

The Corruption of Youth: Juvenile Delinquency and the Boy Detective Hero

The 1860s heralded a significant transition in children's literature. Peter Hunt argues that:

Conventionally, the period between the publication of Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1862), Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1864), and the First World War has been regarded, as we have seen, as the first golden age of children's books. [...] Distinctively, the books of this period are for a recognizable childhood, and begin to use a tone that is increasingly "single address"; the books become more complex, and any didactic intent (which is, perhaps, inescapable) is a poor second to entertainment. (*An Introduction to Children's Literature* 59)

This focus on entertainment over didacticism and the increasingly child-centric status of children's literature coincided with a rise in working-class literacy and a spate of cheap publications—particularly fictional forms such as the "penny dreadful," which flourished in the 1860s and was aimed primarily at young, working-class readers. This form, with its criminalised boy protagonists, offered a representation and became

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perceived as a cause of the growing independence of working-class boys from, and their rebellion against, middle-class adult supervision and influence. The “penny dreadful” tradition saw boy protagonists and boy readers alike move from a position of submission to adult rules and role models towards one of quasi-adult independence, unchecked by moral, legal and social codes. In the eyes of middle-class adult moralists, this was a dangerous transition—from order to chaos, from respectability to delinquency, from sheltered childhood to premature adulthood—and one that needed to be stopped in its tracks. When the boy detective arrived on the scene in the 1860s in the form of Ernest Keen, hero of *The Boy Detective; or, the Crimes of London. A Romance of Modern Times* (1865–1866), he did so in response to the moral panic surrounding “penny dreadfuls” and became a direct opponent of the boy criminal heroes prevalent in this apparently harmful form of literature.

This chapter identifies the origins of crime fiction for the young, particularly through the development of the “penny dreadful” tradition, and explores the middle-class backlash against such texts. It examines *The Boy Detective*’s attempts to counteract the perceived damage done by boy criminal heroes of “penny dreadfuls” through the creation of a moral alternative in Ernest Keen. The boy detective undoubtedly begins his literary existence as a positive role model for impressionable working-class boy readers, condemning criminal literature and behaviour and encouraging boy characters and readers alike to develop into honest, hard-working, patriotic and morally incorruptible members of society. However, despite the apparent popularity of *The Boy Detective*—the length of the serial’s run to 72 weekly parts and the text’s adaptation for the stage by William Travers in 1876 are testimony to this¹—the establishment of the juvenile detective character in children’s literature was to take some considerable time. *The Boy Detective* appeared several decades before juvenile detective fiction began to develop clearly in the wake of Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories in the *Strand Magazine*. The latter part of this chapter begins to account for the boy detective genre’s failure to flourish in the period directly following the publication of *The Boy Detective*. It does so by exploring the tensions inherent in this early text’s attempts to satisfy a dual readership—both the middle-class adult critics and the working-class child readers—in its construction of the boy detective hero. It also offers some potential literary and social explanations for the disappearance of this figure for almost thirty years following Ernest Keen’s brief foray into the boy detective genre in the mid-1860s.

THE ORIGINS OF JUVENILE CRIME FICTION

The 1860s was not only a crucial decade in the establishment of a new, entertaining form of children's literature but also in the development of detective fiction. In particular, the rise of sensation fiction—a genre closely linked to crime fiction—ensured that this was a period of experimentation with the fictional detective. In parallel with the emergence of the amateur female investigator in the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Mrs. Henry Wood, a more professional female detective model appeared in the form of Mrs. G. in Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* (1864) and Mrs. Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864), often attributed to William Stephens Hayward.² Unlike their counterparts in sensation fiction, these detective heroines have connections with the police force and receive payment for their work. The emergence of the fictional female detective, long before the establishment of a real-life equivalent in the British police force, demonstrates a willingness in crime literature of the 1860s to extend the investigative role beyond the realms of the contemporary reality, inviting fictional pretenders, as well as legitimate candidates, to fill the position.³ It was in such an environment that the boy detective made his first tentative steps into the realm of crime fiction.

Over thirty years before the creation of Sherlock Holmes's notorious Baker Street Irregulars, the boy detective appeared as an assistant to the adult investigator in Collins's short story "The Fourth Poor Traveller" (*Household Words*, 1854), later republished as "The Lawyer's Story of a Stolen Letter" (1856). Fourteen-year-old Tom, acting primarily as a tracker or spy for the lawyer-detective protagonist, and lauded as "the smallest, quickest, quietist, sharpest, stealthiest little snake of a chap that ever dogged a gentleman's steps," nevertheless plays a peripheral role in the narrative ("The Fourth Poor Traveller" 22). Equally fleeting is the appearance of street urchin Jack Doyle as a "servant" to Mrs. Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. After saving him from a life of thievery, Mrs. Paschal employs Jack to spy on a suspect, an activity that occupies no more than a few lines before the young assistant disappears from the narrative altogether (*Revelations of a Lady Detective* 101–104). More notable are the later exploits of Collins's Octavius Guy, better known as "Gooseberry," in *The Moonstone* (1868). Gooseberry, a "poor little wretch" who is, nevertheless, "one of the sharpest boys in London" (*The Moonstone* 208), plays a more independent and integral part in the

detective plot than his prototype, Tom, or Mrs. Paschal's Jack. However, despite Sergeant Cuff's assertion that "[o]ne of these days [...] that boy will do great things in my late profession" (211), Gooseberry's role in the narrative is limited to a single chapter. As a child in an adult crime narrative, he is condemned to a secondary role, and his detective input is inevitably limited.

It was the boy detective's appearance in fiction targeted specifically at children that enabled him to take on a central role. This opportunity arose in the 1860s through the emergence of cheap, serialised crime narratives written predominantly for children and retrospectively labelled as "penny dreadfuls" by middle-class opponents of penny fiction in the 1870s. In his *Slang Dictionary* of 1874, John Camden Hotten defines "penny dreadful" as "an expressive term for those penny publications which depend more upon sensationalism than upon merit, artistic or literary, for success" (250). As John Springhall notes, the "penny dreadful" label covers a vast range of cheap fiction, beginning with the gothic and criminal tales, sometimes known as "penny bloods," which targeted working-class adults in the 1830s and 1840s. Commentators have also used the term to refer to the penny serials aimed more specifically at child readers in the 1860s and the juvenile story papers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics* 42). Springhall also acknowledges that the form extends beyond criminal narratives to other genres, including "historical and adventure stories, school stories, Robinsonnades, rags to riches stories, and pirate stories" (*Youth* 44). By contrast, here the term "penny dreadful" refers specifically to the criminal-centric penny serials of the 1860s aimed primarily at a juvenile audience and often produced by the Newsagents' Publishing Company (NPC).

These "penny dreadful" crime narratives arose from a wider tradition of crime fiction that, from the 1830s onwards, dealt sympathetically with the lives and exploits of criminal protagonists. The Newgate novels of the 1830s and 1840s, for example, often focused on notorious eighteenth-century highwaymen and robbers. Critics condemned such fiction for glamorising crime and romanticising criminals and, consequently, for being a "low" form of literature, unworthy of its middle-class readers (Hollingsworth 14; Pykett 29–30). F.S. Schwarzbach recognises that anxieties about the "lowness" of Newgate fiction were not limited to its potential effect upon the morals and behaviour of its predominantly middle-class audience, but extended to "the fear of downward slippage into

lower literary and cultural forms,” providing sensational, pro-criminal entertainment for an impressionable working-class audience (233). This fear was realised, in particular, through the fictionalised representation of real-life criminal Jack Sheppard, an eighteenth-century thief, notorious for his multiple jailbreaks before his execution in November 1724 (Springhall, *Youth* 164–165). Harrison Ainsworth’s Newgate novel *Jack Sheppard* (*Bentley’s Miscellany*, 1839–1840) revived interest in Sheppard and prompted a host of penny-issue imitations, such as *Life of Jack Sheppard, the Housebreaker* (1840), *The Life and Adventures of Jack Sheppard* (1845) and *Jack Sheppard; or, London in the Last Century. A Romance of Reality* (1847). From the late 1830s onwards, Jack Sheppard also became the focus of various cheap theatre productions called “penny gaffs” that, according to Springhall, were especially popular with “poor, out-of-work boys, young labourers, errand boys, shop boys and girls, milliners’ girls, apprentices and the ubiquitous costers” (*Youth* 21). By the 1840s, therefore, some sensationalised and sympathetic accounts of criminal exploits specifically targeted a lower-class audience.

As the nineteenth century progressed, entertaining, lower-class literature proliferated and thrived, helped by rapidly decreasing production costs. Technological advances in printing,⁴ in combination with the removal of the advertisement duty (1853) and the stamp duty on newspapers (1855) and the repeal of the paper excise duty (1861), all contributed to the proliferation of penny serial fiction (Springhall, “Disseminating Impure Literature” 567–568). Low production costs allowed for low retail prices and this, combined with the significant increase in literacy throughout the nineteenth century even before Forster’s Education Act (1870), ensured a sustained mass readership for penny-part fiction. While serialised penny fiction initially targeted adult readers, it soon gained popularity with the younger elements of the working class, and by the 1860s young readers were the dominant audience for this type of literature.

There were several reasons for the growth of a child readership for penny fiction in the mid-nineteenth century. Mass urbanisation resulted in a significant increase in the number of young people living in London and other industrial cities. Many of these youngsters, as Springhall reports, became part of “a mass of unspecialized ‘boy labour,’” employed by a host of small-scale businesses and preferred by employers for the lowness of their wages in comparison to those of adult workers (*Youth* 46). This employment afforded boys an economic

autonomy that enabled them to purchase their own reading material regularly, and cheap installment fiction became an obvious candidate on which to spend their earnings. Moreover, there was a significant increase in educational provision for working-class children in the early-to-mid nineteenth century. This development, along with the implementation of the Revised Code (1862)—a system of “payment by results” based on each individual pupil’s attendance rate and examination performance—ensured a greater focus in school upon reading, writing and arithmetic (Stephens 7–8). The spread of youth literacy to the working class and the overall availability and improvement of education for the young, coupled with the large proportion of young people with a small disposable income earned through casual labour, meant that the potential youth market for penny serials was strong. Springhall observes that, as adult readers began to reject “penny-blood”-style fiction in the mid-nineteenth century in favour of cheap Sunday newspapers and weekly illustrated magazines featuring serial stories, so publishers and authors of the newly emerging “penny dreadful” tradition increasingly began to focus upon the working-class child reader (“Disreputable Adolescent Reading” 103–104).

Narratives celebrating highwaymen and robber heroes appealed to working-class youths by providing them with exciting, sensational stories and anti-establishment outlaw heroes—the perfect escapist antidote to their lives of monotonous obedience to adult authority figures and, more broadly, their submission to the ruling classes. As working-class boys became firmly established as the prime market for “penny dreadfuls” in the 1860s, juvenile characters were introduced as the protagonists of these criminal narratives. The form that had previously depicted notorious highwaymen, brigands and thieves as its adult heroes now created equivalent boy protagonists. Most of these figures were located amongst the lowest orders of the city slums and often represented in the errand-boy roles with which many of the young readers of their adventures could identify. Successful serials in this mode included *Charley Wag: The New Jack Sheppard* (1860–1861), whose eponymous hero is a boy of unknown parentage, lured into a life of crime in the London slums. Springhall defines *Charley Wag* as a “London low-life ‘dreadful,’” along with other serials that feature fictionalised gangs of street urchins sometimes forced into a life of crime by their desperate circumstances, such as *The Wild Boys of London; or, The Children of Night* (1864–1866) and *The Poor Boys of London; or, Driven to Crime. A Life Story for the*

People (1866) (*Youth* 59–64).⁵ There were equivalent titles for lower-class girl readers, too, with female heroines, such as *The Work Girls of London* (1865), *Rose Mortimer, or The Ballet-Girl's Revenge* (c. 1865) and *Fanny White and Her Friend Jack Rawlings: A Romance of a Young Lady Thief and a Boy Burglar* (1865), although boy heroes still dominated the form. Since, for the most part, “penny dreadfuls” featured boy protagonists and were condemned for their violent and criminal content, they were primarily aimed at male readers. In particular, they targeted those boys and young men in casual employment who had the economic autonomy to purchase these publications regularly and the leisure time to read them unhindered—freedoms not often afforded to their female counterparts, who were usually confined to the domestic realm. By the 1860s, therefore, an early juvenile crime fiction, albeit in a highly sensationalised, criminal-centric form, had a firmly established boy readership.

“PENNY DREADFULS” AND MORAL PANICS

With the rise of penny fiction and, in particular, the criminal-centric “penny dreadful,” middle-class adults became concerned about the potentially corrupting effect of such literature upon impressionable young readers. In the eyes of its opponents, the “penny dreadful” form incited juvenile delinquency and, consequently, had to be obliterated in order to safeguard the positive moral development of young people—especially working-class boy readers, whom critics considered to be particularly susceptible to the bad examples set by “penny dreadfuls.” This moral panic is unsurprising, considering that, from the early-to-mid nineteenth century, middle-class social reformers became increasingly aware of and concerned with the state of childhood—particularly the poor quality of life of working-class children. Charles Dickens played a significant role in bringing the plight of the children of the poor into the public consciousness, charting the struggles of destitute street urchins in several of his best-known fictional works. The most notable example is, of course, *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress*, originally serialised in *Bentley's Miscellany* from 1837–1839. Drawing on the Newgate novel pattern, it follows the trials and tribulations of orphan Oliver from the workhouse, through a brief apprenticeship to a cruel master, to his descent into a life of crime as he joins a gang of boy pickpockets. According to Peter Coveney, the novel “represented the feelings of an age anxious about the miserable condition of its children” (93).

Recognition of the terrible conditions endured by the lower classes, coupled with the growth of a nostalgic idealisation of childhood, generated in middle-class adults a sense of responsibility towards socially inferior youngsters. Part of middle-class moralists and philanthropists' response to the deprivation and depravation of lower-class children was to introduce legislation that allowed them to remove children from the apparently evil influence of their families, placing them instead in state-run institutions such as ragged or industrial schools, group homes and reformatories. As Claudia Nelson observes, "All these institutions were intended to redress the faults of domestic life among the lower orders by substituting a loving and responsible discipline for the chaotic and probably criminal parenthood that the children in question had presumably experienced" (73). In many cases, therefore, state intervention served to impose middle-class values and behavioural codes upon potentially delinquent working-class youths. State intervention increased, too, in the lives of children who remained within the family and who were not obviously "delinquent." Restrictions on youth labour, such as the Factory Act of 1833, aimed to protect and improve the lives of all working-class children (Pinchbeck and Hewitt 404). This regulation of children's working hours helped to promote the spread of education and literacy amongst the lower classes, as young labourers now had more time and energy to devote to elementary studies. Thus, despite the apparent expansion of state control over working-class children, the concomitant rise in literacy afforded the lower classes a new level of freedom in their pursuit of knowledge and entertainment, as they now had access to a whole range of literary material that they had hitherto been unable to read. Middle-class moralists, therefore, became increasingly anxious about the use to which the masses were putting their newfound literacy skills.

When discussing working-class reading habits in 1858, Margaret Oliphant laments that:

It is the tale which is wanted; give but that, and the qualities of mind concerned in its production are quite a secondary consideration. The characters may be the merest puppets of wood; the springs of the machinery may betray themselves at every movement; the language may be absurd, the invention miserable; yet if it is a story, it will give a certain amount of pleasure to the dormant intelligences. (205)

The surge in popularity of “penny dreadful” fiction amongst lower-class children in the 1860s proved that Oliphant’s fears were not unfounded. Many of these “penny dreadfuls” fell into the category of the absurd, unimaginative and poorly constructed literature against which she was protesting. A more direct indictment of “penny dreadful” fiction came from Scottish publisher Alexander Strahan, shortly after the passage of the Education Act in 1870. While discussing well-known “penny dreadful” serials such as *The Wild Boys of London* (1864–1866), Strahan asks, “[i]s it worth while [*sic*] to agitate for compulsory education, if, when people have learnt to read, they will content themselves with such poor innutritious stuff?” (458–459). Here Strahan echoes Oliphant’s earlier criticism, condemning “penny dreadfuls” for their inferior literary quality and identifying them as a potential hindrance to the intellectual development of working-class readers.

Of greater concern to middle-class critics, however, was the immoral criminal content of these “penny dreadful” serials at a time when moralists and reformers were beginning to show an interest in the status and welfare of lower-class young offenders and in their motivations for committing crimes. “Penny dreadfuls,” and the Newgate novels and “penny bloods” that inspired them, were often brought forward as proof or explanation of the guilt of young offenders in court cases, and their corrupting influence was widely reported in the press. An account entitled “Youthful Adepts in Crime” in the *Reformatory and Refuge Journal* in January 1864 tells an all-too-familiar story of the impact of the criminal heroes of Newgate novels and their penny-fiction derivatives upon two boy thieves. These boys planned to murder a cab driver and then steal his horse and cab in an attempt to evade capture: “Upon their examination, the lads confessed that their imagination had been excited by the perusal of such works of fiction as the *Life of Dick Turpin*, *Jack Sheppard*, *Paul Clifford* and others” (Carpenter, *Our Convicts* 75). A satirical article in *Punch*, reporting on the trial of two boy burglars, makes the same link between child readership of crime literature and the “real-life” perpetration of juvenile crime:

They had hitherto borne a good character, but lately they had had their minds poisoned by the reading of infamous publications, such as the “*Juvenile Highwayman*,” and other things of that stamp, and he [the judge] believed that they had been the cause of their present position. (Anon, “How We Breed Our Burglars” 248)

Here, the criticism relates more directly to the “penny dreadful” tradition, since the text charged with inciting the boys to commit their crimes features a child criminal protagonist.

By contrast, in his analysis of “penny dreadfuls” in *The Seven Curses of London* (1869), James Greenwood, though heavily critical of the worth of such fiction, challenges the so-called relationship between “penny dreadfuls” and juvenile crime. He suggests that apparently penitent young offenders, pandering to the prejudices of law enforcement figures, often used “penny dreadfuls” as a convenient scapegoat for their criminal behaviour (112–113). Meanwhile, an article in *The Bookseller* in 1868, though not offering an outright defence, moderates the views expressed in the widespread accounts of the corrupting influence of “penny dreadfuls” upon young readers. It allows that “some mischief may have arisen—not so much by making young thieves, as by familiarising the juvenile mind with crimes of a certain character, and investing those crimes with a false halo of romance” (Anon, “Mischievous Literature” 445). This, however, was not a widespread view in the mid-to-late nineteenth century where, for the most part, middle-class moralists still argued that the glorification of crime and criminals in “penny dreadfuls” lured the impressionable, working-class child readers of these texts into a life of crime.⁶

Opinions varied on how to combat the pernicious influence of “penny dreadfuls.” The article in *Punch* suggests, rather drastically, though with deliberate hyperbole:

Works such as the *Boy Burglar*, or the *Infantile Assassin*, should not be suffered to go forth, without having the word “POISON!” stamped upon the cover; and it might further somewhat tend to the suppression of the evil, if, after being branded, every such book should be burnt. (“How We Breed Our Burglars” 248)

Though obviously tongue-in-cheek, this comment captures the mood and opinion of the most ardent critics of the “penny dreadful.” More realistic and less extreme is the advice proffered, in the *Reformatory and Refuge Journal*, to authors of popular crime narratives:

May our popular novelists [...], if they deal in criminal subjects at all, state facts as they are, with the veracious accompaniments of the criminal’s habitual, trembling, apprehensive dread of discovery, his frequent

subjection to poverty, hunger, cold and fatigue, ending in the privation of personal liberty and severe discipline, or still more severe monotony of prison life. (Carpenter, *Our Convicts* 75)

Crime literature for the young, the article argues, must perform a monitory function, offering its readers a warning about the dire consequences of committing crimes. Consequently, this account suggests, the most objectionable feature of “penny dreadful” fiction is not the presence of crime and criminality in the text, but its glamorisation.

The publication of *The Boy Detective* in 1865–1866 marked the emergence of a new type of “penny dreadful,” which responded to critics’ fears about the potential immorality of the form and attempted to assuage their anxieties about the presence and representation of criminality in the narrative. The denunciation of crime and criminals moderates the narrative’s sensational crime content, positioning the reader firmly on the side of the heroic upholder of the law—the boy detective protagonist. Consequently, *The Boy Detective* is a seminal text in the history of juvenile crime fiction, pushing the genre in a new, morally viable, direction. The boy detective protagonist therefore plays a crucial role in the attempt to transform crime literature into respectable fare for a young audience and to steer boy readers away from the path of juvenile delinquency and towards an acceptance of middle-class behavioural codes and values.

THE BOY DETECTIVE AS MORAL EXEMPLAR

The Boy Detective is the first “penny dreadful”—and indeed the earliest British text aimed at children—to feature a clearly defined boy detective hero.⁷ Ernest Keen, the text’s fourteen-year-old protagonist, has “a passion for the detection of crime” (56) and operates as a detective, both independently and alongside the police, throughout the narrative. Ernest stands apart from many of the lower-class boy characters—criminals and quasi-detectives alike—that frequent the “penny dreadful.” While some of these characters turn out to have loftier origins after growing up in ignorance of their true parentage in unsavoury slum environments, Ernest’s middle-class status is clear from the beginning. The opening installments of *The Boy Detective* reveal that Ernest belongs to a wealthy, middle-class family—his father is a retired banker. However, after being sent away to boarding school, running away to sea and

returning to London with an injury that means he cannot work, Ernest's wicked stepmother does not welcome him back (4). Instead, she drives him out of his home and onto the streets of London. Before he went to sea, Ernest had already proved his detective prowess by working cases for Inspector Sharp and Sergeant Hawks, earning the soubriquet of "the Boy Detective" for his troubles. When Ernest's father is murdered and the police arrest Ernest for the crime, he decides to take up the role of boy detective once again. In this position, he determines to bring to justice the true culprit, Gaspard Massillon, a counterfeiter and leader of a criminal organisation called the Shadow Band. Acquitted of his father's murder, Ernest brings together a host of street urchins to form a gang called the Band of Light, in direct opposition, as their name suggests, to the Shadow Band.⁸

The murder of Ernest's father, Abel Keen, frames the narrative and drives the plot, but Ernest's mission is not a purely selfish one. Ernest seeks justice rather than personal vengeance for his father's death. He is concerned with the greater good—namely, the protection of law-abiding citizens from the criminal classes, the punishment of the wicked and the preservation of law and order. Any doubts about Ernest's true motivations for pursuing his father's murderer are dispelled on the final page of the narrative as Ernest attends Massillon's execution:

His presence was neither animated by a spirit of vengeance, nor did he abandon himself to a ferocious expression of joy.

Gaspard Massillon recognised the detective, and casting a look towards him seemed to infer that he was now making all the atonement in his power for the wrong he had inflicted, and that as he could not expect forgiveness at his hands, the presence of his enemy at such a time was unpleasant and painful to him.

Ernest Keen, whose noble nature would not suffer a vindictive feeling to add to the pangs the miserable wretch was now suffering, instantly withdrew. (566)

Ernest's role as a detective is not simply the means to an end, nor is it for his own gratification. Rather, it is a key part of his moral and social identity. As a detective, Ernest is committed to public justice over personal vengeance. He derives no pleasure from Massillon's suffering but views his punishment as necessary to the efficient operation of the

justice system. Moreover, although his primary aim is always to capture Massillon, the Boy Detective solves many other cases and detains a host of criminal figures in the process, often working alongside the police, who have great respect for his abilities.⁹ As the antithesis of the boy criminal heroes prevalent in “penny dreadful” fiction—a law enforcer rather than a law breaker—Ernest values society over self and moral obligation over personal gain. While critics of “penny dreadfuls” charged the boy criminal hero with inciting boy readers to crime, Ernest Keen, the Boy Detective, offers a more positive behavioural model to his young readers.

Through the representation of its boy hero, *The Boy Detective* plays an active role in the moral and social education of its readers as it obviously and deliberately disseminates middle-class values to its predominantly lower-class child audience. In his role as detective, Ernest Keen becomes a middle-class exemplar who conditions both his fictional juvenile acquaintances and the real-life child readers of the text to emulate his behaviour and adopt his beliefs. Ernest’s ideological function materialises early in the text when, through an aside in a footnote, the boy detective protagonist appeals directly to child readers to give up pernicious literature in favour of his own alternative moralising narrative:

Boys, I am one of yourselves, and, like yourselves, have taken great delight in reading the dashing adventures of Pirates, Highwaymen, and Robbers, and have sometimes felt satisfaction when the bold thief has beaten the thief-taker. You will, in this story, see the other side of the picture, and will learn how a noble band of lads joined together to lend a helping hand to those who were tempted by poverty and hunger to become dishonest, and to hunt down the most terrible who dared to corrupt others by their villainy. Should you find as much pleasure in startling deeds of daring, performed in the cause of honesty, as you do in the courage of great robbers; if you acknowledge how noble how great and brave an honest thief hater may be, great is the reward of your loving comrade—Ernest Keen, the Boy Detective. (21)

Through the words of its hero, *The Boy Detective* disassociates itself from its more morally ambiguous “penny dreadful” counterparts and instead openly establishes itself as a direct opponent of the criminal “dreadfuls.”

In a series of speeches to his Band of Light and conversations with his closest confederates, Ernest becomes a spokesperson against the “penny

dreadful,” consistently denouncing such texts. When Ernest’s friend Stumpy Sam rushes off to buy an installment of a Jack Sheppard penny serial, Ernest protests, “Couldn’t you read these things if they were better written—if the stories were not so wild and improbable, so black and bloodthirsty?” (205). In a later conversation with Mr. Goldring, who eventually becomes a patron of the Band of Light, Ernest criticises criminal “dreadfuls” for arousing in boys an appetite for violence:

[O]nce the tiger has tasted human blood he is never satisfied unless he is tearing flesh, crunching bones and lapping gore. The boys are very tigers for a romance of crime, they will have murder and fire and fury! (258–259)

Ernest goes on to predict that boys will soon reject these tales in favour of more palatable fiction, which focuses upon “‘boys’ and not brigands” who “did not cut other’s throats, but conquered themselves” (259). Ernest’s attack upon criminal “dreadfuls” is supported by authorial asides that speak out against the popular heroes of this offending literature, such as Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard, emphasising their actual status as villains and their superficial glorification in penny fiction. A particularly vehement authorial aside calls boy readers to revise their opinions of such “heroes” and to see them for what they really are:

Jack Sheppard was a fine fellow, so was Blue-skin, so was bold Dick Turpin! Granted, granted; if you please you shall have it so, in spite of common sense and common honesty; but are there no other fine, daring, dashing fellows in the world? Are heroes confined to that pestilent class who pick pockets, cut throats, and go to the gaol for their fine deeds? Surely yes boys! At once avow that you have had enough of the robber gang and pirate crew, and want to hear a bit about some other characters. (298)

The Boy Detective, of course, is one of these “other characters”—“fine, daring, dashing,” without the immorality or criminal proclivities of popular robber and highwayman heroes.

Through the figure of the middle-class Boy Detective, the text not only conditions its working-class child readers to reject low-class criminal fiction but also to denounce the lowly criminal behaviour celebrated in such narratives. *The Boy Detective* achieves this aim through

its representation of the relationship between Ernest's Band of Light and its boy criminal opponents. The text constructs the young fictional thieves as enemies of the Boy Detective—villains, rather than heroes—and depicts them in sharp contrast to Ernest and his companions. While Ernest and his Band of Light are “tidy and respectable, with clean faces and good characters” (172), their opponents are criminal caricatures, who betray their corrupt nature through their ugly appearance, sly expressions, and in their brutish nicknames. The most frequent offenders amongst this group of miscreants are Slashing Tom, leader of the local gang of boy criminals, and his second-in-command, the Bull Dog:

Among the company assembled in the tap-room of this tavern, was a tall, savage lad, about sixteen years of age; he had a large head, heavy hanging brow, and an expression of low cunning and animality that was very repulsive.

This was a boy, known as the Bull Dog. (59)

The Bull Dog's unattractive animalistic appearance accords with later nineteenth-century studies of physiognomy—for example, that of Cesare Lombroso, in which facial anomalies such as “enormous jaws, strong canines, prominent zygomae, and strong developed orbital arches” were identified as signifiers of criminality, suggesting a “close relationship between the criminal and the savage” (Lombroso-Ferrero 7, 5). The Bull Dog's “criminal” appearance contrasts greatly to the classically heroic depiction of Ernest Keen as “a very handsome and intelligent youth” who is “well dressed” (109) with his “eyes sparkling brightly, and his face shining with the light of pride and good-will” (310).

It is not only their appearance but also their behaviour that distinguishes the boy criminals from the Boy Detectives. While the members of Ernest's Band of Light resort to violence in the war against Slashing Tom's gang, they do so with a sense of honour that is notably lacking in their criminal opponents. For example, when the Bull Dog thrashes Tim the Tyke—a small, defenceless street urchin—Ernest's friend Stumpy Sam leaps to Tim's defence, immediately overpowering the Bull Dog but declining to press home his advantage. The Bull Dog, on the other hand, has no such scruples: “The treacherous sneak stumbled behind Stumpy Sam, and before he could turn gave a terrific kick on the shins, which made poor Stumpy howl with rage and anguish, and brought tears

to his eyes, despite his stout heart" (87). Of course, such base trickery demands punishment and, when he later renews his attack upon Sam, the Bull Dog falls flat on his face:

This sudden downfall of the Bull Dog when in mid-career was accounted for to the spectators, when they beheld a dark gentleman-like lad bestriding the prostrate coward, and glaring down on him with contemptuous passion.

It was the Boy Detective. (87)

Similar scenes appear throughout the text as the honourable Boy Detective continually triumphs over his ignoble boy criminal foes. These repeated confrontations do not just perform a monitory function, condemning the criminal characters and focusing upon their downfall. They also have a disciplinary function, presenting child readers with dichotomous behavioural models and conditioning them to align themselves with Ernest, the exemplar of middle-class values, and to denounce the devious, low-class criminality of his opponents.

This disciplinary function is prominent in Ernest's interactions with his potential and successful criminal converts. The text does not simply condemn all young criminal characters to humiliation at the hands of the Boy Detective. Although some of the fictional child offenders are innately wicked and beyond his help, others, Ernest recognises, can be saved. The Boy Detective's Band of Light is not just a tool for capturing criminals, but also a means of recuperating poor street boys who otherwise would turn to crime in order to survive. Ernest disciplines child characters and readers alike by drawing attention not only to the punishments that crime incurs but also to the rewards of rejecting criminality and becoming a law-abiding member of society. *The Boy Detective*, therefore, performs a more positive function than that of solely monitory crime narratives, since the text's role extends beyond suppressing vice to actively encouraging virtue. Ernest constantly instructs his followers in the ways of morality and honest living and urges them to find respectable work in order to support themselves, an action that will lead to the improvement of their quality of life and their moral well-being.

To assist his teachings, Ernest adopts a concept of self-help that reflects widely held middle-class views of the mid-nineteenth century—a concept best expressed in Samuel Smiles's work on the subject. In his

preface to the 1866 edition of *Self-Help*, Smiles emphasises the key tenets of his self-help doctrine:

Although its chief object unquestionably is to stimulate youths to apply themselves diligently to the right pursuits,—sparing neither labour, pains, nor self-denial in prosecuting them—and to rely upon their own efforts in life, rather than depend upon the help or patronage of others, it will also be found, from the examples given of literary and scientific men, artists, inventors, educators, philanthropists, missionaries, and martyrs, that the duty of helping one's self in the highest sense involves the helping of one's neighbours. (iii–iv)

Ernest clearly champions this ideology in a speech to the new members of the Band of Light:

“Now, being honest is working for your living, not taking what belongs to others, and living together without fighting and quarrelling, like good friends, as we all are now. Won't you be honest?”

“That we will.”

“If suppose as we can't get no work?”

“There's always some work to be got if you go the right way to find it; but even if we cannot all be employed let those in work help those who are not.” (172)

This passage is replete with middle-class values. Ernest promotes bourgeois ideals by prompting his young lower-class followers to emulate the middle-class practice of earning a living through respectable employment. More crucially perhaps, by adopting the self-help doctrine, the Boy Detective potentially neutralises threats to middle-class prosperity as he encourages his Band of Light to become self-sufficient and to support their less fortunate working-class companions, rather than implicitly living at the expense of the middle classes and committing crimes against them. Finally, this passage reinforces the social status quo, as honest employment for Ernest's lower-class followers will probably involve serving their middle-class superiors. Thus, by inducing potentially criminal street urchins to better themselves by emulating middle-class behaviour but retaining working-class occupations, Ernest does not advocate social mobility, but instead reinforces class boundaries.

While new recruits to the Band of Light aspire to emulate Ernest, the text clearly positions them as loyal subjects of, rather than social equals to, the Boy Detective. This hierarchy is especially apparent in Ernest's relationship with his young criminal converts, who are initially resistant to his ideas and are prone to criminal behaviour. One of the Boy Detective's greatest success stories is in the case of an associate of Slashing Tom's gang, known as "the Tiger." He is "[a] small, but sturdy and repulsive-looking boy, who had always been noted as a desperate little ruffian" (172). Initially, he objects to Ernest's lecture about finding employment, responding that:

its [*sic*] all werry well for you to say as it's easy for them to get vork as vants it, but you knows as that's all gammon. Besides, a many of us isn't fit to do no vork, and don't know how to neither. (172)

By the middle of the narrative, however, he has fully reformed and demonstrates his contempt for his former role by singing an anti-highwayman song, taught to him by the Boy Detective:

I do not think it manly
To be a brigand chief,
For though he wear a dainty dress
What is he but a thief?
I feel 'tis truly noble
Though dressed in corduroy,
To be, in spite of poverty,
An honest British Boy! (245)

The Tiger's substitution of Ernest's standard English for his own vernacular might initially suggest a blurring of class boundaries. However, the Tiger's faithful repetition of Ernest's words, rather than using his own, to denounce low-class criminality positions him as a disciple, promulgating the philosophy of his saviour, the Boy Detective. He aspires to follow Ernest's example rather than becoming equal to it. This pattern repeats itself in the initiation of Nobby Joe, former pickpocket and assistant to Old Death the Fence. Despairing of his criminal lifestyle, Nobby Joe throws himself upon Ernest's mercy, determined to become his most faithful convert:

“Captain Keen, I’m yer most dewoted slave. S’welp me never, I means to be honest, or die! If you hadn’t come alone [*sic*], though, with your pleasant grin and hearty grip I should ha’ turned to a highwayman, and have taken the road. I was just a thinking of going round Rotten Row to select a black hoss for my charger.”

“But now you belong to the Band of Light.” (420)

While swearing allegiance to Ernest, his middle-class hero, Nobby Joe’s lexicon, accent and diction bolster the social distinction between the Boy Detective and his disciple at a juncture where class boundaries potentially could be breached. Ernest is “Captain” to a “dewoted slave,” whom he saves from a life of crime and depravity.

The transition from criminal gang to the Band of Light not only dictates that the juvenile convert must reject lower-class criminality in favour of middle-class morality but also, the text implies, that he should embrace his British identity. The Tiger’s anti-highwayman song glorifies the “honest British Boy,” the antithesis of the morally reprehensible “brigand chief” (245), while foreignness is synonymous with criminality throughout the text. For example, the ringleaders of the Shadow Band—Massillon, Morolt, Blasire and Burdan—are Frenchmen, “savage” and “black-bearded” (20), with “glittering black eyes” (10) and “beetling brows” (82), and are members of “a secret order that has lodges in every capital in Europe” (37).¹⁰ To belong to Ernest’s Band of Light, the text posits, is to become an “honest British Boy” (245) as well as a follower of middle-class ideologies and morals. Here, the invitation to join this Band of Light implicitly extends from the young criminal wretches of the story to the child readers of the text who were, if we are to believe the complaints of Victorian middle-class moralists, equally in need of moral guidance.

Notably, then, boy readers are not directly aligned with the boy detective hero but with his loyal subjects in the Band of Light. Ernest himself is an idealised, quasi-adult figure who is, in many respects, a finished product. By contrast, his boy followers—both his fictional Band of Light and real-life boy readers—are works in progress. They are lower-class, potentially delinquent figures—often idle or directionless—who are guided by Ernest towards respectability and responsibility. The detective stands larger than life, as a symbol of law and order, civilisation and

moral purity. The text encourages boy readers to emulate the detective's moral characteristics, but not his investigative skills or exploits. The Boy Detective, therefore, maintains a distance from his boy readers, policing them just as he polices the fictional society of the text.

RESTRICTING THE BOY DETECTIVE

During a period of rising anxiety about the negative effects of criminal "dreadfuls" upon suggestible working-class child readers, the Boy Detective provides a welcome alternative to popular boy criminal heroes. In his role of policing childhood, Ernest is a deeply conservative and comforting figure, satisfying the requirements of the adult middle-class moralists who demanded more wholesome children's literature to counteract the growing trend for criminal "dreadfuls." Complications arise, however, as *The Boy Detective* attempts to satisfy the conflicting desires of a dual audience, who are distinguished from one another in terms of both age and class. To ensure its success in a consumer-driven industry, *The Boy Detective* had not only to placate the adult middle-class moralists who opposed the "penny dreadful" form but also, more directly, appeal to the predominantly lower-class child readers who made up the primary market for these texts. Such readers longed for sensational crime content and glamorised, all-powerful and often anti-establishment protagonists. Restricted by poverty and work in their own lives, young working-class readers sought independent fictional heroes to fulfill their desire for escapism. Criminal heroes, who operated outside the law and mocked official law enforcers, offered a particularly welcome diversion since, according to Michael Anglo, "Working-class readers had more than a sneaking regard for anybody who could buck the Establishment and make monkeys of the clumsy minions of the law" (44). As a detective, Ernest Keen cannot win the approval of the young readers by defying the law but must instead find new ways to satisfy their desire for an all-powerful fantasy figure with complete dominion over the events of the narrative.

The text responds to this challenge by constructing Ernest as a super-detective and, in order credibly to fulfill the criteria of this role, he has to enter into the domain of adult criminality. But, as an investigator of adult criminality, Ernest has the potential to usurp adult authority, since he is no longer dealing with petty juvenile criminals, who may be susceptible

to reform. Instead, he fights against experienced, adult career criminals, the nemeses of the official law enforcement system. Initially, Ernest only appears to challenge adults who are in some way “other”—those foreign or lower-class criminals who pose a threat to the social status quo. The higher-class members of the Shadow Band—most notably, the leader, Massillon, “dressed in the height of fashion, though with taste and neatness” (13)—are foreigners, making them legitimate opponents of the middle-class British boy detective. Criminal adult characters outside of the Shadow Band are shown to be lower class by their names, appearances and surroundings. For example, Jem the Penman lives in “a wretched garret in one of the alleys of the vilest part of St. Giles’s” in “squalor and poverty” (13), while Old Death, the fence, is “a miserable wretch in appearance, old, withered, palsied” and “in his dress he was always dirty and slovenly” (56). Ernest’s excursions into the world of adult criminality, therefore, are acceptable as they support the text’s dominant adult middle-class and nationalist ideologies without challenging proper adult authority.

Taking to heart the self-help doctrine that he imparts to his social and moral inferiors, Ernest works hard to improve his own situation and the conditions of those around him by adeptly employing a host of detective skills in order to become a middle-class investigator of the lower criminal orders: he successfully dons disguises to gain entrance to the lairs of his criminal opponents (54–56, 59–61); he deciphers the secret code used in correspondence by the Shadow Band (98); he uses his talent for ventriloquism to extricate himself from precarious situations (63–64, 97, 261, 316); he conducts scientific experiments to corroborate evidence (98). Moreover, by rescuing damsels in distress from his criminal adversaries, Ernest reinforces the contemporary gender ideologies. When he rushes into a burning building to save his friend, Fanny the flower-girl, from a violent death (149) and then, soon after, dives into the water to save her cousin, Lady Lilian, from drowning (170), he embodies the masculine figure of action, the saviour of the passive female victims of crime. However, a tension between Ernest’s middle-class status and his age begins to emerge when, in his role of investigator of adult criminality, Ernest encroaches upon the territory of official adult working-class law enforcers and, because of his success, begins to rival the police in terms of detective skill and reputation. Equally, Ernest and his band of Boy Detectives

become a great source of anxiety to the criminal classes. The text's villains lament the omnipresence of Ernest's Band of Light and are wary of conducting their criminal business in public where "a hawk may pounce on you, or you may be watched by one of those infernal young spies of Keen's gang" (221). In the eyes of the criminal characters, Ernest and his followers are just as much a threat to their shady activities as the police are.

More unrealistic, and, perhaps, problematic, is the consistent deference of police characters themselves towards the Boy Detective. The police often employ Ernest in difficult cases and constantly express their faith in his matchless abilities. When Ernest arrives at the scene of an apparent robbery and meets with hostility from the victim of the crime, a policeman immediately leaps to his defence:

"This youth is the Boy Detective. He's employed by the police and countenanced by the magistrates, and when he gets a few years older, I don't doubt that he'll be a great man in the force. [...] If any one could help you to the finding of your money, it is the Boy Detective," replied the policeman. (207)

In some instances, the police's faith in the Boy Detective extends so far that they trust his juvenile judgement above their own. For example, when Inspector Hawks finds himself in peril after an undercover operation against the Shadow Band backfires, the police are at a loss as to what to do and await instructions from Ernest:

"Ah, Master Keen, is it you? For Heaven's sake give us some plain directions," said the officer.

"Attention" said the Boy Detective, in a calm, but quick, thrilling tone of command, which no one could assume so well as he upon emergency, though in ordinary cases he always addressed his elders and superiors with respect and deference. "Two of you get into that boat. Unmoor it quick, Vincent.—The tide will drift Hawks and Jack towards the first arch from the lee shore.—Here, sir, you forget the lantern—Now, sirs, trim the boat; row out into the river, and pull down the stream in chase of Gaspard Massillon. Pull with a will. There's a young lady in the boat we're chasing. If we don't overhaul the pirates in a twinkling they may throw her overboard."

The men needed no further prompting or instruction. (169–170)

On one level, the police's deference to the Boy Detective reinforces class boundaries: while Ernest is a firmly middle-class figure, the police are recruited from the lower classes and, in their role as public servants, they are bound to follow the directions of their middle-class superior.¹¹ Yet Ernest's command over the police becomes problematic when considering his child status: by superseding the authority and surpassing the ability of the *adult* police force, Ernest, like his boy criminal equivalents in the popular criminal "dreadfuls," transcends the boundaries of conventional childhood behaviour and roles.

Thus, Ernest's unrivalled independence in his role as investigator of adult criminality poses a challenge to the adult/child hierarchy, and the Boy Detective becomes a potentially problematic and uncomfortable figure for the middle-class moralists campaigning against the "penny dreadful" form. According to Springhall, "It is likely that what offended pious middle-class adults about 'penny dreadfuls' was, in many cases, the precocious independence and potency of their boy heroes, together with their implicit challenge to the generational status quo" ("Disreputable Adolescent Reading" 105). Marjory Lang goes further, claiming in her examination of adult critics' reactions to cheap, sensational fiction for children that:

Middle-class Victorians found in these adolescent rebels an uncomfortable contradiction to their romantic and nostalgic images of childhood purity and innocence, inseparable from a state of weakness and dependence. Literature exalting the cheeky, capable juvenile hero they felt to be especially dangerous to their own well-protected children. (22)

In light of this criticism, it is clear that, in his role as super-detective, commanding the respect and obedience of the adult police force, Ernest still poses a threat to the middle-class Victorian ideal of childhood, regardless of his status as a law-abiding figure. In order to prevent middle-class moralists from condemning *The Boy Detective* along with its criminal-"dreadful" contemporaries, therefore, the text needed to impose a layer of restraint upon Ernest's characterisation as a super-detective and, in particular, upon his relationship with the police.

Thus, while in the passage discussed earlier the police appear to rely upon Ernest's superior wisdom in order to avert disaster, on closer examination the weaknesses in Ernest's apparently omnipotent role

begin to show. There is an implicit sense of constraint in the emphasis upon the extreme circumstances in which Ernest takes control. Though he can assume a “quick, thrilling tone of command” in an emergency, the text is swift to add that “in ordinary cases he always addressed his elders and superiors with respect and deference” (170). What seems to be an assertion of the Boy Detective’s authority also reminds the reader of his proper, normative and habitual conformity to the subservient role of childhood. While this detail gently subverts Ernest’s all-powerful status, a later passage more comprehensively dispels any illusion of his police detective role and implicit superiority to the police force:

It must not be supposed that the Boy Detective was really a police authority; he was merely an assistant employed by Inspector Hawks; but, as captain of the Band of Light, and as hero of our marvellous romance, of course his prowess and influence were transcendental! (343)

In its use of the words “marvellous romance,” the text openly admits that Ernest’s super-detective status is a fictional ploy to ensure that he conforms to the child readers’ expectations of the boy hero. Ernest only enjoys unparalleled authority, independence and success as a detective because it is *his* story, the text suggests, and, outside of this fictional construct, the Boy Detective would struggle to live up to his heroic reputation since, in the real world, the role of juvenile detective does not actually exist.

Throughout the narrative, there are numerous examples of this disempowerment of the Boy Detective, evident in the emphasis on his conformity and conventionality. In many cases, scenes that initially appear to support Ernest’s status as a super-detective actually undermine it. For example, when gangsters Billy the Butterfly and Happy Jack hunt down and confront Ernest, he handles the situation with the utmost composure, confidently bragging of his attachment to the police and using it to gain victory over his criminal opponents:

“I hope you don’t wish it to be in private?” said the Boy Detective, with a dry smile, “for I’ve some friends awaiting me round the corner.”
He drew his silver whistle from his breast, and applied it to his lips.
“Zounds! the little beasts have the crushers at their beck and call,” cried the sharper, looking round with no slight trepidation. [...]

Our hero trebled softly on his whistle.

Like deer at the sound of the hunter's horn, the two mobsmen sprang away and quickly disappeared round the corner of the street. (179)

Yet, as Billy and Jack make a hasty exit, it is their fear of the police rather than Ernest's power to summon them that drives the gangsters away. Despite his apparent victory, above all, this passage emphasises Ernest's ultimate reliance upon, and subservience to, adult authority figures and the official law enforcement system, and draws attention to his inability to deal with adult criminal figures independently. He may successfully threaten or trap the text's criminals, but he always looks to the police to ensure their arrest and punishment.¹² This deference to police power emphasises the ultimate authority and efficiency of the law, ensuring that the text performs a monitory function, instilling in child readers a fear and respect for the official state disciplinary system that, by the mid-nineteenth century, had met with widespread middle-class approval (Emsley 62–64; Worthington 103–169).

Despite the police's apparent admiration for Ernest's skill as a detective, their recognition of his child status and lack of authority in the force confirms his subservience and inferiority to the official law enforcement system. When Sergeant Hardy and Ernest are conducting a search for the Shadow Band, Hardy reminds Ernest of his place:

"It strikes me that there are some of the coiner's gang in this place."

"It may be so; at all events, we will search the lower part of the house," said Hardy.

"All right, sir," cried our hero, springing forward.

"Stop, my boy; you must follow and not lead, for there may be danger."

Hardy gently pulled our hero aside, and passing him, descended the stairs quickly. (140)

Far from being a super-detective, Ernest here becomes an eager yet vulnerable child in need of adult protection from the violent criminal world. Yet this presentation, too, creates conflict. While the generational status quo is restored, as the Boy Detective's apparent challenge to adult systems of control is undermined and, thus, overcome, Ernest's ensuing subservience to the police generates a class reversal in which,

paradoxically, the text's middle-class protagonist submits to the command of his social inferiors, the working-class police characters.

Consequently, the Boy Detective becomes the victim of a perpetual cycle of irreducible tensions. He is a dichotomous figure, simultaneously socially superior and generationally inferior to the law enforcement system alongside which he works. As an independent middle-class child investigator, Ernest struggles to operate effectively in the detective profession that is, at this point, both in fiction and reality, predominantly the domain of the working-class adult police force in Britain. Thus, while Ernest is, in many ways, a deeply conservative character who upholds and disseminates middle-class ideologies, he becomes a problematic figure when he steps outside of his childhood circle in order to exercise his detective influence in the realm of adult criminality. In his attempt to meet the conflicting requirements of a dual audience—the working-class boy readers who desired exciting, independent heroes and the adult middle-class moralists who demanded conservative role models for child readers—the boy detective perhaps fails to satisfy fully either audience.

THE BOY DETECTIVE FAILS

In the decades after the publication of *The Boy Detective*, the juvenile detective protagonist, and the juvenile detective genre, failed to secure a place in children's literature.¹³ This failure relates directly to the literary climate in which the boy detective emerged in the 1860s and, in particular, to the relationship between *The Boy Detective* and three specific literary forms: "penny dreadfuls," their ostensibly moralistic story-paper replacements and, finally, adult detective fiction. One of the main drawbacks for *The Boy Detective* was its categorisation as a crime narrative and its inevitable connection with the criminal—"dreadful" tradition against which it was ostensibly protesting. Although *The Boy Detective* constantly reiterates the moral, heroic status of Ernest and his companions, while introducing crime and criminals as forces to be denounced and contained, it would be naïve to assume that the appeal of the text relied solely upon the thrill of the chase and capture of the criminal characters. With such strong crime content, it is perhaps inevitable that child readers would derive pleasure, too, from the actions of the narrative's villains: the text is replete with murder, kidnapping, forgery and

fighting—activities at the centre of many of the criminal “dreadfuls” that were precisely so popular with young working-class readers in the 1860s.

Moreover, despite the text’s emphasis upon the morality of Ernest’s detective role, his representation as a paragon of virtue occasionally falters as he becomes entangled in the volatile criminal world depicted in the narrative. Just as Sherlock Holmes breaks the law in the pursuit of justice in Doyle’s stories in the 1880s and beyond, Ernest too engages in criminal behaviour in his dealings with the Shadow Band, particularly when he breaks into the apartments of the vice-president of the organisation:

He unpicked the lock of a heavy desk which stood on the side-table.

“I fight with foxes—I must use foxish cunning. I seek justice for a father’s murder, and the detection of a band of murderous villains.”

Thus steeling his conscience—for it is painful, even in a good cause, to use deceit and subtlety, and in his own character our hero was incapable of this double dealing, but he had a passion for the detection of crime, he was as remorseless in hunting a thief as the sportsman in chasing a wolf, and he stuck at nothing to bring offenders to justice—he opened the desk very silently. [*sic*]. (56)

Ernest’s detective role here functions to excuse his criminal behaviour, as it does throughout the narrative. In particular, his alliances with criminal characters, such as thief Gregorio Burdan, and Reuben Lee, an accomplice of Massillon, are justified as tactical measures that the Boy Detective employs to defeat greater enemies. Ernest must, the text argues, engage with criminals and utilise their methods at times, if he is to win his battle against evil. Despite the moral, anti-criminal stance taken by *The Boy Detective*, the text’s status as detective fiction ensures that crime is inevitably a central force in the narrative and one that is potentially capable of contaminating its fictional heroes and child readers alike, however much the narrative suggests their immunity.

Although the cheap serial-fiction industry relied heavily upon the support of its young readers, it was the views of the middle-class moralists that triumphed from the mid-1860s onwards. The empowerment of the working class through the extension of the franchise to working-class men over twenty-one (1867) and the implementation of Forster’s Education Act (1870) ensured that middle-class moralists became

increasingly concerned about the behaviour of, and influences upon, working-class children and young adults (Bristow 19). As the backlash against criminal “dreadfuls” intensified, publishers recognised that they must meet the growing demand for a new, moralistic and improving type of literature for children. *The Boy Detective* could be more accurately described as a crime “dreadful” than a criminal “dreadful,” since it explores criminality without taking criminal characters as its main protagonists or obviously glorifying their unlawful behaviour. However, the inevitable crime content of *The Boy Detective* ensured that it was not distinct enough from the criminal-“dreadful” tradition to avoid being associated with its more disreputable “penny dreadful” counterparts. The contemporary critics grouped *The Boy Detective* alongside “criminal” dreadfuls. Greenwood places *The Boy Detective* in the same category as “‘The Boy Thieves of London,’ ‘The Life of a Fast Boy,’ ‘The Boy Bandits,’ ‘The Wild Boys of London,’ [...] ‘Charley Wag,’ ‘The Lively Adventures of a Young Rascal,’” defining them collectively as “weekly pen’orths of abomination” (“Penny Awfuls” 162). He clearly sees *The Boy Detective*, with its moralistic, middle-class boy detective hero, as no different to those “dreadfuls” that featured boy criminal protagonists.

The lines between the detective narrative and the criminal “dreadful” became even more thoroughly blurred in 1866 when, partway through the serialisation of *The Boy Detective*, further penny serials containing detective plots and boy detective characters emerged. For example, *The Wild Boys of Paris; or, The Mysteries of the Vaults of Death* (1866), published by the NPC, features boy protagonists in quasi-detective roles. In its opening “Notice to the Reader,” the text promises to record, amongst other things, the skill of Paris’s “homeless class of boys [...] in ferretting out concealed criminals, and the valuable service they render to the authorities” (Anon 1). However, the so-called Wild Boys are more closely connected with the text’s romantic and comedic plots than with any serious criminal exploits. While they “never thought any trouble too much if they could save any victim of criminal violence” (42), they are more often than not “a nuisance to the gendarmes” (182), playing tricks and getting into the kind of trouble that sometimes leaves them on the wrong side of the tracks.

The Poor Boys of London; or, Driven to Crime. A Life Story for the People (1866) is more clearly comparable, and perhaps indebted, to *The Boy Detective*. Here Captain Jack and his fellow shoeblack boys—precursors of Holmes’s Baker Street Irregulars—work as “watchers” for police

detective Richard Grant. Jack, like Ernest Keen, is leader of a loyal “little band of boy detectives” (95) and is praised by Grant for his keen detective skills. Just as a policeman predicts that Ernest Keen will be “a great man in the force” (*The Boy Detective* 207), so Grant asserts that Captain Jack “will turn out well one day, and be an ornament to the profession” (*The Poor Boys of London* 20). Where Ernest rescues Sergeant Hawks from criminals on several occasions, so Jack rescues Inspector Grant. Similarly to Ernest, Jack organises his band of boy detectives and is responsible for their well-being and moral living, donating the funds from his detective work to help his followers into an honest profession rather than pursuing a life of crime (316). Despite these similarities, however, *The Poor Boys of London* does not make such a conscious and successful effort as *The Boy Detective* to distinguish itself from the criminal-“dreadful” tradition. Jack is not the moralistic, middle-class exemplar that Ernest is. He is poorly educated, speaks in slang and shows ignorance of certain words. He also lacks Ernest’s humility as, on rescuing Inspector Grant for a third time, his thoughts turn to the admiration he will receive from his friends and colleagues (247). His band of boy detectives seem to be motivated by money more than morality, and Jack does not sermonise about honest living or the dangers of pernicious literature. The tale’s closing maxim that “HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY” (318) is something of an afterthought, tacked onto the end of an entertaining crime narrative.

The Poor Boys of London not only lacks the moral zeal of *The Boy Detective* but also the investigative function of its boy characters lacks the integrity of the detective role adopted by Ernest Keen and his Band of Light. Captain Jack and his followers are “watchers,” figures who “form a very curious part of our detective and ordinary police system. More success in bringing criminals to justice is owing to the work of spies and treacherous accomplices than to the intelligence of the police themselves” (18). There is a note of disapproval in this description—a suggestion that this detective employment is ethically dubious and that the perpetrators of such work might be as dishonourable, immoral and lawless as the criminals that they pursue. As in *The Wild Boys of Paris*, the detective role here has little moral purpose and, potentially, strengthens the link between the detective plot and the criminal-“dreadful” tradition. The appearance of boy detective characters and a firm detective plot in *The Poor Boys of London* might have marked the establishment of a trend towards boy detective fiction. However, the text’s failure to

distinguish itself morally and formally from the criminal-“dreadful” tradition undoes the good work undertaken by *The Boy Detective* to make the detective genre respectable and, thus, a viable option for boy readers. In their superficial imitation of *The Boy Detective*, texts like *The Wild Boys of Paris* and, more particularly, *The Poor Boys of London*, hinder rather than help the development of the boy detective genre.

The publishers of the story papers that arose from the mid-1860s to take the place of the popular crime-centric “penny dreadful” narratives marketed their papers as moral alternatives to this highly contentious form of fiction, and ostensibly suppressed the crime content that had made their predecessors so popular with working-class child readers. Edwin J. Brett, the managing director of the NPC, the firm that oversaw the publication of *The Boy Detective*, was one of the frontrunners in the emergence and success of this new category of juvenile literature, launching the short-lived *Boy's Own Companion* in 1865 and the *Boy's Own Reader* the following year. Moving away from the NPC's criminal-centric highwayman and “London low-life” tales, in 1866 Brett announced his intention to clean up his catalogue of boys' fiction. The “Editor's Address” of the first issue of his most successful story paper, *Boys of England*, which copied the format of his earlier, less popular publications, stated that:

Our aim is to enthrall you by wild and wonderful, but healthy fiction; to amuse and instruct you by interesting papers on History and Science; to inform you on all matters belonging to your manly out-door sports and games, and your home pastimes; to enter into a hearty, free, and trusty companionship with you through the medium of the Correspondents page; to afford you a merry laugh by a droll story or jest; to charm you with a pretty verse. (Brett, 1.1: 16)

The paper combined historical tales, sea stories, adventure narratives and Gothic fiction with informative and instructive articles focusing on subjects such as sport, history and nature, as well as jokes, riddles, correspondence and competitions.¹⁴ Notably, Greenwood, who had condemned *The Boy Detective* alongside criminal “dreadfuls,” lent his support to *Boys of England* when requested to write a story for this paper. He regarded *Boys of England* as “a creditable periodical, and the more so, that from small beginnings it has, by legitimate and wholesome means, raised itself to its present satisfactory eminence, and

is still improving its claim on public goodwill" ("Special Notice!" *Boys of England*, 4.90: 191).

Following the great success of the *Boys of England*, which continued to appear until 1899, numerous story papers modelled themselves on Brett's pioneering publication. Popular titles included the Emmett Brothers' *Young Briton* (1869–1877) and *Sons of Britannia* (1870–1877), James Henderson's *Young Folks* (1871–1897) and Charles Fox's *Boys' Standard* (1875–1895). Brett himself produced several juvenile story papers similar to his *Boys of England*, though the earlier paper was more successful than its imitators.¹⁵ While the fictional serials featured in Brett's publications were notorious for their sensational content, they differed in crucial ways from their "penny dreadful" predecessors. Where many of the "penny dreadfuls" of the 1860s, including *The Boy Detective*, used the slum areas of London as their location, the fictional tales featured in the *Boys of England* and other story-paper publications were often set in faraway, foreign and exotic environments. This shifted the focus from the domestic concerns of Victorian England, which were of great import in crime narratives, to an engagement with imperialist values and an exploration of a host of different cultures.¹⁶

This change of setting marked a shift in emphasis from a concern with imposing social order internally to imposing it externally upon the wider British Empire. With the expansion of the Empire, the greatest apparent threat to national security and social status quo was the savage, untamed races that now lived under British rule, and the need for a stable, unified Britain became of paramount importance. Boys' literature aimed to familiarise its readers with the territory over which they would, one day, rule—at least symbolically, if not literally in the case of working-class boys. It intended to endow boy readers with a sense of patriotism and racial superiority through stories that emphasised the might of the British as they held sway over a vast Empire (Dunae, "Boys' Literature" 106–108). While *The Boy Detective* began to emphasise the importance of Britishness through the triumph of the honest British boys of the Band of Light over the depraved foreign criminals of the Shadow Band, the early story-paper narratives expanded upon and amplified this focus upon Britishness. These papers transferred the British hero to foreign climes where he acted as a coloniser and civiliser of barbarous lands and races, implicitly bringing them under British rule. Consequently, these stories also transposed criminality to foreign, usually non-European, environments.

In order to reinforce their firmer imperialist message, fictional story-paper narratives frequently avoided the realistic depictions of crime displayed in “London low-life” tales such as *The Boy Detective* as this would undermine the unity and authority of the image of Britain that these texts were trying to project. While story-paper serials often still contained elements of crime and violence, criminality was clearly aligned with savage lands and races, elevating British heroes over their savage, non-European counterparts. Criminality in the texts, therefore, was dissociated from Britishness and, thus, posed little threat to British society or identity. Furthermore, despite their crime content, the story-paper narratives were not, by definition, crime fiction. Instead, these stories belonged more obviously to genres such as adventure, historical and naval fiction. Thus, while in criminal “dreadfuls” and detective stories the crime content defined the type of fiction produced, in the early story-paper fiction it lurked beneath the surface, concealed in exotic and unfamiliar environments and through the narratives’ location in apparently more respectable genres. The contemporary critics, while often seeing little value in these story-paper narratives, were sometimes fooled by the suppression of crime content, arguing, in the case of the *Boys of England* for example, that, unlike its “penny dreadful” predecessors, there was nothing “vicious” or “flagrantly offensive” in it (Waite 70; Hitchman, “Penny Fiction” 155–156).

Since the demise of *The Boy Detective* in 1866 coincided with the birth of a new, overtly moralistic story-paper tradition in which Brett himself played a key role, it is not inconceivable that the text’s moralising passages aim not only to assuage the middle-class critics of “penny dreadful” fiction but also, more directly, to promote Brett’s new publications. Such an objective is unsurprising considering that Brett was the managing director of the NPC, the company that published *The Boy Detective*. The possibility of *The Boy Detective*’s promotional function for Brett’s new papers becomes apparent in a passage in *The Boy Detective* where Ernest and his friends discuss the future of cheap juvenile fiction:

Well, now, Bob, I’ll tell ye what the boys could do: they could find the name and address of the publishers of their penny sensationals on the title page of the books, and write them a ‘round-robin’ to this tune,
 “Dear sir,—We are getting perfectly sick of pirates, highwaymen and the like, and we want something new. We are but boys, and as such we like

tales of dashing adventure. We want no dull moral tagged on to every chapter, no long dry sermonising; we like a good slashing fight, but we don't want rogues to be the conquerors; we like a tale of true love, but we don't want to know anything about the indecent pranks of bad girls; we want something honest and English-like, that we need not blush to show our parents or to have bound or framed. If you can produce something rattling and amusing, and yet moral and good, we will give you our best support, and will remain your obliged subscribers, the 'Boys of England!'" Ah, Bob, but the 'Boys of England' haven't the pluck to do this. [...] if they do, they will be the gainers of what is sadly wanted, a *cheap* and thoroughly good work to suit sensation readers, who want their minds to be excited without being polluted. (279)

Since Brett launched his popular *Boys of England* late in 1866, the same year in which the serialisation of *The Boy Detective* concluded, it seems hardly likely that the use, repetition and capitalisation of the term "Boys of England," and its appearance, in quotation marks, in *The Boy Detective* is coincidental. The passage reads like an advertisement for Brett's forthcoming story paper.¹⁷

If this is the case, Brett utilises *The Boy Detective*—a text positioned somewhere between the popular criminal "dreadfuls" and the newly emerging story papers—to pave the way for his new publications. This narrative bridges the gap between the apparently immoral "penny dreadful" fiction that glorified crime and criminals and the seemingly sanitised story papers, which were full of historical tales, adventure stories, and practical articles, that were, on the surface at least, more in keeping with Victorian ideas of what children *should* read. *The Boy Detective*, therefore, becomes a transitional text between the "penny dreadful" and early story-paper forms. It contains some characteristics that are in line with the aims, patterns and ideologies of the latter form—for example, an obvious moral focus and an overt rejection of "penny dreadfuls" and criminal heroes. However, other features, such as its obvious crime content, its "penny dreadful" status and its focus on crime and corruption in, rather than beyond, Britain offer a partial explanation for the absence of similar detective narratives in the early story-paper replacements of the "penny dreadful."

But the juvenile detective genre's failure to develop and flourish following the publication of *The Boy Detective* must also be traced back to advances in the adult detective genre from which it, in part, derived.

Ernest is a private detective character—almost a consulting detective, like Sherlock Holmes—a status confirmed through his official connection to the police force and his acceptance of payment for his work.¹⁸ In his summary of the text in the *Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana*, Jess Nevins emphasises that, as a private detective character, Ernest is not only an anomaly in children's literature but also in the wider detective genre in Britain:

In the 1860s most fictional law enforcement characters were policemen. While there were certainly private detectives in England in the mid-1860s, most authors, whether of penny dreadfuls or sensation fiction, followed the model of Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* and made their detectives policemen. Private detectives were not socially respectable in the 1860s and did not become common in British fiction until the 1880s and 1890s. While Ernest's job as a private detective is indicative of his lowered social standing, it is surprising that he is one to begin with. (459)

The popularity of policemen as lead investigators in the adult detective genre in Britain could not be replicated in children's literature, since official law enforcement was, by its nature, an adult pursuit and so the role of policeman was not open to the young protagonists who dominated children's popular fiction. Instead, child characters could only really adopt the role of a private and/or amateur detective.

Ernest's status as a private detective, rather than an amateur investigator working independently of the police, perhaps emphasises a further layer of restraint imposed upon the characterisation of the boy detective. In the 1860s, the amateur detective protagonist was closely associated with sensation fiction, in which the hero or heroine uncovers scandals in the middle-class domestic space, and was, perhaps, in light of this, a wholly unsuitable character for the working-class child readers of cheap juvenile fiction.¹⁹ Moreover, these adult amateur detectives often displayed an autonomy and authority in their investigative work that was reminiscent of the behaviour of the audaciously independent "penny dreadful" heroes and heroines to which middle-class moralists were violently opposed. Since he is a private detective who regularly works alongside the police, Ernest's detective work is constantly monitored both by adult characters and by the official law enforcement system. This ensures that his occupation is, potentially, less threatening to middle-class ideals of childhood than the possibility of an unsupervised amateur juvenile

detective who polices not only his social inferiors but also his equals and betters. Ernest, then, barred from a police or amateur detective role, is constructed as a new kind of investigator.²⁰ As a semi-professional private detective who works alongside the police, Ernest emerges two decades before this model firmly established itself in British detective fiction through the widespread popularity of Sherlock Holmes.²¹ British crime fiction of the 1860s lacked any suitable adult detective models for the boy detective to follow.²² Instead, *The Boy Detective* creates an innovative detective protagonist who is unique, both in British children's literature and British detective fiction in the 1860s. Since the private detective protagonist had not thus far consolidated his place in British adult crime fiction, it is unsurprising that he did not, at this juncture, gain a foothold in children's literature, where the detective genre had barely begun to establish itself.

Just as there was a considerable break between the publication of *The Boy Detective* and the firm establishment of the boy detective genre, so there is a significant gap between Ernest Keen, the boy detective protagonist, and his boy readers. Ernest is a super-detective—an unreachable ideal—and boy characters and readers become his disciples rather than his equals. Ernest is a symbol of morality—the antithesis of the “penny dreadful” boy criminal hero who induced a moral panic in the 1860s. He is a spokesperson, telling boys what to read, how to behave, and how to interact with each other and society at large. Here, boy readers are not encouraged to develop any specific detective skills or to become detectives themselves. Instead, the detective role is used as a tool to reinforce moral and social codes. The Boy Detective performs a monitory and disciplinary function for boy readers, keeping them in their place, ensuring their conformity and containing their potential threats. Such functions continued when the boy detective finally reappeared in the 1890s in the wake of Sherlock Holmes's success in the *Strand Magazine*. Strongly influenced by the Holmes/Watson pattern in Doyle's stories, the detective narratives that appeared in the Harmsworths' boys' story papers introduced an adult detective/boy assistant variant. In this format, the boy assistant offered a point of identification for young readers, and while this was a clever marketing ploy, it also had significant implications for the establishment and functions of the boy detective genre. On the one hand, this new tradition forged a stronger connection between boyhood and the detective role, inviting boy readers to identify with and emulate the boy assistants who were making their first steps

into the detective profession. On the other hand, the adult detective/boy assistant pattern afforded the opportunity to respond to new anxieties surrounding boyhood and the transition to manhood at the end of the nineteenth century. The boy detective characters that tentatively emerged in the 1890s were very different from boy super-detective Ernest Keen.

NOTES

1. The play was performed at the Britannia Theatre, Hoxton, on Wednesday, July 12, 1876 ("Britannia Theatre Programme"). Before this, the play had premiered at the Effingham Theatre, Stepney.
2. Examples of amateur female investigators in sensation fiction include Wilkie Collins's Anne Rodway in "The Diary of Anne Rodway" (*Household Words*, 1856), Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1859–1860), Magdalene Vanstone in *No Name* (1862) and Valeria Woodville in *The Law and the Lady* (1875). Further examples include Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Eleanor Vane in *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) and Jenny Milsom in *Run to Earth* (1861). Stephen Knight suggests Barbara Hare, a character in Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861), as potential inspiration for Mrs. G. and Mrs. Paschal (*Crime Fiction* 43). *Revelations of a Lady Detective* is sometimes addressed by the alternative title *Experiences of a Lady Detective*. The former title appears on the front cover of the earliest edition, while the latter appears on the inside title page of the same text.
3. The first woman employed by the Metropolitan Police served as a visitor to female convicts on licence in 1883. The Metropolitan Police appointed women as Police Matrons from 1889 to search and supervise women and children in police custody. Women began to join the Metropolitan Police and other official forces from 1919 but were usually restricted to dealing with female and juvenile offenders. It was only with the outbreak of World War II that any significant recruitment of women to the police force began (Emsley 127, 157–158).
4. These advances included the invention of the Hoe Rotary Press in 1847, the discovery of cheaper paper-making materials such as *esparto*, an African grass, and more cost-effective paper manufacturing methods, such as Gilpin's paper-making machine, "The Fourdrinier," created in 1817 (Anderson 12; Springhall, "Disseminating Impure Literature" 568, 573).
5. For further information on "London low-life 'dreadfuls,'" see Springhall, "A Life Story for the People?"

6. For further discussion on the perceived relationship between “penny dreadfuls” and crime in the mid to late nineteenth century, see Dunae, “Penny Dreadfuls”; Kirkpatrick, *From the Penny Dreadful to the Halfpenny Dreadfuller*; and Springhall, *Youth* 71–97.
7. *The Boy Detective* was published anonymously, although both Springhall and Kirkpatrick attribute authorship of the text to Edward Ellis, pseudonym of Charles Henry Ross (Springhall “A Life Story for the People?” 231; Kirkpatrick 117), while John Adcock speculates that Vane Ireton Shaftesbury St. John, who wrote serial stories for the story papers of Edwin J. Brett and the Emmett Brothers from the 1860s, wrote part of *The Boy Detective* (Adcock, “The Wild Boys of London”).
8. The choice of the name “Band of Light” may have been a deliberate ploy to give respectability to this new mode of writing by alluding to the Band of Hope, a children’s temperance movement inaugurated in Leeds in 1847 (Shiman 51). This movement produced the *Band of Hope Review* (1851–1937), edited by Thomas Bywater Smithies, a journal aimed at working-class children that expressed some of the principles advocated in *The Boy Detective*, particularly that of self-help (Murray 37).
9. Capitalisation is used when referring specifically to Ernest Keen, the Boy Detective, and to his band of Boy Detectives, to reflect the use of capitalisation in the original text.
10. In Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Black Band; or, The Mysteries of Midnight* (1861–1862), first serialised in *The Halfpenny Journal*, her Black Band of criminals, headed by Oscar Bertrand, is very similar in composition to *The Boy Detective*’s Shadow Band. The Shadow Band’s description at one point in the narrative as a “black band of thieves and assassins” (*The Boy Detective* 315) is perhaps a direct reference to Braddon’s novel.
11. For information on police recruitment policies in the nineteenth century, see Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman* and *The Ascent of the Detective*.
12. The reliance upon the police to round up the text’s criminals is also a feature of later detective fiction for adults. Sherlock Holmes, for example, often hands over criminal characters to the police once he has solved the case. Yet, while in the Holmes stories the detective, for the most part, works independently of the police, who are used as a narrative device to conclude the plot neatly, in *The Boy Detective* the police play a more dominant and invasive—and hence a more realistic and disciplinary—role in the investigations of the young detective protagonist.
13. Similarly, there is a dearth of detective characters in mainstream British literature for adults between the crime and sensation fiction of the 1860s and the Sherlock Holmes stories from the late 1880s. While

Stephen Knight challenges the claim that the 1870s and 1880s are “barren years” (*Crime Fiction* 52) for detective fiction, the most significant detective titles that Knight identifies in this period are American in origin. These include the novels of Anna Katharine Green, which featured female detectives Amelia Butterworth and, later, Violet Strange, Allan Pinkerton’s semi-autobiographical accounts of his Pinkerton National Detective Agency, and a host of detective dime novels (Knight, *Crime Fiction* 52–55).

14. Following the success of the *Boys of England*, Brett changed the name of the Newsagents’ Publishing Company, of which he had become sole proprietor in 1867, to the “Boys of England’ Office” (Carpenter, *Penny Dreadfuls and Comics* 12).
15. Brett’s *Young Men of Great Britain* (1868–1872), *Rovers of the Sea* (1872–1873), *Boy’s Comic Journal* (1883–1887) and *Boys of the Empire* (1888–1893) all had a much shorter publication run than the *Boys of England*, spanning just a few years compared to nearly three decades of success enjoyed by the *Boys of England* (Turner 76–77).
16. For further information on imperialism in boys’ story papers of the nineteenth century, see Bristow, *Empire Boys* 4–52; James, “Tom Brown’s Imperialist Sons”; and MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*.
17. This is not the text’s only mention of the “Boys of England.” Another reference occurs in an earlier passage in which Ernest discusses the state of British society with his benefactor, Mr. Goldring. In response to Ernest’s observation that “I think the world improves fast,” Mr. Goldring replies:

“Yes; and shall I tell you on whom depends the glorious future, the increasing rate of progress? On the BOYS OF ENGLAND!”

“The boys of England are beginning to feel this, I think, sir.”

“But they’ve a great deal to learn yet.”

“Yes, sir, and more still to unlearn.” (*The Boy Detective* 258)

18. Ernest claims that he is employed by the police (*The Boy Detective* 24, 90, 101), an assertion confirmed by police characters, who express great faith in the Boy Detective and turn to him to help them to solve difficult cases (35–36, 199), for which Ernest receives payment (171, 200). In a telling scene, Ernest identifies detection as a job when he is reluctant to apprehend a gang of pickpockets during a visit to the theatre in his leisure time, claiming that he is “not on duty” (380).
19. Anne-Marie Beller argues that “[a] key element of [...] critical attacks on sensation novels concerned their perceived immorality, particularly when plots revolved around sexual crimes and transgressions” (355). Adultery, bigamy, bearing illegitimate children and other sexual transgressions

feature strongly in popular sensation novels such as Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1862–1863), and these novels explore the uncomfortable issues of female immorality, criminality and insanity. While the sexual crimes and transgressions common in sensation fiction ensured that it was deemed an unsuitable genre for all young readers, the fact that these scandals occurred in middle-class households made sensation novels even more controversial for a working-class juvenile audience. This representation of scandal and immoral behaviour in middle-class society challenged the notion of the moral superiority of the middle classes that they wished to project to the lower orders.

20. Ernest has come of age by the end of *The Boy Detective* and so is able to become a member of the police force rather than an assistant to it. The final chapters are set five years after the rest of the narrative, when "Ernest Keen the Boy Detective has become a man" (*The Boy Detective* 547) and is now "a most illustrious member of the French Police department" (548).
21. Knight suggests that "Sherlock Holmes's professional and private status may well be the most innovative single feature of Conan Doyle's stories" (*Crime Fiction* 52).
22. Although two significant female detectives appear in the 1860s in the form of Mrs. G. in *The Female Detective* and Mrs. Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, their investigations usually take place in the domestic realm—often of the middle and upper classes. This environment is largely inaccessible to the boy detective. Furthermore, these female detectives' methodologies are dependent upon their gender and, therefore, cannot be imitated by the boy detective.

The Boy Detective in Early British Children's Literature
Patrolling the Borders between Boyhood and Manhood

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