

ISSUE 12.3 (WINTER 2016)

Special Issue:

Gender in Victorian Popular Fiction, Art, and Culture

Guest Edited by Janine Hatter and Helena Ifill

***Jack Sheppard and the Eternal Boy***

By [Brooke Fortune](#), University of Florida

<1>William Harrison Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, published serially from January 1839 to February 1840 in *Bentley's Miscellany*, follows the adventures of its titular character from his birth in 1702 until his hanging at Tyburn in November 1724. Ainsworth's literary rendering of the eighteenth-century criminal details Jack Sheppard's childhood as a carpentry apprentice and his subsequent rise to notoriety as a thief and prison-breaker. In addition to Jack's criminal exploits, the novel's plot and action often center on Jack's contentious rivalry with Jonathan Wild, the London crime lord and Jack's former mentor, as well as his relationship with his childhood friend Thames Darrell. Upon its publication, Ainsworth's novel was enormously popular among the reading masses. Matthew Buckley notes that "within just weeks of its first installments... the novel had given rise to a full-blown mania, generating a great wave of pamphlets and abridgements, plays and street shows, prints and cartoons, and related baubles and souvenirs" (426). Although *Jack Sheppard's* audience included members of all classes and ages, the novel was most popular amongst boys, particularly the young men "who constituted much of the city's growing industrial labor force" (Buckley 427). It is therefore striking, due to *Jack Sheppard's* audience, in addition to its adventure and coming-of-age story arcs, that thus far the novel has not been approached through the lens of the boyhood narrative. A particularly strong argument can be made for *Jack Sheppard* as anticipating the eternal boy, a model of masculinity popular during the late nineteenth-century and characterized by Britain's vast imperial agenda.

<2>Since the foundational works of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, James Eli Adams and Linda Dowling in the 1980s and 1990s, a great deal of work has been published on Victorian modes of masculinity, with no small emphasis on the role boyhood played as a formative stage along the overarching masculine narrative. Works like Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857),

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883) and J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1902), for example, reveal much about differing Victorian ideals of masculinity. In particular, these texts emphasize boyhood as a stage foreshadowing and preparing for the achievement of mature masculinity. This article's argument is particularly indebted to Deane's work on imperial boyhood, most notably his article "Imperial Boyhood: Piracy and Play-Ethic" (2011). Deane's model of masculinity marks a departure from models valued at the mid-century, such as Muscular Christianity, which is famously depicted in *Tom Brown*. This article will first look to Hughes's novel for an understanding of Muscular Christianity before proceeding to analyze *Jack Sheppard* through the lens of Deane's paradigm. What emerges is a dramatic shift from the masculine rhetoric contemporary with *Jack Sheppard*'s publication date, and a clear foreshadowing of *fin-de-siècle* boyhood narratives.

<3>The boyhood of Hughes's imagination glorified physical prowess and Christian morality, and portrayed boyhood as an important, but transient, stage on the journey to manly maturation. This earlier rhetoric was heavily dependent upon Charles Kingsley's Muscular Christian movement, which depicted manliness as "synonymous with strength, both physical and moral, and the term 'muscular Christianity' highlights these writers' consistent, even insistent, use of the ideologically charged and aggressively poised male body as a point of reference in and determiner of a masculinist economy of signification" (Hall 9). In other words, the Muscular Christian imagination associated physical development with moral development, and stressed a progressive masculine narrative. In this configuration, boyhood serves as a training ground for "Christian Englishmen," as Hughes writes in *Tom Brown* (78).

<4>Although *Jack Sheppard* certainly takes it to an extreme, many Victorian boyhood narratives, including those of the Muscular Christian persuasion, suggest a link between boyishness and criminality, or at least unruliness. *Tom Brown* describes adolescent boys as being "as full of tricks as monkeys, and of excuses as an Irishwoman, making fun of their [school]master, one another, and their lessons, Argus himself would have been puzzled to keep an eye on them; and as for making them steady or serious for half an hour together, it was simply hopeless" (Hughes 75). Hughes's novel also heartily acknowledges the boyish affinity for adventure and rule-breaking:

They now often stole out into the hall at nights, incited... partly by the excitement of doing something which was against the rules; for, sad to say, both of our youngsters, since their loss of character for steadiness in their form, had gotten into the habit of doing things which were forbidden, as a matter of adventure,—just in the same way, I should fancy, as men fall into smuggling, and for the same sort of reasons—thoughtlessness in the first place. It never occurred to them to consider why such and such rules were laid down: the reason was nothing to them, and they only looked upon rules as a sort of challenge from the rule-makers, which it would be rather bad pluck in them not to accept. (87)

The difference between Hughes's boys and the *fin-de-siècle* boys encountered in "Imperial Boyhood" is that in *Tom Brown*, published at the mid-century, boys were very much expected

to grow out of this roguishness and into morally steadfast examples of manhood. This is in direct opposition to attitudes during the late-century, which sought to keep this juvenile adventure spirit in stasis. For example, the narrator of *Tom Brown* encourages boys to:

Quit yourselves like men, then; speak up, and strike out if necessary, for whatsoever is true, and manly, and lovely, and of good report; never try to be popular, but only to do your duty and help others to do theirs... For boys follow each other in herds like sheep, for good or evil; they hate thinking, and have rarely any settled principles... it is the leading boys of the time being who give the tone to all the rest, and make the School either a noble institution for the training of Christian Englishmen, or a place where a young boy will get more evil than he would if he were turned out to make his way in London-streets, or anything between these two extremes. (78)

Here Hughes stresses the impressionable nature of boys, as well as the inclination to feed off each other, whether for good or evil purposes. Thus, the narrator encourages his readers not to act as boys, but to “quit yourselves as men,” for the better “training of Christian Englishmen.” If Hughes’s novel at all revels in the adventures and mischievous nature of boys, it is done with the mindset that this is just a passing phase on the journey to the “glorious manhood” of Kingsley’s imagining.

<5>The later years of the century display a marked contrast in masculine rhetoric, especially as pertaining to boyhood:

As conservative strains of imperialism displaced older liberal narratives of progress, civilization, and enlightenment in favor of militarism, expansionism, and a vision of permanent dominion and endless competition, imperialists found in enduring boyishness a natural and suitably anti-developmental model of identity. An empire that had ceased to strive towards idealistic ends no longer required its heroes to grow up, and a non-developmental understanding of global politics welcomed a masculinity resistant to development. (Deane 690)

Thus, imperial boys contrast sharply to Kingsley’s young Muscular Christians in that they are never meant to mature. Due to the later, bleaker contexts of British imperialism, their masculinity is in fact defined by their inherent childishness, which ensures a certain imperviousness to ideological and ethical concerns, attributes much valued in young men sent out to enact the empire’s dirty work. Instead of religion or morality, imperial boys based their formation upon play-ethic, or game mindset, constructing their masculinity in relation to competition and achievement instead of a set of ethical binaries.

<6>As previously mentioned, *Jack Sheppard* spans the entirety of Jack’s life, but focuses largely on Jack’s adolescence, establishing him as unusually cunning, but also a reckless and self-serving young boy. Ainsworth writes that the young Jack possesses “a penetration and cunning beyond his years,” describing his character as a mixture of “effrontery, and resolution,” even as he notes “a strong tendency on his part to coarse indulgence” and “a faithless and uncertain

disposition" (25). In the novel's last epoch, which portrays Jack's adulthood, Jack has not matured past these characteristics that defined him in boyhood. In fact, they have only intensified in adulthood, thus becoming the basis of Jack's manhood. In this fashion, *Jack Sheppard* and its titular hero (or anti-hero) can be read as a precursor to the eternal boys of the late-century.

### Critical History

*Jack Sheppard's* critical history is relatively sparse, and revolves mainly around the novel's sensationalism, contextualizing its presence within the Newgate and Penny Dreadful traditions. Lauren Gillingham notes that "one of the differences distinguishing the Newgate novels of the 1830s from earlier crime fiction was their tendency to treat criminals sympathetically, if not to imbue them outright with the colors of heroism" (884). The Newgate Novel championed the outlaw hero, displacing "the structure of the romance hero onto a protagonist whose very identity is premised on transgression of the social order, and on the unleashing of ambitious, appetitive energy" (Gillingham 886). Despite the Newgate Novel's popularity, these narratives were widely denounced as garnering "readerly sympathy for thieves and prostitutes" (Gillingham 880).

John Springhall covers similar ground in his article "Pernicious Reading," identifying *Jack Sheppard* as a Penny Dreadful, a print medium "encompass[ing] cheap printed instalment fiction and boys' weekly periodicals reaching a predominantly lower-middle and working-class juvenile audience" (326). Springhall's article is useful in that it examines the detrimental influence the middle classes imagined works like *Jack Sheppard* exercised, particularly over its juvenile readers. For example, Springhall cites Alfred Harmsworth's 1893 assertion that:

It is almost a daily occurrence with magistrates to have before them boys who, having read a number of "dreadfuls," followed the examples set forth in such publications, robbed their employers, bought revolvers with the proceeds, and finished by running away from home, and installing themselves in the back streets as "highwaymen." This and many other evils the "penny dreadful" is responsible for. It makes thieves of the coming generation, and so helps fill our gaols. (326)

This argument corresponds with Thomas Beggs's assertions in *An Inquiry Into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity* (1849), which bemoan the popularity of stage productions of *Jack Sheppard* amongst young boys. Beggs writes that these "exhibitions of dexterous and daring crime attract the attention and ambition of these boys, and each one endeavors to emulate the conduct of his favorite hero... In a continual whirl of excitement and intoxication, the boy learns the lessons which finish the candidate for the Penal Settlements, if disease or death does not arrest his career" (97). Likewise, in an 1856 review of the novel, Charles Mackay writes that "since the publication of the first edition of this volume, Jack Sheppard's adventures have been revived. A novel upon the real or fabulous history of the burglar has afforded, by its extraordinary popularity, a further exemplification of the allegations in the text" (253). Mackay goes on to cite the enthusiasm of several young inmates at the prison school in the New Bailey

at Manchester towards *Jack Sheppard*, such as one “J.L. (aged 14),” who “thought this Jack Sheppard was a clever fellow for making his escape and robbing his master” (253). Reports such as these led to the widespread inclination to blame fiction for real-life crimes, and “the British government act[ed] immediately to stop the growth of the Sheppard phenomenon” following several incidents of copy-cat crimes (Buckley 429).

<9>Of special importance in all these sources is the emphasis on youth, and particularly male youth, in this supposed process of corruption. This is significant to Jack Sheppard’s relationship to the boyhood narrative in that the characteristics of Jack that mid-Victorian audiences denounced as immoral and corrupting to a juvenile audience are the very same characteristics celebrated in the late-century as constructing the idea of imperial boyhood. Thus, as a literary figure, Jack Sheppard can be read not only as a Newgate hero, but an early example of the valiant boy who never grows up, a figure that grew widely recognizable during the late Victorian period and *fin de siècle*.

### **Pirates, Prison-Breakers and Play-Ethic**

<10>Deane’s paradigm of boyhood hones in on the literary pairing of pirates and boys, functioning to “naturalize the behavior of pirates as an expression of the essence of boyhood” (697). Deane explores this argument in the context of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* (1883), tracking the young Jim Hawkins’ interactions with Long John Silver and company, and the resulting effects on Jim’s development over the course of the novel.

<11>Deane’s article is interested in alternate codes of behavior that arise from what he refers to as “play-ethic,” a set of ideals that:

prized the ostensibly natural impulses of boys and sought to preserve them rather than force them to submit to the external order of moral maturity. It was concerned with questions of fairness that might guide the players in a game, but generally uninterested in questions of a universal justice that might guide us all. (692)

Deane emphasizes the extent to which the pirates of *Treasure Island* adhere to this code of play-ethic, asserting that “the pirates themselves, while thoroughly lawless from the perspective of British authority, are in fact obsessed with their own set of rules” (698). Deane goes on to stress the “importance of the code that governs piracy, to which the pirates adhere even at the expense of self-interest” (698). It is important to note Deane’s point that this code, governing the behavior of both boys and pirates, arises not out of morality, but out of competition. Deane argues that “the allure” of this particular set of rules “lies in their freedom from any constraints beyond a bare scaffold of regulations that allow conflicts to be experienced as exciting contests of skill and imagination, precisely in the way that Stevenson conceives of the appeal of children’s play” (698-699). Abiding by play-ethic, then, transforms the real world into a playground “divorced from the ordinary world and its ordinary values, where male communities can regard and police themselves according to their own rules” (701). Thus, the imperial boy “does not so much grow into manhood as strive constantly for a better

manhood than one's rivals. In fact, one need not be a man in the developmental sense to be a man in the competitive sense" (700). Again, this mode of masculinity significantly contrasts with the masculine narrative of the mid-century, which stressed a journey to maturation and subsequent goodness, a goal to which a boy could aspire, whereas in many boyhood narratives of the late century, such as *Treasure Island*, boyhood is itself the goal.

<12>The London crime-world depicted in *Jack Sheppard* is as dependent upon play-ethic as the pirates in *Treasure Island*. Like Long John Silver and his crew, Jonathan Wild's gang of housebreakers and debtors have their own code of "honorable" behavior that is unassailable. In the novel's opening pages, the middle-class carpenter Mr. Wood ventures into the Old Mint, Jonathan's turf and London's debtor stronghold, to offer his assistance to Jack's mother, whose circumstances have grown dire following the hanging of Jack's father. Their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of the mysterious figure Darrell, who is fleeing the wrath of his brother-in-law, Sir Rowland, in an effort to protect his newborn son. When the incident turns violent, Mr. Wood raises the alarm in the streets, an action standardly reserved in the Old Mint to prevent arrests by the sheriff, thus preserving the impunity of the debtors from British law. Here the alternate law of the Old Mint becomes clear, as the rabble Wood roused demands payment for their assistance in ceasing the scuffle. When Wood protests, Jonathan Wild, speaking for the Old Mint, issues a warning:

before you put out your foot so far, it would have been quite prudent to consider how you were to draw it back again. For my own part, I don't see in what way it is to be accomplished, except by the payment of our customary fees. Do not imagine you can at one moment avail yourself of our excellent regulations... and the next break them with impunity. If you assume the character of the debtor for you own convenience, you must be content to maintain it for ours. (Ainsworth 10)

Although certainly anarchic by the standards of the British government, the debtors demand absolute adherence to their own set of rules to preserve the "playground" of the Old Mint. When Wood continues to refuse payment, the debtors subject him to the appropriate penalty of dousing his head beneath the square's rusty water pump. Shortly after this incident the young Jack, himself born in the Old Mint, is apprenticed to Mr. Wood, and supposedly set upon the path of middle-class trade and respectability. However, it does not take long for Jack to find his way back to this playground-world, where he returns in adolescence, under the tutelage of Jonathan Wild, to begin his career as a housebreaker.

<13>As previously noted, the behavioral codes of play-ethic are uninterested in concepts such as universal fairness, but instead are concerned with strict adherence to a particular set of rules within a given game. These codes manifest themselves in the novel as the weight both the adult Jack and Jonathan Wild place upon keeping promises. Although at this point both are notorious criminals, widely renowned for their immorality and illegality, the rules of their particular "game" demand remaining true to one's word. While Jack and Jonathan may be uninterested in civic justice or moral behavior, they place value upon being honorable, at least in this manner. For example, now a renowned housebreaker, the adult Jack asserts that "I never yet broke an

engagement. Though a thief, Jack Sheppard is a man of his word" (Ainsworth 75). Jack's reputation as thus is best proved when, while incarcerated in Newgate, he promises Mr. Kneebone to join him for dinner that night. Despite the extreme measures taken to confine Jack, due to his notoriety as an expert prison-breaker, his jailers are aware that they need to "look sharply after him," one going as far as to claim that "I may be hanged myself if I don't believe he'll be as good as his word" (Ainsworth 95). Despite all these precautions, Jack does in fact escape, and of course keeps his dinner engagement with Mr. Kneebone. Jack's actions here anticipate the pirates of *Treasure Island's* adherence to their code "even at the expense of self-interest" (Deane 698). Jack similarly throws caution to the wind to maintain his thieves' honor. Rather than fleeing London and ensuring his safety once his escape is made good, Jack keeps his promise (or perhaps his boast) to Kneebone, despite the near certainty of recapture.

<14>Jack's initial mentor and eventual nemesis, Jonathan Wild, exemplifies adhering strictly to his word, albeit in a more sinister fashion. Known as the "thief-taker General," Wild was an eighteenth-century criminal infamous as a fence for thieves, but also for his willingness to report those who crossed him to the authorities. Ainsworth writes that "when in the plenitude of his power, [Jonathan] commenced... a traffic in human blood. This he carried on by procuring witnesses to swear away the lives of those persons who had incurred his displeasure, or whom it might be necessary to remove" (64). Although this sets Jonathan up to be treacherous and volatile, it also emphasizes a dark form of promise-keeping. In Ainsworth's novel, once Wild vows to have someone hanged, it is almost certain they will come to meet that grisly fate, and his record of success in this matter propagates his power and maintains his reign of terror. When Jack and Wild part ways over a housebreak gone wrong, Wild vows to see his protégé's life similarly ended. Later, considering Jack's intelligence and skill, Wild muses that "I'm almost sorry I've sworn to hang you. But, it can't be helped. I'm a slave to my word" (83). In another scene, Wild further details his commitment to his promises, noting that "If I am the devil... as some folks assert, and I myself am not unwilling to believe, you'll find that I differ from the generally-received notions of the arch-fiend, and faithfully execute the commands of those who confide their souls to my custody" (46). Although Wild is treacherous, unmerciful and self-serving, much like Long John Silver, he too abides by the codes of play-ethic, even when it is not always convenient, in the service of the very gruesome game over which he presides.

<15>Furthermore, the competition that fuels the masculinity of imperial boyhood plays a significant role in *Jack Sheppard*. Thus, much of the tension and resulting action in *Jack Sheppard* lies in the power struggle between Jack and Jonathan Wild. The two are doubled throughout the text, Jonathan at one point asserting that "were I not Jonathan Wild, I'd be Jack Sheppard" (83). Jack is indeed the only member of Jonathan's gang that matches (and perhaps exceeds) his capabilities, with other accomplices like the thief Blueskin (who develops into Jack's closest friend and ally) or Wild's assistant Abraham Mendez consistently reading as boneheaded, brutish and unobservant. Deane asserts that the "tools for success" on the perilous playground of imperial boyhood include "resourcefulness, skill, trickery, bravery, panache, and luck," virtues he argues arise from "undeveloped boyish instincts" (699). Jack and Jonathan thus stand out amongst their ramshackle colleagues in that they possess these attributes in abundance, leading to their success as criminals, but also to a natural rivalry. For

example, describing Jonathan's criminal prowess, Ainsworth writes that "he was the Napoleon of knavery, and established uncontrolled empire over all the practitioners of crime. This was no light conquest; nor was it a government easily maintained. Resolution, severity, subtlety, were required for it; and these were qualities which Jonathan possessed in an extraordinary degree" (63). This mirrors the early description of Jack as possessing extraordinary "penetration and cunning" (25).

<16>For much of the novel's exposition, Jack and Jonathan appear to be allied, Jack functioning as the most capable "Captain" of Jonathan's criminal army. Despite these friendly pretenses, in the narrative's wider arc, Jonathan Wild has intended to hang Jack since infancy, as further revenge against Jack's father, an ex-partner of Wild's who crossed him one too many times. Jack and Jonathan's inevitable falling-out occurs after a housebreak at the Wood home, Jack's former masters, during which Blueskin murders the shrewish Mrs. Wood, who threatens to raise the alarm. Upset by the incident and unsettled by the resurfacing of his childhood friend, Thames Darrell, Jack voices his intentions to leave Jonathan's employ and seek a new life. When Jonathan responds by threatening to hang him if he leaves, Jack issues the following challenge:

"It is time you should know whom you have to deal with. Henceforth, I utterly throw off the yoke you have laid upon me. I will neither stir hand nor foot for you more. Attempt to molest me, and I split. You are more in my power than I am in yours. Jack Sheppard is a match for Jonathan Wild, any day." (Ainsworth 77)

Here the competition always underlying Jack and Jonathan's seeming alliance is made explicit, and the struggle following their separation embodies a high-stakes game of wit, force and resourcefulness. Jonathan even utilizes the language of games. After Jack and Blueskin infiltrate Jonathan's home (fortress is perhaps more apt a description), and escape after overhearing the truth of both Jack and Thames Darrell's aristocratic lineage, Jonathan remarks that "tonight is *their* turn... To-morrow it will be *mine*" (83). In this fashion, Jack and Jonathan spend the majority of the novel's third epoch attempting to outmaneuver and outsmart each other, in increasingly more preposterous shows of power and skill. This climaxes in Jack's final, most daring and complex escape from Newgate Prison, a feat accomplished "single-handed, in a few hours, and, as far as it could be ascertained, with imperfect implements, what it would have taken half a dozen men several days, provided with proper tools, to effect" (133). Although Jack is recaptured, this escape cements Jack's status as a celebrity, as well as bringing public sympathy firmly to his side in the conflict with Jonathan.

<17>Although Jonathan lives to see Jack's death, he perhaps receives the worse outcome. Jonathan suffers a vicious attack at the hands of Blueskin while gloating over Jack in prison, nearly dying of lacerations inflicted on his throat. Although he somewhat recovers, Jonathan is then targeted by the mob for his crimes against Jack, and forced to watch as his house and all earthly belongings are torched, a "maddening spectacle" that Ainsworth suggests incurs "torture equivalent to some of the crimes he had committed" (138). Although Ainsworth's novel is not explicit about the matter, Jonathan, despised by the public and distrusted by all, was historically hanged at Tyburn within a year of Jack Sheppard's death, an event Daniel Defoe

described as invoking “nothing but hollowing and huzzahs, as if it had been a triumph” (254). Although Jonathan and Jack’s deadly “game” is gruesome, the role of play-ethic in their struggle is clear. Jack and Jonathan certainly do not establish their masculine identity in relation to moral or civic law, but in relation to their competition with each other, a practice Deane locates amongst the pirates in *Treasure Island*, and identifies as essentially boyish in nature.

### **The Muscular Christian vs. The Eternal Boy: Thames Darrell and Jack Sheppard**

<18>If Jonathan Wild serves as one double for Jack Sheppard, another is found in the fictional character of Thames Darrell. Like Jack, Thames enters the narrative as an infant, the son of the mysterious figure Darrell. In the novel’s opening scenes in the Old Mint, Mr. Wood helps Darrell escape from Sir Rowland, who believes Darrell, thought to be lower class and title-less, has enticed his sister into an illicit affair.<sup>(1)</sup> After Darrell perishes in the pursuit, Mr. Wood adopts Thames as his own son, naming him in honor of a severe storm they both survive upon the River Thames. Thus, Jack and Thames are raised alongside each other, both working in Mr. Wood’s shop as carpentry apprentices. Their childhood provides ample opportunities for comparison, as Thames rises to the role of the favored son, while Jack is consistently chastised for laziness and vulgarity.

<19>Although *Jack Sheppard* was published about a decade before Kingsley’s ideas were solidified, Ainsworth’s depiction of Thames includes many of the attributes that would later come to constitute the Muscular Christian ideal (strength, physical beauty, courage), seemingly suggesting Thames as the novel’s more favorable model of young masculinity to the sensibilities of many mid-nineteenth-century readers. Even in adolescence, Thames gives “promise of a glorious manhood” (27). However, as the novel progresses, Thames proves to be essentially useless, although he is honorable and good. Unable to navigate a world without moral binaries, Thames’s personal narrative is advanced not by his own efforts, but by Jack’s bravery, reckless determination and morally questionable methods. To some degree, Lauren Gillingham addresses this conundrum in her article “Ainsworth’s ‘Jack Sheppard’ and the Crimes of History”:

Thames Darrell... stands in the novel as a much more conventional figure of the honorable, respectable gentleman-hero. Thames’s problem, however, is that he is thoroughly ineffectual. He identifies in adolescence with glorious military heroes of antiquity and styles himself in adulthood a courtly gallant of the Restoration—albeit fifty years after the fact. He would be the hero and commander of a civil society, yet he proves himself not only anachronistic but also repeatedly incapable of taking action. Thames pales next to the masculinized rogue Jack, who emerges as the true romance hero of the novel. (892)

Although Gillingham approaches Thames through the lens of the Restoration gentleman-hero, the tension she locates between the middle-class genteel masculinity Thames presents and the roguish, morally-compromising model Jack embodies remains valid when approaching the two in terms of the Muscular Christian and the imperial boy. Despite Thames’s presumed physical

prowess and moral uprightness, he is completely incapable of navigating the treacherous goings-on of London's underworld, an environment divorced from moral regulation and governed by competition. In Ainsworth's novel, it takes a Jack Sheppard to thwart the villain and restore balance, thus undermining the Muscular Christian in favor of the eternal boy.

<20>In his 1858 review of *Tom Brown's School Days*, Fitzjames Stephens asserts that Muscular Christian heroes were drawn with "the almost unconscious instinct to do good, and adorned, generally speaking, with every sort of athletic accomplishment," which proves to be a rather apt description of Thames (191). Ainsworth constructs Thames's moral and physical superiority in contrast to Jack, and often through lengthy comparisons, such as the following, in which he establishes the boys' opposing physicality:

The two friends contrasted strikingly with each other. In Darrell's open features, frankness and honour were written in legible characters; while, in Jack's physiognomy, cunning and knavery were as strongly imprinted. In all other respects they differed as materially. Jack could hardly be accounted as good-looking: Thames, on the contrary, was one of the handsomest boys possible. Jack's complexion was that of a gipsy; Darrell's as fresh and bright as a rose. Jack's mouth was coarse and large; Darrell's small and exquisitely carved, with the short, proud upper lip which belongs to the highest order of beauty. Jack's nose was broad and flat; Darrell's straight and fine as that of Antinous. The expression pervading the countenance of the one was vulgarity; of the other, that which is rarely found, except in persons of high birth. (27)

Here Ainsworth's fascination with physiognomy is demonstrated in full, aligning Thames with Classical standards of beauty and honor, while locating Jack's "cunning and knavery" within his "gipsy" complexion and primitive features. This ultimately proves to be ironic when Ainsworth reveals later in the narrative that Jack and Thames are in fact cousins, Jack's mother having been kidnapped from her family by gypsies as a small child. Thus, Jack and Thames share the same "high birth," despite the discrepancies in their appearances.

<21>However, even this early on, Ainsworth hints that the differences between the two might be less straightforward than they appear, noting a certain attraction and joy in Jack's roguishness. He writes that Jack's "physiognomy resembled one of those vagabond heads which Murillo delighted to paint... faces that almost make one in love with roguery, they seem so full of vivacity and enjoyment" (25). While Ainsworth is explicit that Thames is the more wholesome of the two, he suggests that Jack is by far the more fascinating, effective, and even the more likable.

<22>Leaving physical appearances behind, Ainsworth later details the possessions in the boys' shared playroom to further the contrast between them:

The characters of the youthful occupants of the room might be detected in every article it contained. Darrell's peculiar bent of mind was exemplified in a rusty broadsword, a tall grenadier's cap, a musket without lock or ramrod, a belt and cartouch-box, with

other matters evincing a decided military taste. Among his books, Plutarch's Lives, and the Histories of Great Commanders... Jack Sheppard's library consisted of a few ragged and well-thumbed volumes abstracted from the tremendous chronicles bequeathed to the world by those Froissart's and Holinsheds of crime—the Ordinaries of Newgate. His vocal collection comprised a couple flash songs... while his extraordinary mechanical skill was displayed in... another model of the pillory at Fleet Bridge; and a third of the permanent gibbet at Tyburn. (38)

Here again Darrell embodies the Muscular Christian, his fascination with chivalry and militarism demonstrated in his rusty broadsword and reading material, whereas Jack's "vulgarity" is reinforced, his fascination with popular sensation culture made clear.

<23>Ainsworth also utilizes these early pages to establish Jack and Thames's differing areas of strength. While Thames can claim the moral high ground, and is by far more physically impressive,<sup>(2)</sup> Ainsworth is unflinchingly clear that Jack is intellectually superior, hinted at above in Jack's "extraordinary mechanical skill." This is demonstrated in a scene where the boys get into a fist fight over Winnifred Wood (Mr and Mrs Wood's daughter), whom they both are attracted to (although Winnifred vastly prefers Thames—she views Jack with a mixture of fear and repulsion). Ainsworth notes that "Jack was no match for his opponent, for, though he possessed more science, he was deficient in weight and strength" (39). Despite Jack's "science," Thames firmly defeats Jack in this altercation. However, Ainsworth utilizes the ensuing events to suggest that Jack's intelligence is the more useful attribute.

<24>Having discovered the truth of Thames's identity, Jonathan Wild plots his murder with Sir Rowland, to ensure that Sir Rowland's title and possessions are not passed on to Thames, as Sir Rowland's father intended in his will. When the two boys stumble into Jonathan Wild's hastily laid trap,<sup>(3)</sup> Thames, unsurprisingly, attempts to fight his way out, while Jack gives the appearance of cheerfully complying, and even abetting in Thames's "arrest," acting "utterly reckless and insensible," whistling and singing, so that he will be permitted to accompany Thames to prison (51). While Thames is willing to accept the situation on surface appearances, Jack has the insight to further investigate the "charges," eavesdropping on Jonathan Wild's machinations to row Thames out to sea, and throw him overboard. Here, Jack's "vulgarity" and "cunning," which Ainsworth has seemingly posed as negative, are what give the boys their best chance of survival, beginning to challenge what characteristics the reader is meant to admire. Once locked up, Jack reveals what he has learned to Thames:

Listen to me, Thames. You're in more serious a scrape than you imagine. I overheard Jonathan Wild's instructions to Quilt Arnold, and though he spoke in slang, and in an under tone, my quick ears, and acquaintance with thieves' lingo, enabled me to make out every word he uttered... Before morning, unless, we can effect an escape, you'll be kidnapped, or murdered, and your disappearance attributed to the negligence of the constable. (53-54)

Whereas before Jack was chastised for sneaking off to the Old Mint to seek low company, here the criminal knowledge he has gained doing so, in addition to his naturally keen perception, reveals the truth of the circumstance that Thames could never have ascertained. Here Jack is inserted into a heroic plot, instead of the villainous one readers may be expecting, caring for Thames rather than seeing only to his own interests. The escape the boys mount, which is again indebted to Jack's ingenious and quick thinking, is ultimately unsuccessful, with Thames thrown overboard and presumed dead following the incident. However, this early event asserts that Thames's mode of masculinity is not conducive to surviving Jonathan Wild's sinister playground, just as it would be equally inviable in the not-so-civilized playground of the British Empire at the turn of the century.

<25>The inherent differences in Jack and Thames's characters largely influence their separate journeys to adulthood. Jack leaves the Woods' employ to follow Jonathan Wild into criminality, eventually becoming the most renowned housebreaker in London. By the time the novel's third epoch resumes in Jack's twenty-first year, he is described by Mr. Kneebone as:

the talk and terror of the whole town. The ladies can't sleep in their beds for him; and the men, they daren't go to bed at all. He's the most daring and expert housebreaker that ever used a crow-bar. He laughs at locks and bolts; and the more carefully you guard your premises from him, the more likely are you to ensure an attack. His exploits and escapes are in every body's mouth. He has been lodged in every round-house in the metropolis, and has broken out of them all, and boats that no prison can hold him. (70)

Although this description is an account of Jack's criminality, the almost joyful fascination Ainsworth hints at in Jack's adolescence is also present in this supposed denunciation.

<26>In contrast to Jack's rise to notoriety, Thames's late adolescence and early adulthood assume the structure of the traditional Muscular Christian adventure narrative, with the slight deviation in that it begins with him presumed dead. Upon his reunion with the Woods in adulthood, Thames later recounts the ensuing events:

Carried out to sea by Van Galgebok, and thrown overboard, while struggling with the waves, he had been picked up by a French fishing boat, and carried to Ostend. After encountering various hardships and privations for a long time, during which he had no means of communicating with England, he, at length, found his way to Paris, where he was taken notice of by Cardinal Dubois, who employed him as one of his secretaries, and subsequently advanced to the service of Philip of Orleans, from whom he received a commission. On the death of his royal patron, he resolved to return to his own country; and, after various delays, which had postponed it to the present time, he had succeeded in accomplishing his object. (74)

Thames thus fulfills the masculine adventure narrative in that he forays out into the world to establish his masculine prowess (albeit unwillingly), and distinguishes himself among other men on the battlefield, earning glory before returning home to be reunited with his family and

childhood sweetheart Winnifred, thus rejoining the domestic sphere.<sup>(4)</sup> However, this happy ending is complicated by Jonathan's learning of Thames's resurfacing, and Sir Rowland's vows to finish the job started a decade prior. Despite the supposed manly ability demonstrated during Thames's time in France, Thames is unsure how to counter Jonathan's threat, since he is governed by both moral and civic law, as opposed to the play-ethic codes of Jonathan and Jack. For example, as children, when Jack steals Lady Rowland's jewel case, Thames insists he return it, exclaiming to Jack that "I want to save you from disgrace and ruin," to which Jack casually and "contemptuously" replies that "nobody's disgraced and ruined unless he's found out" (39). Since Jack is more than familiar with the moral gray areas necessary to properly "play" Jonathan's "game," he is able to thwart Jonathan's plans to assassinate Thames, and recover the documents revealing Thames's true identity as the Marquis de Chatillon. It is only after Jack has repeatedly sacrificed his safety, and ultimately his life, to ensure the verification of Thames's identity and security that Thames is able to peacefully marry Winnifred, and successfully re-enter the domestic.

<27>In conclusion, the contrast between Thames and Jack is crucial in that although Thames's masculinity may have been sufficient while abroad in France, he is helpless to fight his own battles and settle his own affairs in a world that operates by play-ethic, rather than moral and civil law. Likewise, while Jack's roguishness is denounced as defying middle-class respectability, it is that same roguishness that allows him to successfully navigate the challenges and threats presented by Jonathan Wild and the Old Mint. Thames and Jack thus reveal significant differences in the manner that mid and late Victorians conceived of boyhood. While mid-Victorian Muscular Christians sought to teach boys how to behave morally and develop into good men, imperial boyhood stressed competition and wiliness in order to prepare boys for conquest and survival in Britain's vast imperial "playground." Although *Jack Sheppard* is contemporary with the rise of the Muscular Christian, Ainsworth's novel depicts eighteenth-century London as governed by its own codes of honor that resemble those of savages, boys and criminals, thus directly oppositional to the mid-Victorian illusion of England as inherently polite and civilized.<sup>(5)</sup> Although this functions more as entertainment in Ainsworth's novel, rather than a method of ideological education, *Jack Sheppard* anticipates the ideas of Imperial Boyhood in that the Muscular Christian is presented as idealistic, but ultimately impractical, while the eternal boy triumphs, not in spite of, but because of his boyish attributes.

#### Endnotes

(1)Darrell and Rowland's sister are in fact married, and Darrell's true identity is the Marquis de Chatillon.<sup>(^)</sup>

(2)In both historical accounts and Ainsworth's novel, Jack Sheppard is recorded as small and lean, not exceeding 5' 4" in height. Jack's slim and compact frame, causing him to seem perpetually boyish, were partially what enabled his seemingly-impossible escapes.<sup>(^)</sup>

(3)Jonathan Wild's murder plot involves a false arrest of Thames on the charge of stealing Lady Trafford's jewel box, which in reality Jack has pocketed.<sup>(^)</sup>

(4)This is the general narrative arc of Kingsley's *Westward Ho*, and many other novels participating in, or reacting against, the Muscular Christian and associated traditions.(^)

(5)A concept of middle-class respectability, which valued "sobriety, thrift, cleanliness of the person and tidiness of the home, good manners, respect for the law, honesty in business, and, it need hardly be added, chastity" (Altick 175).(^)

#### Works Cited

Adams, James Eli. *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood*. Cornell UP, 1995.

Ainsworth, William Harrison. *Jack Sheppard*. CreateSpace, 2013.

Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas*. Norton, 1973.

Beggs, Thomas. *An Inquiry Into the Extent and Causes of Juvenile Depravity*. London: Tyler and Reed Printers, 1849.

Buckley, Matthew. "Sensations of Celebrity: 'Jack Sheppard' and the Mass Audience." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2002, pp. 423–463.

Deane, Bradley. "Imperial Boyhood: Piracy and the Play-Ethic." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2011, pp. 689-714. 23 Apr. 2016.

Defoe, Daniel. *Mist's Weekly Journal*, 1725, p. 254. 29 May 1725.

Dowling, Linda. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*. Cornell UP, 1997.

Gillingham, Lauren. "Ainsworth's 'Jack Sheppard' and the Crimes of History." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2009, pp. 879–906.

Hall, Donald E. "Muscular Christianity: Reading and Writing the Male Social Body." *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, edited Donald E. Hall, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 3-13.

Hughes, Thomas. *Tom Brown's School Days*. CreateSpace, 2015.

Mackay, Charles. *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*. Routledge and Co., 1856.

Rosen, David. "The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness." *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, edited by Donald E. Hall, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, pp. 17-44.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Columbia UP, 1985.

Springhall, John. "'Pernicious Reading'? 'The Penny Dreadful' as Scapegoat for Late-Victorian Juvenile Crime." *Victorian Periodicals Review*, vol. 27, no. 4, 1994, pp. 326-49. 23 Apr. 2016.

Stephens, Fitzjames. Rev. of *Tom Brown's School Days*. *Edinburgh Review*, 1858, pp. 172-93.