19th-Century English Girls' Adventure Stories: Domestic Imperialism, Agency, and the Female Robinsonades

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Post-*Madwoman in the Attic* readings of nineteenth-century novels regularly consider the ideologies that define female characters within their fictional social context and the strategies of female authors who express their "madness." M. Daphne Kutzer points out that an examination of nineteenth-century English children's literature also reveals how "the role of children's texts, both fictional and nonfictional, is to help acculturate children into society and to teach them to behave and believe in acceptable ways" (Kutzer *xv*). Consequently, a number of English girls' stories, especially the female Robinsonades, provide opportunities for critical analysis that examine the tension between fulfilling conventional feminine roles and developing individual potential. Although Robinson Crusoe variations have been a popular children's adventure story format, considerably few English texts within the existing corpus of Robinson Crusoe tales have women authors or feature a female protagonist.[1] Significant critical texts such as Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (1988), Martin Greene's *The Robinson Crusoe Story* (1990), and M. Daphne Kutzer's *Empire's Children: Empire & Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books* (2000) provide valuable insights about the Crusoe theme, nineteenth-century children's literature, and imperial topics. However, each critic interestingly overlooks all female versions of the Robinsonades. Because the female Robinsonades constitute a historically significant literary category that remains absent from current critical discussions of nineteenth-century children's literature, this study will identify and examine key elements of this genre to reposition these texts as part of the larger critical discussion of nineteenth-century children's adventure stories.

Despite the critical neglect, the once popular but largely forgotten English female Robinsonades do present two significant literary contributions. First, the earlier texts reposition the domestic component from a marginal concern to a central and significant role within the popular, imperialistic adventure narrative. Second, later texts challenge the perception of traditionally defined social roles for

women and create a female protagonist who retains the feminine while displaying the intellectual abilities and physical skills associated with men. As the earlier female Crusoes affirm women and the domestic paradigm as essential components of the imperial model, the later female Crusoes capably merge the domestic with the adventurous to embody a new female identity as an amalgam of the traditional Angel of the House and the New Woman.

Clearly, the female Robinsonades counter the images of women found in the popular boys' Crusoe adventure stories that predictably uphold prevailing cultural values and that commonly relegate women and girls to subordinate roles and marginalized positions. In his "Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914" Patrick Dunae examines how most boys' adventure stories perpetuate the male-dominated colonial theme and notes that "the ardor of young patriots was fanned by dozens of illustrated periodicals which provided readers of all classes with an enticing array of imperialistic articles and tales. The adventure novels sold in their thousands; the penny weeklies in their millions" (105-106). Similarly, in his defining examination of the Crusoe archetype, *The Robinson Crusoe Story*, Martin Green explores the development of the tale and observes the conventional elements of the Robinsonade[2] often present a story "of morally justified imperialism and that the male focus of these variations typically excludes or marginalizes women and the domestic within hegemonic delineations" (22). For example, Captain Fredrick Marrayat's *Masterman Ready; or The Wreck of the Pacific* (1841-42), a well-known, early English Robinsonade, employs conventional gender stereotypes that marginalize women by depicting the matriarch of the central family, Mrs. Seward, as an often-incapacitated mother figure and her young daughter as a child wholly dependent on the protection of others. Reinforcing both gender and class delineations, Marryat also portrays the servant Juno as the only woman capable of fulfilling her standard domestic duties in addition to working alongside the men to build their camp and defending it from a native attack.

The strong English, masculine tradition that marginalizes women starkly contrasts with women's treatment in the Crusoe stories found in eighteenth-century German literature. In "An Island of Her Own: Heroines of the German Robinsonades from 1720 to 1800," Jeannine Blackwell identifies sixteen female castaways appearing in popular German literature between 1720 and 1800. Blackwell's study importantly establishes the credibility of an adept female protagonist while identifying several essential characteristics of the tale's female version that are evident in the later English girls' stories: "The female's island experience, in summary, emphasizes the qualities of egalitarian friendship, communal living arrangements, entertainment and domestic detail to a greater

extent than the standard male island experience. The women occupy and dominate social and emotional territory, where the male Robinsons learn to master their geographical surroundings" (14). She also observes that "the woman castaway survives through communal effort. . . . She does not stand alone fighting the elements but prevails only through cooperation with others" (17). Challenging the romantic image of the rugged individualist asserting his will over nature, the female-centered tales assert the need for communal effort as well as both the basic household and caregiver support systems found in a domestic model.

Agnes Strickland's *The Rival Crusoes; or The Shipwreck* (1826) reflects the popular interest in stories recounting adventure tales of military exploits, travels to strange new lands, and encounters with foreign peoples who coincided with British commercial and military expansion after the Napoleonic wars. Strickland creates the earliest of the English female-authored Robinsonades and introduces male protagonists who, amid the usual scope of naval adventures, develop an essentially domestic paradigm. As part of her story, she explores the fundamentals of colonization through the examination of abilities often associated with specific gender roles and imbues the commoner Philip Harley with traditionally feminine skills along with overt masculine qualities. Jackie C. Horne's "The Power of Public Opinion: Constructing Class in *The Rival Crusoes*" offers a persuasive interpretation of Strickland's novel as a study of class conflict and reconciliation between protagonists Phillip Harley and Lord Robert Summers. Horne argues for the historic and cultural importance of Strickland's novel and asserts that it "suggests the upper classes can in fact maintain control of the workings of patronage and power" and "stave off the threat posed by a radical working class" (5). In addition to the substantial issues Horne investigates, Strickland also emphasizes the fundamentals of colonization and empire as her two castaways take the necessary measures for their survival on the island. Strickland isolates her protagonists when the longboat crews initially sent to fill water casks for an English warship founder in the turbulent waters and drown. Since their own ship was swept back out to sea by a storm, Harley and Summers are left marooned and without the benefit of supplies usually salvaged from the wrecked vessel. The actual Crusoe component, survival on the deserted island, makes up a third of the novel with the initial class conflict, harmonious conflict resolution, affirmation of social values, and naval adventures making up the rest. Notably, Strickland's presentation of the young men's island survival complements the text's social resolutions that Horne discusses as it strongly argues for a viable domestic and communal model as a necessary basis for both survival and settlement.

The novel's colonial and imperialistic component appears in Summers's

position as a naval officer on an official expedition, connecting his perceptions and methodology to both the military and the masculine. Conversely, Strickland creates Harley's press-gang introduction to the military to keep him as an outsider, one with little social power and a broader range of living skills. Harley's initial marginalization consequently serves to connect him further to the domestic and feminine elements in the tale. Strickland also avoids the male-oriented combat emphasis and does not include an indigenous island population for the men to conquer and subdue; instead, both men must do their own work to survive. Summers reconnoiters the beach, finds shelter in a cleft of rock, and discovers turtles to eat but was "wholly unpractised in the slight of striking a few sparks to kindle a flame," bruising "his knuckles without producing the desired effect or if he did elicit a few sparks they died away for want of proper kindling" (Strickland 52, 53). Lacking household expertise and unable to cook the raw meat, he must settle for turtle eggs that he can eat without cooking. Strickland emphasizes that while Summers can procure the necessary commodities of food, fuel and flint, a traditionally defined masculine attribute, he cannot produce the desired result. In contrast, Harley creates "a bright blazing fire" and "was employed cooking his dinner" (53). She continues to highlight the pointed difference between the methods of the two men with Harley carefully constructing a significant shelter, showing resourcefulness in procuring materials, and creating all the utensils necessary to make life on the island easier while Summers finds shelter in a rock cleft with inadequate water food and water. Seriously ill from his failure to provide adequately for himself, Summers requires Harley's domestic skills as nurturer and provider for his survival.

Strickland carefully constructs and reinforces Philip Harley's manly qualities to maintain a parallel with Summers; however, Harley's domestic skills, which she established earlier through his attention to and care of his terminally ill sister, become the means of the men's survival. Reduced to childlike helplessness, Summers slowly regains his health and strength through Harley's administration of physical care, the protection of comfortable shelter, and the provision of nourishing food and drink. Strickland makes the point that without the necessary household and nurturing skills, Harley would not have been as successful in creating his encampment and would not have been able to extend appropriate care toward Summers. She uses the ability to return an individual to health as a substantial component of the domestic model and highlights this element as a sustaining factor in any imperialistic design, a point later Robinsonades will repeat.

The reconciliation between the men that occurs with Summers's improvement certainly follows Horne's argument regarding the novel's examination of reordering

class relationships; yet, in a manner coinciding with Blackwell's observations, this reconciliation reinforces the communal ideal so central to a domestic paradigm. Before Summers and Harley are rescued and return to their sea adventures, Summers reciprocates the support and educates Harley with naval materials conveniently found in an abandoned chest. Strickland presents this exchange as a necessary step that is not only significant in raising Harley's class aspirations as Horne points out but as one that also complements and elevates the domestic paradigm as a necessary and essential foundation for greater social and imperial success. Despite the absence of distinct female characters, Strickland distinctly argues through the success of Harley's efforts that household and caregiver skills, not military prowess, assure the men's survival in their encounter with the island's wilderness.

The importance of Strickland's contribution of an essential domestic component becomes clearer in a comparison to noted boys' adventure author William Henry Giles Kingston's revision of Strickland's novel that is published in1881. Under the influence of aggressive imperialistic fervor during the later nineteenth-century, Kingston's revision abbreviates the island component, especially the domestic interaction of Harley and Summers, to expand upon their adventurous and heroic naval exploits. In the book's preface, Kingston touches upon the era's bias against women as he rationalizes his revision: "The publishers, however, consider that the work, esteemed as it was in former years, is, from the style and the very natural mistakes of a young lady . . . scarcely suited to the taste of the present day" (Kingston n. pag.). A thrilling tale in its own right, Kingston's male-oriented revision emphasizes the characters' feats, relegates the domestic component to minimal importance and, consequently, misses a significant point of the original text. Strickland's innovation appears in the importance that she assigns to the domestic model and in her effective demonstration of its crucial role in the success of any imperial endeavor.

Thirteen years after *The Rival Crusoes*, Ann Fraser Tytler presents one of the earliest female protagonists in an English Robinsonade in her novel *Leila; or, The Island* (1839). Noteworthy for the absence of young male protagonists, the novel follows twelve-year old Leila Howard, her father, her Nurse, and her pet spaniel and cat as the only shipwreck survivors. Although the book becomes more of Tytler's tribute to middle-class principles than an adventure tale, the novel's opening embraces the conventional tropes of the Crusoe genre: a foundering ship, a protagonist and family who are separated from the ship's crew, possession of supplies, and an arrival on a deserted and potentially hostile island. Downplaying the challenges and dangers of the characteristic adventure story and focusing

more upon the representations of middle-class Victorian social behavior and expectations, Tytler moves the domestic component to being *the* focus of *Leila* instead of it being an important part of a larger story as it was in *The Rival Crusoes*.

With an unconscious, possibly dying, Leila being anxiously attended by her father and Nurse in the opening scene, Tytler melodramatically emphasizes the mortal danger inherent in the survivors' position outside the boundaries of civilization. Perilous undercurrents permeate the entire novel, and the potential for disaster never completely dissipates as they colonize the island by creating shelter and locating water and potential food supplies. Similar to the setting of *The Rival Crusoes*, the absence of native inhabitants decreases any immediate threat to the survivors' safety and allows for a more specific focus on establishing a shelter in the their attempt to endure. Tytler reinforces social and gender stereotypes as the strongly patriarchal Mr. Howard risks his life with a trip to the shipwreck to acquire necessary supplies: some clothing, especially Leila's, other necessary household items, a few live chickens, books and tools. Typically paternalistic, Howard provides the strength and technical knowledge necessary to create and protect their encampment; however, his greater purpose is to provide both daily guidance for their welfare and social and religious instruction for Leila. Instead of placing the usual emphasis on the survivors' attempts to farm and to support themselves, Tytler further enhances an English domestic model through the recreation of middle-class Victorian cultural icons. At the outset, Howard and Nurse apply conventional identities such as "bedroom" and "wardrobe" to aspects of their conveniently structured cave, mitigating the reality of their harsh situation by the imposition of a clearly middle-class perspective of home. To make Leila's experience as conventional as possible, Tytler has both adults recreate several signifiers of English middle-class home life like Leila's garden bower with its gate and baskets, her goat-cart, and her pets, including island species (rabbits and birds) that they cage and domesticate. The inclusion of Nurse to assist Mr. Howard allows Tytler's further reinforcement of English cultural norms with social rituals requiring a feminine hand such as arranging Leila's clothes, serving daily tea, celebrating birthdays, and creating special meals.

To underscore the quintessential elements of Victorian morality and social standards, especially the norms associated with raising children, Tytler highlights Leila's daily routines of prayer, schooling, and small chores under the guidance of either her father or Nurse. Despite the dire situation and demands of the island experience, Tytler places emphasis on Howard's focus on methods for the proper management and education of Leila, noting the need for different approaches and "judicious management" (72). Seeking a properly paternalistic "steady, yet gentle

sway" over Leila (73), Howard blends nature lessons with moralistic overtones to curb gently Leila's childish outbursts and to encourage a thoughtful, mature response without damaging childhood innocence and joy. Ultimately, Tytler rewards the diligent work of her survivors as their domestic practices successfully cause orthodox ideals to flourish. Leila learns patience, curbs her impetuosity, and matures into a conventionally proper young lady. With Leila's successful maturation in the island setting, Tytler validates her belief in society's need for fundamental structures such as a clear set of social standards and a strong paternal leader to prevent any wilderness erosion of domestic stability.

In her development of Nurse's role as caregiver and attendant to Leila, Tytler moves beyond the peripheral treatment of Marryat's Juno to create a more fully realized domestic depiction in Nurse. Characterized as having a limited capacity but deep feelings (72), Nurse embodies a middle-class view of working-class virtues and reinforces the working class's supportive role in sustaining the dominant, Victorian middle-class hegemony. Using Nurse's position and function to establish her identity rather than any specific personality traits, Tytler underscores the strict separation of classes within the English social structure. Despite the intimacy of the island situation, Tytler shows Howard and Nurse maintaining a formally appropriate employer-employee relationship and interacting only about Leila or household maintenance, as they would have done in England. However improbable, unrealistic, and impersonal such a formal relationship might be on the island, it serves to remove possibilities of impropriety and acknowledges the conventions of middle-class morality.

To underscore Nurse's humility and sense of social place, Tytler reveals little of either Nurse's inner-self or her personal life. Notably, she does provide Nurse with a rare moment of self-awareness when Nurse mentions that she misses a friend with whom she could converse as an equal, a statement that confirms the formality of the social relationship and her subordinate position as a nursemaid. Additionally, Tytler includes an episode that sustains the benefits of middle-class morality when Nurse discloses that her name is Milly and recounts a moral exemplum to Leila of a childhood experience in Gloucester. As a young girl, Nurse confronts an ethical dilemma of either returning a found shilling to its owner or buying herself a pink hat ribbon. Her cousin Betsey's moralistic counsels and her own conscience help Milly/Nurse overcome her personal desire and return the shilling to the lady who overpaid her. The lady and her gentleman husband applaud the girls' honesty and later reward them with a pair of new straw bonnets. Besides providing suitable moral instruction to Leila, Nurse's story also supports the model of a simple and ethically upright working class whose fitting social deference and obedience to

moral precepts result in a reward. Rather than a digression, Tytler's inclusion of the story further buttresses the social mores and class distinctions central to the novel.

Tytler clearly employs Nurse to sustain the representation of a dutiful and mindful working class. Nonetheless, the developing sense of humanity that emerges from Nurse's backstory provides greater depth to both her character and the story as a whole. The presentation of Nurse as a woman and no longer simply a depersonalized servant allows the reader to recognize Nurse's creativity and resourcefulness, especially through her ability to maintain a safe and smoothly running household on the island. Similarly, Tytler also has Nurse show strength of character in her capacity to disregard her personal needs for the welfare of the group. In having Nurse care for Leila while also administering to a seriously ill Mr. Howard, Tytler creates a strong example of a woman's resilient capabilities in facing a wilderness, a model that anticipates changes from the traditional feminine paradigm emphasizing reliance to an emerging feminine figure that is strong and capable.

In addition to its overt and highly stylized assertion of Victorian middle-class values and sensibilities, *Leila* underscores the stabilizing and constructive properties of this domestic model when encountering the uncivilized.[3] Just as Marryat's realistic *Masterman Ready* explores the details of acquiring food and shelter for survival, Tytler's *Leila* examines the importance of household forms and routines as a means of preserving English character under dire circumstances. Tytler also adapts Strickland's belief that a functioning domestic organization possesses the essential capacity to sustain life when Mr. Howard's later severe illness and incapacitation do not endanger Leila and Nurse. Their ability to restore him to health again asserts the stabilizing and constructive value of *and* necessity for this domestic model when surrounded by wilderness.

The domestic ideology Tytler explicitly expresses in *Leila* appears in numerous contemporary texts, most succinctly in Coventry Patmore's often-discussed *The Angel in the House* (1854). It is significant that several concurrent texts, such as Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* (1849), had already begun to question conventional assumptions about women and their social identity. Several notable, contemporary critical texts have examined the national scope of this shift in belief such as Elizabeth Langland's *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Langland points out, for example, how the era's female novelists reflected women's complex desires to fulfill traditional roles as well as to attain a degree of social and economic self-determination. She observes: "Whereas working women were articulating their rights through a rhetoric of domesticity that had framed the lives of middleclass women in the nineteenth century, bourgeois women,

struggling to escape that rhetoric, focused on individual rights" (248). Mirroring these critical shifts in perception and presenting a dramatic and significant ideological movement away from the strong hegemonic assertions of gender and class found earlier in *Leila*, Elizabeth Whittaker's "Robina Crusoe and Her Lonely Island Home" appeared serially from 1882 to 1883 in *The Girls' Own Paper*. Despite the general tendency of mainstream literature to overwhelm the idea of the independent New Woman with positive representations of the domestic ideal, Whittaker achieves a striking innovation in the synthesis of character types in her protagonist Robina Crusoe. Whittaker rejects a limited female identity and moves beyond a simple female representation that is either a bulwark for the traditional home or that is a subversively independent and unconventional woman. She reconfigures the feminine as a blend of diverse but complementary characteristics, defined here within the tropes of the imperialistic adventure story. Besides strongly asserting the importance of maintaining a viable homestead for colonial success, Whittaker's Robina forcefully establishes an argument in support of a woman's role as an independent and active agent of change.

Incorporating several references to Robina Crusoe's famous self-sufficient ancestor, Whittaker connects Robina's story to Defoe's protagonist and attributes Robina with Crusoe's bravery, resourcefulness, and physical skills. In addition to Robina's ancestral connection, Whittaker imbues her protagonist with a range of abilities, "male" and "female," that will assist her in meeting her challenges. The initial episode reveals a clear-headed and pragmatic Robina preparing for emergency contingencies as her ship founders: "I had sufficient self-possession to encircle my waist with a piece of rope I saw near me, and into it I stuck a knife which was also lying at hand" (184). Whittaker has Robina show unusual courage, strength and determination that move her beyond conventionally less-capable models of female behavior. For example, once on land, Robina wisely appropriates clothing and household articles from the dead before she buries them: "I first reverently prepared the body for burial . . . I kept for my own use the exterior garments and the boots, and several small articles I found in her pockets . . . which one in my circumstances could not possess too many" (197). After Robina survives the shipwreck, she sets up her shelter, explores the island, and discovers resources thereby increasing her chance of survival and demonstrating both her emotional and physical strengths. She continues to exhibit typically masculine traits when she later kills and skins a dangerous, great snake and applies remarkable physical skills to create her shelter and obtain supplies. Her rowing, sailing, and navigational proficiency enable her to circumnavigate the island and locate raw materials like clay that are necessary to construct her shelter (356-357). Whittaker expands her

definition of the feminine when she additionally reveals Robina's scientific and engineering knowledge through her construction of a fireplace after she fabricates her own bricks and mortar from the available raw materials and makeshift tools: "My work was laborious from want of proper tools . . . I had only my hunting knife, which fortunately was of formidable proportions for cutting clay . . . I had enough to construct a small kiln . . . I found three-fourths of my bricks were excellent" (357). Similarly, her broad scientific understanding of plants and minerals, recognizing specific varieties of each group as she explores, facilitates her ability to collect plants to raise her own food supply and her ability to find the chemicals necessary to create gunpowder for hunting and defense (413). Notably, despite having Robina manifest the normally masculine skills necessary to build a viable home, Whittaker balances her character with a more traditional feminine side as she has her competently make her clothing, weave baskets, and knit fishing nets (380, 428).

Although the previous female Crusoe versions avoid interactions with native peoples, Whittaker's tale parallels the confrontational boys' adventure stories and includes a dangerous threat from a raiding band of warriors. The episode with the warriors evokes current imperialistic attitudes with racial stereotyping in Robina's description of them as "terrible creatures" (509) that are "scarcely human" (525). Revealing a generally defined male sense of military skill, Robina plans strategically, surmounts successfully the danger embodied in the warriors, and avoids catastrophe because of her courage and her earlier defensive preparations (509). In a response similar to the male protagonists in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, she boldly frightens off the marauders in an attempt to save a native female prisoner. Unable to protect the woman, Robina discovers and rescues the woman's child, a moment when Whittaker introduces the conventionally maternal dimension of Robina's character as she realizes "true mother's love" (525). Reinforcing Robina's maternalism, Whittaker has her refer to the child Undine as "my baby" (525) and reflect: "I was beginning to have some idea of the strength and absorption of the mother-love" (525). As she nurtures and educates Undine, Robina resumes her settlement of the island and the improvement of their island home, actions that further display her broad range of abilities through which Whittaker posits the significant possibility of combining the maternal nurturer with the standard male role of provider.

It is noteworthy that Robina's motherly love for the child mitigates the overtly racist and negative perceptions evident in her earlier experience with the warriors. Whittaker uses this situation significantly to unite the usually opposing qualities of the militaristic and the maternal in Robina's character. Along with introducing

Robina's maternal instincts, the episode suggests another reading that echoes elements of other contemporary, imperialist narratives in that Robina becomes protector of one people as she defends them (the child) from the threat of hostile "others." Whittaker's racist depiction of the warriors and her sympathetic portrayal of the captured woman and child also reflect the era's increasingly complex attitude toward native populations that Patrick Brantlinger identifies in his *Rule of Darkness*. Public support for missionary and humanitarian efforts, the work of Dr. Livingston for instance, began to influence imperial policies that continued to include elements of conquest and subjugation. Brantlinger notes: "As part of the discourse about empire, it [the Dark Continent] was shaped by political and economic pressures . . . and portrayed white explorers and missionaries as the leaders of a Christian crusade that would vanquish the forces of darkness" (195). In the larger imperial context, Whittaker portrays Robina's as a contemporary figure whose combined skills qualify her as an active but sympathetic agent of change in the building of empire.

Whittaker again has Robina's behavior transcend gender normative boundaries in her response to the pirates who come to the island, a response again similar to the boys' combative interaction with pirates in *The Coral Island* (1857). Buoyed by her earlier experience with the warriors, Robina again employs her intelligence, courage, and hunting skills to rescue a young boy by imperturbably shooting his pirate captor with her bow and arrow. Whittaker enhances Robina's complexity when she has Robina later raid the ship for supplies and cleverly frighten the pirates away from the island before she resumes her maternal role, now to Undine and Henry. The courage and physical skills required to accomplish these feats place Robina on a level with her male counterparts in many of the boys' adventure stories. Additionally, in a paternal manner reminiscent of Mr. Howard's instructing Leila, Robina engages young Henry in a discussion about the moral distinctions between a justified killing for defense and an unjustified killing for revenge (605). By developing Robina's interaction with the two children, Whittaker merges traditional maternal qualities with traditional paternal attributes and again demonstrates the possibility of a woman's moving beyond the limitations of broadly accepted gender stereotypes.

Robina's rescue after twenty years initially appears to follow the standard adventure story tropes of children's adventure literature, especially a conclusion where the readers "never see them [the survivors] arrive back in England, nor know what happens to them as adults, but their sadness in leaving the islands behind suggests not only their sadness at leaving childhood behind, but also at leaving the adventures of colonization behind" (Kutzer 10). Whittaker, however,

once more forges new territory for the girl's tale when she has Robina return as matriarch to the prospering society she began, now successfully settled by Robina's "children," grandchildren, and "a party of settlers; and some artisans, mechanics and agricultural labourers of ascertained good character, having consented to take their wives and families to colonise the place" (668). Robina's return to a prosperous community and her suggested appearance as the island's dowager monarch, a surrogate Victoria, recall the imperial model and provide a final emphatic validation of her achievements. The tale's idealistic conclusion asserts the conventional imperialistic belief in the power of British skill and ingenuity to tame a wilderness. Nonetheless, Whittaker's protagonist also defies convention and combines traditionally defined male and female attributes into a new model of the feminine. Though the downplayed union of the native Undine and the English Henry unsettles common racial bias, the marriage offers a harmonious vision of unity that contributes to the growing success of the island settlement and a positive account of empire. The creation of the prosperous island colony begins with the efforts of one woman who successfully embodies conventionally defined feminine and masculine strengths.

"Robina Crusoe" effectively integrates the conflicting social identities of Victorian women in a model showing that a strong, capable, and independent woman can also fulfill the maternal, domestic ideal. Following Whittaker's example, L.T. Meade (Elizabeth Thomasina Meade Smith) addresses the concept of the empowered New Woman while reinforcing the domestic paradigm in *Four on the Island: A Story of Adventure* (1892). Sharing several iconic tropes with previous Robinsonade versions, *Four on the Island* manifests the development of the feminine as a shaping force as well as the application of the domestic model as an essential approach to colonization. Employing representations similar to those Tytler establishes in *Leila*, Meade includes English cultural practices and household items like a tea-kettle that hold great significance through their connections to the standard values and behaviors of daily English routine.

Despite the novel's exotic setting and adventurous plot, the limited critical response to *Four on the Island* mistakenly places it along with the majority of Meade's many girls' books that focus on the social development of young women within English society. In *The New Girl: Girls' Culture in England 1880-1915*, Sally Mitchell argues that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books and magazines written for girls, especially texts like those of L.T. Meade, address issues of female identity and "authorized a change in outlook and supported inner transformations that had promise for transmuting woman's 'nature'" (3). Of Meade herself, Mitchell comments: "L.T. Meade made popular (though she may

not have invented) the chief varieties of formula fiction that came to dominate girls' voluntary reading" (14). Despite the fact that Mitchell is one of a very few children's literature critics who specifically addresses Meade's *Four on an Island*, her perceptive investigation of Meade's writing focuses on the shaping forces of girlhood appearing in popular print and does not approach Meade's Crusoe novel as a part of the existing tradition of female Robinsonades. Rather, Mitchell's entire analysis of *Four on an Island* is quite brief and dismissive, simply stating that in the novel "some children are cast away and survive largely through the efforts of the fourteen-year-old tomboy who is their leader" (15). Unfortunately, Mitchell's reading of Isabel as simply a "fourteen-year-old tomboy" reduces the complexity of Isabel's character and ignores the synthesis Meade achieves by merging the "tomboy" with a traditional homemaker in her characterization of Isabel.

Meade's creation of Isabel Fraser presents an important literary alternative to conventionally developed girl characters and to Whittaker's sixteen-year-old Robina. The much younger Isabel Fraser must fill a gap created by adult absence and maintain cultural standards when alone on an island. Being "between twelve and thirteen" (8), Isabel occupies a liminal space between childhood and adolescence and, despite the fact that Isabel is approximately the same age as Leila, she is not pampered and must assume significantly more responsibility. Still associated with childhood, Isabel must now establish on White Feather Island the rules and practices that Mr. Howard and Nurse established on their island in *Leila*. Moreover, like Robina, Isabel also embodies the shift toward the New Woman/ New Girl whose abilities are not circumscribed by gender or age.

In establishing their first shelter in a small, wrecked ship, Meade has Isabel work alone, as her injured brother and her young cousins are unable to help: "Bell, however seemed possessed with the courage and strength of twenty girls. She energetically bailed the water out of the ship's hold, flung open the portholes, and lighting up a large fire on the beach, dragged out the mattresses and bed-linen to be dried and aired thoroughly. By night the little house looked once more fairly ship-shape" (153). Although her remarkable skill in replicating an English home provides a more than adequate approximation to the comforts and support her younger cousins and brother require, Isabel's shooting, tracking, and daring rescues solidify her link to Robina and generate far more interest than her domestic activities. As a young yet impressive embodiment of the domestic model, Isabel must prepare meals, set the table, mend and make clothes, tend to her younger cousins, and nurse the sick. However, Meade also defines Isabel as a formidable force through her actions, e.g., shooting threatening giant land crabs, felling trees for shelter, tracking her missing brother, and rescuing him from a dangerous pit.

Dominating the narrative's action, Isabel surpasses the efforts of her older brother; her range of abilities exemplifies a significant literary shift in its positive depiction of empowerment in a female adolescent. Meade also reinforces the importance of a sound, functioning domestic arrangement when Isabel suffers through a fever before the children's rescue at the story's conclusion (285). The other children are able to nurse Isabel back to health and survive themselves because of the safe homestead Isabel has established for all of them. Reflecting the earlier female Crusoe narratives, Meade uses the ability of the community to sustain itself when a pivotal character is injured or ill to prove the effectiveness of the domestic model and the community's viability.

Even though Isabel's three-month adventure, impressive as it is, does not compare with Robina Crusoe's twenty-year occupation, Meade establishes a significant precedent in the creation of her young protagonist. In "Angel of the Island: L.T. Meade's New Girl as the Heir to a Nation Making Robinson Crusoe," Megan Norcia develops an insightful analysis of Meade's treatment of the New Woman issue through a comparative study of Isabel's character and the protagonists of other girls' novels. Building on the familiar Angel in the House and New Woman dichotomy, Norcia's strong, feminist approach analyzes Meade's emphasis on the domestic component as essential to society. Her analysis also considers how Meade attempts to expand the focus of a young woman's vision beyond conventional limits: "Meade constructs the triumph of one 'trained' New Girl despite the socially determined bonds that limit the orbit of her activities. As such, *Four on an Island* can be read as an extension of pro–New Woman activism" (350). Norcia's important and extensive analysis of Meade's novel primarily discusses her presentation of the emerging changes associated with the social roles of women and girls in context with similar presentations in other contemporary girls' stories. Norcia, however, does not recognize or discuss Meade's text in relation to the other female Robinsonades or makes any connection to themes of empire. Moreover, Norcia's discussion of Meade's "pro-New Woman" position fails to mention the precedent for Isabel Fraser that Elizabeth Whittaker creates ten years earlier in Robina Crusoe.

The fearlessly capable and indomitable Isabel Fraser, therefore, not only defines the expansive capabilities of the New Woman, but her ability to use household virtues as a civilizing force also links her to the domestic tradition of the women's Robinsonades. With Isabel, Meade successfully synthesizes the conventional with the more progressive perceptions of women. Although the children, under Isabel's direction, repeat the domestic paradigm of creating a viable shelter and surviving their wilderness experience on Whitefeather Island, the brevity of their

three-month stay offers only an implication of their ability to colonize rather than their establishing a sustained settlement as Robina achieves. The significance of Meade's story rests in her creation of a twelve-year-old girl who functions as a highly competent leader and who is able to establish a viable island settlement for *any* period of time.

Across a seventy-two year span, the nineteenth-century female English Robinsonades challenge the chauvinistic assertions defining the feminine found in popular literature and in boys' adventure tales in particular. Each female Robinsonade uses the conventional island framework of the tale to address significant social issues and to assert a domestic paradigm as a means of stability and advancement.[4] Strickland's *The Rival Crusoes* responds to the shifting power issues generated by the early waves of industrialization as it offers a model of social unity. The resolution of class antagonism leads to a means of mutual assistance that, in turn, enables successful military expeditions and the building of empire. Tytler likewise affirms traditional middle-class English morality and social structures in *Leila* as a response to the social uneasiness of the 1840s. The micro-society embodied in Mr. Howard, Leila, and Nurse successfully functions and provides for their well-being as sound social standards ensure stability even in the wilderness. Finally, in *Robina Crusoe, and Her Lonely Island Home* and *Four on an Island*, authors Whittaker and Meade address the New Woman issue and contribute to the ideals of the expanding middle- and working-class girls' culture. They create female protagonists who operate effectively within a traditional domestic context and who act with equal efficiency within a traditional masculine sphere. More specifically, just as Whittaker's Robina exhibits a range of talents that refutes traditional gender stereotypes, Meade's Isabel Fraser further challenges conventional social perceptions of gender and age and expands the assertion of a complex and capable woman to an adolescent's level.

Collectively, these seldom examined nineteenth-century female iterations of the Crusoe story illuminate key components of the era's debates that examine aspects of empire or that attempt to define women and their position in society. Inclusion of these forgotten texts would especially enhance discussions of nineteenth-century English children's literature with the introduction of greater complexity through alternative and contrasting views to many of the texts currently considered. All female Crusoe adaptations reposition the domestic model and its feminine associations to a significant role in empire narratives as a necessary and sustaining element for any society. The later tales also challenge conventional women's stereotypes to assert a female character at once feminine and competently self-sustaining. Female Robinsonades jointly posit that a viable

domestic order and women as independent agents of change are mutually possible and that these concepts are essential for the stability and future success of both nation and empire.

Notes

[1] This accounting does not include the 1846 *Punch* satiric parody of the woman's tale, "Miss Robinson Crusoe."

[2] *Robinsonade* denotes those stories of survivors marooned on an island. Similar plot structures and thematic concepts may also be found in the numerous frontier and colonial settlement stories that appeared in both boys' and girls' literature.

[3] Contemporary to *Leila* and similarly emphasizing the importance of a social and moral code is Jefferys Taylor's rarely considered *The Young Islanders; or, The Schoolboy Crusoes* (1841). Although his story contains many of the traditional elements of the boys' adventure story, Taylor includes an atypical emphasis on the domestic operations common to female versions of the tale and challenges the optimistic and pervasive success of the English imperial principles and the faith in British character embedded in similar boys' stories.

[4] The reactionary example of Mrs. George Corbett's *Little Miss Robinson Crusoe* (1899) fails to advance either an imperial model or the stronger female Crusoe figure developed by Whittaker and Meade. Her overly simplistic tale exploits many of the clichéd tropes characteristic of other iterations of the Crusoe story with an emphasis on the young heroine's playful adventures, exceptional good fortune, and quick reunion with her parents. A reviewer in the March 1899 edition of *The Bookman* concisely sums up the novel: "It is all very Arcadian, and only mildly interesting . . . and will please simple-minded young folks." The critical dismissal of Corbett's simple revision of the Crusoe story affirms both the preference for a realistic tale and the growing popular interest in a dynamic and capable female protagonist, one who depends upon her abilities for her survival and not on her repeated good fortune alone.

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