words, work to undermine male domestic bonds.

In contrast, intense peer relationships are all to the family's benefit. The task of the second cabin boy of the title, Penguin, a lad of "almost girlish appearance," is to supplant Dominique in Daniel's affections and restore the wanderer to his sorrowing parent. Penguin's own bond to the ship's captain, whom, he notes, "I love as my own life," serves as a model of what father-son connections ought to be even though no biological tie exists; but it is the love of the two boys that enables the reestablishment of domesticity via the reconciliation of father and son and Daniel's marriage.<sup>29</sup> Despite the many occasions upon which the cabin boys' love has some sort of physical expression, Rousselet makes clear that the good passionate friendship eases both patriarchal succession and heterosexuality. "Spiritual, transcendent and free from base desire," in Richards's phrase,<sup>30</sup> manly love creates an emotional climate that will encourage a high-minded approach to marriage in later life.

A final *Boy's Journal* series, Geoffrey Murray's "Mighty London!" (1913–14), provides another striking example of the difference between bad fathers and good ones and between inappropriate and appropriate forms of male bonding. Our story begins with Sam Sherlock, a brutish father who wants to punish his son, Allan, for following up the day's newspaper peddling by playing the violin instead of stealing. In the ensuing melee, Sherlock's wife (who is far superior morally to her husband) reveals that Allan is not their child after all, opening the way for the boy to find more attractive father figures. But although the first of these men, Arthur Stannard, appreciates Allan's musicianship, represents a higher social class, and offers to "be your father and mother too . . . yes, and your tutor into the bargain," he turns out to be a gentleman jewel thief, the "guv'nor" of Sherlock's gang of thieves. When Allan objects to following in these criminal footsteps, Stannard retorts that he must obey: "Understand me, once and for all, you are mine—body and soul! Mine; d'you hear? You'll do my bidding and work my will, or else."<sup>31</sup> Allan's tortured reaction to the discovery of his new father's nature suggests that the struggle between criminal man and honest boy is simultaneously a struggle between deviance and pure manly love:

Arthur Stannard was a thief! Arthur Stannard! The man he had revered and worshipped—the man he was beginning to love as only man can love man, was a common scoundrel!

Fate, laughing at him, had led him straight from the clutches of one ruffian, who would have poisoned his soul[,] into those of another, far more cunning, far more clever, who assuredly would drag him down into perdition unless Allan could escape.

Forcibly returned to Sherlock, Allan finds himself once again in the "lovin' arms" of the "pore old father what you was so wicked as to run away from,"<sup>32</sup> a plot twist that suggests that one problem with the seductive criminal in this formula is that he represents a blind alley rather than a genuine escape from the false father.

Of course Allan eventually finds his true father, in the shape of his biological grandfather Thomas Merridew, and in accordance with all the dictates of romantic melodrama, Merridew is a courtly aristocrat of the highest probity, "almost worshipped" by the local villagers. The story of how Allan came to lose his family in the first place, however, rings interesting changes on the rivalry of true and false parent. Merridew had originally hoped to marry his daughter, Allan's mother, to Robert Garfield, orphan son of a merchant prince, but she preferred the poor but worthy Harry Standish. Standish, indeed, was the wiser choice, as Garfield was then revealed as a bankrupt knave primarily interested in his prospective bride's money. After she became (in rapid succession) a wife, widow, mother, and corpse, Garfield paid his groom Sherlock 300 pounds to steal the infant Allan and bring him up as a criminal; Garfield himself took the alias Arthur Stannard. This elaborate plot, hinging on Garfield/Stannard's obsession with corrupting his rival's son by establishing his ownership of the boy's "body and soul," implies that jealousy both sexual and financial is the consuming passion of the false father, whose deviance both disrupts the desirable all-male family and is thwarted in its turn by other worthy father figures—such as the "tall, soldierly-looking man, Chief Inspector Tanner, the famous head of the criminal department of Scotland Yard," on whose account Allan feels a quasi-sexual "sudden wave of mingled relief and gratitude surge through him." Tanner uses Allan as bait to attract the real object of his interest, the gang; in this tale, it seems that for good and bad fathers alike, the major function of the adolescent son is to serve as a pawn in their dealings with one another.<sup>33</sup> Unable ever to come into contact save through intermediaries such as Allan and, earlier, his mother, adult saints and adult villains are nonetheless passionately interested in connecting with their opposite numbers.

This summary of “Mighty London!” ignores the bond forged between Allan and Tom St. Cyr, Merridew’s admirable foster son, who performs much of the detective work of the story; I pass over this relationship because this narrative’s primary emotional energy seems to me to be situated in father-son bonds of one kind or another. Yet the existence of an important peer relationship is what differentiates serials such as “Mighty London!” and “The Two Cabin-Boys” from stories illustrating the final variation on the adventure’s construction of homoemotional bliss, in which the triangle requires the boy hero to shift his loyalties from one father to another. This subgenre figures male domestic bonds as simultaneously unsatisfactory and deeply desirable, forcing the protagonists to audition applicant after applicant until a stable father-son bond is finally achieved.

One narrative that follows this pattern is G. A. Henty’s “Facing Death: A Tale of the Coal Mines” (*Union Jack*, 1880), which traces Jack Simpson’s rise from orphaned son of a miner to consulting engineer. This rise is accomplished by a series of swaps or add-ons wherein the protagonist exchanges one foster father for another of higher rank and loftier expectations, trading up to the success that we have learned to expect of the Henty hero. Jack’s original foster father, Bill Haden, has taken in the two-month-old orphan reluctantly, at his wife’s urging, and offers the promising lad little encouragement. Accordingly, when Jack is ten years old he fixes on a more useful mentor in the person of an artist who kindles the boy’s ambition by passing on the wisdom he received from his own father: any working-class lad can “end by being a rich man and a gentleman.” The artist promises to write to Jack annually to keep his ambition alive, and with this stimulus Jack is able to move on to a new mentor, the village schoolmaster Mr. Merton, formerly an outstanding student of mathematics at Cambridge. Jack’s own Cambridge hopes are scotched, however, by labor trouble in the mines, in which his first foster father is heavily involved. While Bill is one of the strikers, Jack’s sympathies are with management; significantly, the mine owner, Mr. Brook, has taken a fatherly interest in him. We then fast-forward to a mine explosion, in which Jack saves Mr. Brook and asserts his authority over Bill—whom he now calls “Bill” rather than “Dad.” Twelve years later, Jack has married Mr. Merton’s daughter, and the story ends with a family tableau: Jack, Mr. Merton, Mr. Brook, and the artist sit cozily around a table, while Bill and his wife are out of the picture, playing with Jack’s children. Mr. Merton

lives in Jack's house; Bill and Jane are relegated to a "pretty cottage just opposite to the entrance of the grounds."<sup>34</sup> Class tells.

In one sense "Facing Death" is about putting one's class origins behind one as quickly as possible: learning to "speak posh," reassigning one's loyalties to the dominant social group. Moreover, the homoemotionalism at work here seems far from homoeroticism. Unlike Rousselet's and Murray's sinister older men, Henty's good surrogate fathers do not call Jack "Ducky" or desire to own him "body and soul" in a way calculated to "drag him down to perdition"; unlike the good fathers we have seen in other stories, they do not even clasp his hand in a warm yet manly fashion. But "Facing Death" also seems designed as an attempt to get the middle-class reader to accept working-class boys as potential equals who may be blended into the middle-class "family" both through assimilation and through marriage. Jack's attractiveness is thus both his class difference from the reader (who would have expected a miner's son to be so perfect?) and the eventual erasure of this difference as Jack sits at the middle-class table and sends his origins across the street. Even so, and despite all the first-naming of Bill in the body of the story, we hear at the last that Jack "still affectionately calls [Bill and Jane] 'dad' and 'mother.'"<sup>35</sup> Just enough class difference is retained to render piquant our identification with Jack—presumably a homoemotional identification, since *The Union Jack's* readers are predominantly boys.

Exchanges such as the ones performed in Henty's tale may also be motivated, at least ostensibly, by the death of the original father. Take S. Clarke Hook's "'By Nelson's Side': The True Story of Nelson's Famous Powder Monkey" (*Pluck*, 1894–95), in which the title character, Alec, loses his adored parent in battle but gains multiple father-substitutes, from Nelson himself to gunnery captain Jack Bell. The comportment of these two men toward Alec establishes the father's proper role: it is to comfort, protect, and nurture (all actions more conventionally associated with Victorian motherhood), while the son may reciprocate by prolonging the father's life. The all-male "domesticity" possible in the navy is, by Hook's account, so complete that no male-female ties are necessary for emotional satisfaction. Nor is the original father to be criticized, despite the narrative's need to replace him; when the ship's bully, Tally, calls Alec's father a coward and a fight ensues, Nelson adjudicates, stating flatly, "A braver man than your father never lived. You were utterly wrong, Tally, in speaking as you did to the boy, under

any circumstances, and your assertion was untrue. I cannot punish a lad for upholding his father's honour." When the sea story eventually segues, in the inimitable fashion of the working-class boy's serial, into a narrative of detection, the villain's crime in burning down the house belonging to another of Alec's protectors, Harry Richardson, is the more heinous because the act has destroyed "many things that we value greatly because they belonged to my father," as Harry laments.<sup>36</sup> Treasured, even fetishized, material goods associated with the departed parent, such as favorite possessions or Alec's father's medal for bravery, stand in for that parent but also suggest the ease with which fathers can be added to or exchanged. Fathers are all the more desirable because they are fungible.

Not that sons are irreplaceable either. In a short story published in the somewhat more upscale *Chums* in 1892, "'Duty First!' The Story of Our Old French Master, by the Author of 'One of the Light Brigade,'" the schoolboy narrator, Bellamy, chafes under the burden of having to learn French until his teacher, Anatole Alsace, reminds him that "you must learn the great lesson of obedience to authority or you will never make a man." At this comment, "Bellamy looked up quickly, and the master saw that there was a chord in his nature which would vibrate under a skillful touch." A series of conversations between boy and man ensues, in which Alsace both tells Bellamy thrilling French war stories and signals his willingness to stand in for Bellamy *père*: "'Does your father smoke? . . . Then I suppose I may smoke too, without setting you a bad example.' . . . Smoking vigorously, until the room grew misty before the eyes of the delighted boy, Monsieur Anatole warmed with his subject . . . his text being always 'DUTY!'" After the eighty-four-year-old master heeds his country's call to arms during the Franco-Prussian War, leaving Bellamy with a parting kiss and a reminder that duty is all-important, the newspapers report that he is a baron with a field command. Alsace's forces capture a spy, who "prove[s] to be the Baron's only son, whose persistent profligacy had brought ruin on the family, and who now disgraced alike his father and his country's cause"; duty ever uppermost in his mind, Alsace has his son executed and subsequently loses his own life on the battlefield. Because he has been able to form a loving bond with Bellamy, however, Alsace does not die childless: the narrator assures us that the English son has learned the lesson of "duty before everything," even if the French son has not.<sup>37</sup>

Other stories vary this pattern of infinitely replaceable parts within

the male family by suggesting the same accretive possibilities that exist within serials discussed earlier, such as "Cameron's Last Chance!" The difference is that instead of ringing down the curtain on a triangle composed of two postadolescent boys and an adult man, tales within this subset envision the happy ending as consisting of two "fathers" and a son. The emotional satisfactions of such a configuration are clearly just as rich as in the earlier type, however, as H. C. Crosfield's 1905 *Captain* serial "The Adventures of John Baywood" demonstrates. Set in the 1630s, this narrative focuses on how the title character is forced to leave Massachusetts and his stern father owing to the jealousy of Zephaniah Eccles, his rival for the affections of a young woman named Verity. John's deepest sadness seems to be elicited by separation not from his ladylove but from his father, since "there had never been any tenderness between us, yet now I knew that he was suffering more than I was." But John finds an unlikely substitute father in Barnabas Skeffington, the sea captain who shanghai's him into his crew; while Skeffington lacks the senior Baywood's probity, he makes up for this deficiency inasmuch as he is "easily pacified, warm and faithful in friendship."<sup>38</sup>

This relationship, indeed, is all that sustains John when they find themselves enslaved on the island of Hispaniola—only "the Captain's friendship . . . redeems the time from being one of abject and hopeless misery," he reports—and gradually it succeeds also in redeeming Skeffington himself, who as a Cambridge dropout has the potential to embrace better careers than piracy. To put to rest the story that John has fled under his own steam, Skeffington testifies to having kidnapped him: "I love this lad Jack like mine own son, and I desire to make amends for the ill trick I was deceived into playing him." After the captain saves John's life three times, John is finally in a position to make up the quarrel with his father, who apologizes profusely for his lack of tenderness, and to marry Verity. But Verity herself makes clear who the real marriage partners are when she notes, "I verily believe that thou lovest Barnabas Skeffington more than me, thine own wedded wife."<sup>39</sup> Heterosexual ties in these tales exist primarily to signal the protagonists' full membership in the adult community—specifically, the community of adult men. It is the homoemotional ties between father and son or brother and brother that furnish the true romance.

While narrative patterns such as the ones identified here appear with startling frequency in turn-of-the-century boys' magazine fiction, they are by no means limited to that set of texts. Herbert Sussman, for

instance, has identified within early Victorian fiction a “masculine plot” that focuses on “bonding with the father or more often a surrogate father. This process of bonding involves, first, ritualized rejection by the father, then acceptance by the surrogate father sealed by chaste bodily contact within carefully controlled rituals of male-male physicality”; it also involves a rejection of the marriage plot.<sup>40</sup> Sussman and James Eli Adams both see the “masculine plot,” as expressed by such canonical writers as Carlyle, as “radically challeng[ing] Victorian domestic ideology” in ignoring the female.<sup>41</sup> But in the case of late-century mass-market writing for boys of the type that I have been examining here, I propose that what we see is rather a radical *acceptance* of domestic ideology, a contention that the masculine plot and the marriage plot can and should be combined. To return to Clark’s point (cited at the beginning of this essay), the removal of women from a narrative and the contention that they are not the ultimate good need not imply a rejection of the values conventionally associated with femininity. Rather, the tales suggest an attempt to claim the domestic and the emotional for men, to recast in a single-sex mold values that we now prefer to define as heterosocial. Magazine adventure stories certainly tell boys that domesticity is difficult, that father-son relationships as “normally” constructed are flawed. But at the same time, they suggest that there is nothing so desirable as that staple of Victorian heterosexual romance, the companionate marriage and the happy egalitarian family. Perhaps it is only the modern reader who will consider it strange that the participants in that marriage and that family are all to be male.

#### NOTES

1. Eric Trudgill, *Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 146.

2. In *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 207, John M. MacKenzie hypothesizes that the reason that so much late-nineteenth-century boys’ fiction describes a male-dominated world is that it was a literature that glorified war, a homosocial activity. Certainly combat of all kinds is a major feature of these stories, yet the reverse might equally be the case: authors focus on war in part because doing so allows them to glorify that male-dominated world.

3. Beverly Lyon Clark, *Regendering the School Story: Sassy Sissies and Tattling Tomboys* (New York: Garland, 1996), 212.

4. See, for instance, Kenneth Allsop, “A Coupon for Instant Tradition: On

"Tom Brown's Schooldays," *Encounter* 25.5 (1965): 60–63; Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *The Old School Tie: The Phenomenon of the English Public School* (New York: Viking, 1978), 177; Isabel Quigly, *The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982).

5. Jeffrey Richards, "Passing the Love of Women': Manly Love and Victorian Society," in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 117.

6. See Jeffrey Weeks, "Inverts, Perverts, and Mary-Annes: Male Prostitution and the Regulation of Homosexuality in England in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 195–211.

7. Since the original publication of this essay, Sharon Marcus's fascinating study *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 29, has made a similar argument for women, suggesting, for instance, that to the extent that particular "nineteenth-century lesbian relationships resembled marriages," they enjoyed "a high degree of acceptance by respectable society."

8. Claudia Nelson, *Invisible Men: Fatherhood in Victorian Periodicals, 1850–1910* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 141–69.

9. I do not mean to imply that this phenomenon was peculiar to Britain. In discussing the work of Horatio Alger, for instance, Michael Moon analyzes the twin currents of homoeroticism and homodomesticity in these boys' stories of Gilded Age America. Moon ascribes some of Alger's popularity to the tales' depiction of all-boy families as "idyllic, domestic, self-perpetuating, untroubled by . . . the 'threat' (to male supremacy) of female enfranchisement," noting that while this picture strikes us as odd today, it speaks to deep and widespread longings within its original nineteenth-century context. See "'The Gentle Boy from the Dangerous Classes': Pederasty, Domesticity, and Capitalism in Horatio Alger," *Representations* 19 (Summer 1987): 106–7. The question of cultural differences and similarities between mid-Victorian America and turn-of-the-century Britain is outside my scope here, but the extent to which the (homo)emotional preoccupations of Alger's novels resemble those of the British magazine stories I am examining suggests that the rigid gendering of our own ideas about domesticity and bonding is a comparatively recent phenomenon.

10. I focus this essay on the magazine serial adventure rather than on adventures first published in book form in part because still more than boys' fiction as a whole, the vast territory of turn-of-the-century boys' magazine fiction remains more or less uncharted by scholarly explorers. But readers acquainted with the canonical adventure stories of the period—many of which, from *Treasure Island* (1885) to *Prester John* (1910) and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Lost Prince* (1915), started life in serial form—may well see resemblances between the works I discuss here and those that remain in print today. For comment on the kinds of emotional patterns to be found in these better-known tales, see

Claudia Nelson, *Boys Will Be Girls: The Feminine Ethic and British Children's Fiction, 1857–1917* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 117–46. I discuss the ideology of the boys' magazine of this era at greater length in "Mixed Messages: Authoring and Authority in British Boys' Magazines," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21.1 (1997): 1–19, in which I argue that editors typically preferred contributions whose attitude toward authority and hierarchy was ambiguous; such tales could thus appeal to both the socially powerful and the socially powerless.

11. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, ed. Andrew Sanders (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 233.

12. Robert H. MacDonald, "Signs from the Imperial Quarter: Illustrations in *Chums*, 1892–1914," *Children's Literature* 16 (1988): 45–46.

13. Guy Rayner (S. Dacre Clarke), "Harry Stanton: A Story of Real Life," *The Boy's Graphic* 1 (1890): 17.

14. Gordon Wallace, "Cameron's Last Chance!," *The Boy's Journal* 1 (1913–14): 29.

15. *Ibid.*, 54; these related ideas are juxtaposed in the text.

16. *Ibid.*, 245.

17. *Ibid.*, 210.

18. *Ibid.*, 245.

19. For instance, Benson, employed by Sir Andrew to check up on Arthur's progress, disguises himself as an elderly man because "I thought Cameron would be more interested in me" (Wallace, "Cameron's Last Chance!" 212). Once Arthur has waded into a gaggle of toughs assaulting this apparent "old man," "his hard, brown fists flashing like the piston-rods of a steam-engine" (Wallace, 208), Benson can reveal himself to Bart as the hale forty-year-old that he is.

20. Rayner, "Harry Stanton: A Story of Real Life," 3. That the language in these stories often seems by today's lights to be characterized by excess and melodrama may be one indication of shifting attitudes toward homoemotionality, since in the nineteenth century it smacked more of cliché than of camp.

21. Nelson Power, "The Fighting Footballer; Or, The Sporting Chance," *The Boy's Journal* 1 (1913–14): 253.

22. Power, "The Fighting Footballer," 492. The 1891–92 serial "Axel Ebersen: The Graduate of Upsala," by André Laurie (*Boy's Own Paper* 14), varies this conflation of father-son love and married love. In Laurie's tale, the love and tutelage of a kindly schoolmaster (who says of the young Axel, "I felt I could have kissed him. . . . this young rascal, with his frank and gentle eye, had at once gained my heart, and . . . I already thought of the pleasure I should have in guiding him and instructing him" [150]) give the title character the skill he needs to become a surgeon. Axel practices his calling only once, to cure his distant but adored father after a head injury; he thus becomes effectively his father's "parent," giving "health to his father and sav[ing] his family from want." It is all because of Axel, and the early love between Axel and the schoolmaster, that Mr. Ebersen is "alert and vigorous, launching forth into the great enterprises for which he is so well fitted" (468).

23. Patricia Mary Barnett, "English Boys' Weeklies, 1866–1899," Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1974, 186–89.
24. Nelson, *Invisible Men*, 202.
25. Quoted in Barnett, "English Boys' Weeklies," 112.
26. Gordon Stables, "The Rough Riders: A Story of the Rebellion in Cuba," *The Captain* 1.5 (1899): 475, 480.
27. Louis Rousselet, "The Two Cabin-Boys: A Story of Adventure by Land and Sea," *The Boy's Own Paper* 4 (1881–82): 29.
28. *Ibid.*, 62.
29. *Ibid.*, 118, 155.
30. Richards, "Passing the Love," 93.
31. Geoffrey Murray, "Mighty London!," *The Boy's Journal* 1 (1913–14): 27, 108–9.
32. *Ibid.*, 110, 193.
33. *Ibid.*, 413, 322. Christopher Craft points to a very similar arrangement in *Dracula* (1897), in which, as he argues, Lucy and Mina "mediate and displace a more direct communion among males." Like "Mighty London!," Bram Stoker's novel "does not dismiss homoerotic desire and threat; rather it simply continues to diffuse and displace it." See Christopher Craft, "'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*," *Representations* 8 (Fall 1984), partially reprinted in *Dracula*, ed. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal (New York: Norton, 1997), 447. This pattern is not uncommon in turn-of-the-century popular fiction.
34. G. A. Henty, "Facing Death: A Tale of the Coal Mines," *The Union Jack* 1 (1880): 245, 312.
35. *Ibid.*, 312.
36. S. Clarke Hook, "'By Nelson's Side': The True Story of Nelson's Famous Powder Monkey," *Pluck* 1–2 (1894–95): 1.14, 2.13.
37. "'Duty First! The Story of Our Old French Master," *Chums* 1.7 (26 October 1892): 100–101.
38. H. C. Crosfield, "The Adventures of John Baywood," *Captain* 13 (1905): 7, 12.
39. *Ibid.*, 103, 341, 494, 493.
40. Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 47.
41. James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 63.