

THE HERO RECOVERED

# THE HERO RECOVERED

ESSAYS ON MEDIEVAL HEROISM  
IN HONOR OF GEORGE CLARK

Edited by  
Robin Waugh and James Weldon

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# THE CHILD, THE PRIMITIVE, AND THE MEDIEVAL

## MAKING MEDIEVAL HEROES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Anna Smol

At the forefront of the great philological movement of the nineteenth century, John Mitchell Kemble, the first English editor and translator of *Beowulf*, devoted his career to encouraging the study of the Middle Ages. In his history, *The Saxons in England*, Kemble characterized the British past using the romanticized image of a child: "Contemplate the child who bounds through the wood. . . . Such as the child is, has the child-like nation been, before the busy hum of commerce, the crashing strokes of the piston, the heavy murmur of innumerable spinning-jennies necessarily banished more natural music from our ears."<sup>1</sup> Kemble's vision of the past as more natural and childlike than the present was to become one of the key features of nineteenth-century descriptions of the Middle Ages.

About one hundred years after Kemble presented *Beowulf* to English readers, another renowned philologist, J. R. R. Tolkien, found it necessary to deal specifically with the pervasive association of children with the medieval past. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," Tolkien discusses various kinds of literature that he classifies as "fairy-story"—literature with fantastical elements such as folktales, myths, or legends, including medieval examples in the Arthurian tales, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Beowulf*. Tolkien himself, a product of the nineteenth-century age of philology and an inheritor of that era's ideas about children's literature, increasingly questioned common assumptions about the nature of medieval literature and children in his own fiction. At the time of writing his own medievalized tale, *The Hobbit*, he had more or less accepted that such a story was suitable for a child audience. It was only on the threshold of writing *The Lord of the Rings*, in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," that he articulated his dissatisfaction with the idea that children are the natural audience for such stories. Many years later, he

explained: "I had been brought up to believe that there was a real and special connexion between children and fairy-stories. Or rather to believe that this was a received opinion of my world and of publishers. I doubted it, since it did not accord with my personal experience of my own taste, nor with my observation of children (notably my own). But the convention was strong."<sup>2</sup>

Between Kemble's identification of the medieval past as a childlike state and Tolkien's acceptance of and then struggle against the idea that medieval or medieval-like stories were naturally made for children, there is an era in the development of both medieval studies and the study of childhood which turns popular and scholarly attention to the idea of the child, the medieval, and the primitive. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the connection between the child and the medieval offered educators and writers ample material considered suitable for young readers. Between approximately 1875 and 1914, school texts, periodicals, and popular anthologies were stocked with medieval heroes such as King Arthur, King Alfred, and Beowulf. These figures embodied the national and racial qualities that philologists extolled in their study of medieval languages, and writers served them up to young readers who, it was thought, would have a natural affinity with such "primitive" models. As Hamilton Wright Mabie wrote in his 1913 edition, *Heroes Every Child Should Know*: "if you want to know what the men and women of a country care for most, you must study their heroes."<sup>3</sup> Although Mabie imagines here both a male and female audience, the majority of books that presented medieval heroes had primarily boys in mind as the readers who would most benefit from the exemplary figures who were to inspire emulation and so help to form the national character. In the examples that follow, I will focus mainly on texts that take boys as their primary audience and subject matter, in an examination of how a primitivist and evolutionary discourse shapes the disciplinary study of the medieval and of the child in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>4</sup>

The child and the medieval have a long history of association with each other which predates the nineteenth century. Ever since Renaissance humanists demarcated and labeled the Middle Ages as a barbarous period unlike their own, the idea of a primitive medieval era and its literature was set in opposition to what was considered to be the sophisticated, polite literature that belonged to modern adults. No matter how much antiquarians such as the eighteenth-century scholar Elizabeth Elstob might argue that the primitive purity of the mother tongue recorded in medieval documents was worthy of study,<sup>5</sup> the prevailing opinion was more similar to that of Jonathan Swift's, who called Old English that "vulgar Tongue, so barren and so barbarous."<sup>6</sup>

Medieval romances such as *Guy of Warwick* and the Robin Hood ballads survived, but often in drastically reduced chapbook versions which became the reading material for children and poor, barely literate adults. Samuel Johnson's comments epitomize the dominant view of medieval literature: "at the time when very wild and improbable tales were well received, the people were in a barbarous state, and so on the footing of children."<sup>7</sup> Tolkien correctly assesses the way in which medieval folktales, myths, and legends had come to be considered suitable for children during this time: "Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the 'nursery,' as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused."<sup>8</sup>

By the nineteenth century, however, scholarly and popular attention gradually turned with increasing interest to the territory of the primitive and the childlike. Philologists such as Kemble developed the tenets of their science, as they liked to think of it, by classifying language families. Founded on the Orientalist discovery of an Indo-European linguistic source, philology undertook the analysis of European languages in an effort to delineate their national and racial qualities. Critics such as Allen J. Frantzen and Kathleen Biddick have discussed how the study of the Middle Ages intersects with Orientalism.<sup>9</sup> According to Frantzen, who focuses on the study of Old English, the goal of Orientalism is to define and control the East, while Anglo-Saxonism, its "ideological partner," "glorified the West as English civilization constituted it."<sup>10</sup> John Guillory provides one account of how philology became the most powerful component of institutionalized English study by the end of the nineteenth century, when philologists succeeded in making the study of medieval language a requirement in university English programs in England, the United States, and Canada.<sup>11</sup> The patriotic appeal to study the origins of one's nation and race in the earliest documents available in the European vernaculars—medieval texts—sounded repeatedly. Kemble's zeal is typical: "We have a share in the past, and the past yet works in us; nor can a patriotic citizen better serve his country than by devoting his energies and his time to record that which is great and glorious in her history, for the admiration and instruction of her neighbours."<sup>12</sup>

The medieval text was supposed to offer a direct record of life in an earlier period. William Anson, in his 1882 study of the romances and epics of the English and German peoples, pointed out that they contain a history "of their fathers' manners and customs, of their joys and sufferings, their games and occupations, festivals and religious observances, battles, victories and defeats, their virtues and their crimes."<sup>13</sup> That the medieval text could

offer access to the "manners and customs" of the past became a trope used in text after text. Earlier in the century, Kemble's 1837 translation of *Beowulf* made the same claim: "the poem contains noble records of manners and customs, of superstitious practices, of religious belief, of moral culture,"<sup>14</sup> with the result that we can find in it, according to Kemble's 1833 edition, "a rude but very faithful picture of an age, wanting indeed in scientific knowledge, in mechanical expertness, even in refinement, but brave, generous and right-principled."<sup>15</sup> The belief that an era lacks "scientific knowledge," "mechanical expertness," and "refinement" renders it primitive, but also simpler and perhaps closer to nature than the present industrialized day. Following this line of thought, it is not surprising to find frequent comparisons of the medieval with certain natural elements such as trees, rivers, or flowers. Stopford Brooke, in his 1892 *History of Early English Literature*, writes of the "earliest upwelling of the broad river of English poetry";<sup>16</sup> Andrew Lang claims that "[t]he best traditional ballads have the colour and fragrance of wild flowers."<sup>17</sup> Within this simpler, natural world, even the language is like that spoken by a child. In his *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, first published in 1799 and reprinted well into the next century, Sharon Turner repeats an eighteenth-century idea that the development of English is analogous to the development of language in a child, beginning with nouns and pronouns and only later progressing to verbs.<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, Turner finds the Anglo-Saxons to be a primitive stage in the development of the English nation; however, that childlike primitive quality was often extended far beyond the Anglo-Saxon period to encompass the roughly thousand years of history that can fall under the rubric of the Middle Ages. For example, G. G. Coulton, in *Chaucer and His England*, identifies the fourteenth century, the subject of his first chapter, as "England in Embryo" and declares that "[t]he peculiar charm of medieval art is its youthfulness and freshness,"<sup>19</sup> a quality that he believes Chaucer exemplifies.

Such views are aptly summarized by R. Howard Bloch in his description of some of the beliefs of positivist philologists that highlight the prominent image of the child: "The medieval world is somehow simpler than that of the early modern era. A spontaneous period, a happy period, the Middle Ages participates in the fantasy of an elementary beginning, a world of innocence analogous to the lost paradise of childhood."<sup>20</sup> This view of a natural, picturesque medieval period was encouraged by nineteenth-century medievalism which, as Alice Chandler points out, "had links to the renaissance of interest in nature, primitivism, and the supernatural and to the increasing valuation placed upon the organic, the joyous, and the creative."<sup>21</sup> Even if the idea of

the childlike nation did not explicitly define the medieval in some formulations, primitivist discourse certainly did, as in the powerful idealization of the primitive Teutonic hero in Old English scholarship, frequently an amalgam of German, English, and Nordic stock—"the ancient manful pagan world sound to the core" according to J. P. E. Gerverus, a nineteenth-century German scholar writing about *Beowulf*.<sup>22</sup> In discussing such primitivist beliefs, Frantzen points out that an influential "paradigm of progress"<sup>23</sup> typically rendered the perceived value of the earlier, primitive state as less than the more evolved, modern one. Writing about nineteenth-century philologists, Frantzen explains: "They viewed England's medieval past as the nation's childhood. . . . They saw the past as primitive, little more than a rudimentary version of the present, without values of its own; if they idealized childhood, they left no doubt that primitivism, whether cultural or chronological, was ideal only after progress transcended it."<sup>24</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the idea of evolutionary progress took a firmer hold on historical thinking, and evolutionary anthropology largely determined the course of the study of folktales, myths, and legends. British imperial interests and American racial politics foregrounded questions about the primitive origins of the civilized. Writing about England, Daniel Bivona explains, "In the post-Darwinian imperial age that is the late nineteenth century, 'knowledge' of the alien other is being produced on a large scale, and occasioning a crisis in the way England looks at itself."<sup>25</sup> The evolutionary theory of recapitulation posited that ontogeny, or the stages of development in the individual, recapitulate or repeat phylogeny, the stages of evolutionary development of humans. The theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny meant, for example, that one could provide a scientific basis for the idea that the childhood of the individual human was analogous to the "childhood" stage of development of human beings generally. According to this theory, "civilized" nations could find survivals of their "primitive" nature in any one of these analogous states: in primitive peoples around the world, in the nation's primitive medieval past, or in those chronological primitives, children. Bivona sees the relationship thus set up between, for example, past and present as one "that is simultaneously one of filiation and opposition,"<sup>26</sup> allowing for both a sense of kinship with the past and a sense of superiority for having progressed beyond it. In the concept of survivals, cultural evolutionists now had a more fully developed scientific theory to cement the relationship between the child and the medieval.

Perhaps no one did more to popularize the theory of survivals in the late Victorian period than Andrew Lang. When Tolkien wanted to dismantle the

identification of the child with fantasy literature, often medieval in origin, he challenged Lang's views. In Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," first delivered as the Andrew Lang lecture at the University of St. Andrews in 1939, Tolkien complained that Lang's association of old folktales with children was "an error of false sentiment,"<sup>27</sup> and that neither adults nor children all had the same tastes in literature. His objections highlight how Lang and other writers treated children categorically in opposition to whatever was considered adult and civilized. Adopting the theory of survivals expressed by the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in his 1871 publication *Primitive Culture*, Lang explains his methods:

Our method throughout will be to place the usage, or myth, which is unintelligible when found among a civilised race, beside the similar myth which is intelligible enough when it is found among savages. A mean term will be found in the folklore preserved by the non-progressive classes in a progressive people. This folklore represents, in the midst of a civilised race, the savage ideas out of which civilisation has been evolved. The conclusion will usually be that the fact which puzzles us by its presence in civilisation is a relic surviving from the time when the ancestors of a civilised race were in the state of savagery.<sup>28</sup>

The search for survivals can take place in a "savage" race or in "non-progressive classes," but children can substitute for these primitives as well. Using the familiar analogy of human development to describe the course of history, Lang states his belief in evolutionary progress: "the world became grown-up."<sup>29</sup> In his introduction to *The Blue Fairy Book*, he explains: "The children to whom and for whom they are told represent the young age of man. They [fairy tales] are true to his early loves, they have his unblunted edge of belief, and his fresh appetite for marvels."<sup>30</sup> Children are treated as a single category, with a single-minded literary taste. Lang wrote his extraordinarily popular fairy books specifically for this audience. *The Blue Fairy Book* was first published in 1889, and other books in the color series were subsequently published and reprinted well into the twentieth century.

Lang's collections of folktales and myths looked far into the past and roamed through the folklore of various nations, but other English writers confined their attentions to British literature and history when looking for that childlike past out of which they had evolved. For example, in the periodical *Boys of the Empire*, a serialized article in 1888 entitled "Progress of the British Boy: Past and Present" takes the reader right back to the beginnings of British history and then moves into a fairly detailed look at the medieval

period.<sup>31</sup> The colored illustration accompanying the first article in the series represents the opposition between primitive and modern: on the left of the illustration stands a boy with long hair, bare-chested but wearing some armor and holding a spear, posed in front of bare rocks, while in the distance a chariot runs by. To the right stands a boy in a school uniform, leaning on a cricket bat, a large building behind him. We can also see a steam engine running on tracks in the background, and rowers in a boat on the river. Under the primitive boy is the date AD 64; under the modern boy, AD 1888. The position of the latter in the picture, as well as the rays of light pouring heavenwards behind him, indicate clearly that the modern boy is the culmination of an evolutionary process. Nevertheless, both the primitive and modern boy look at each other across the space of their picture, and the article that follows makes clear their filiation: "as the 'boy is the father of the man,' it may not be amiss to draw the attention of our young readers to the boyhood, if we may so term it, of England. . . . For as the early thoughts, actions, and habits of the boy give some idea of what his future destiny will be, so does the beginning of a great nation impress all who behold its rise with wonder and admiration."<sup>32</sup> The progress of the nation is not only analogous to the development of the child; the early stages of the nation are actually shaped by the child. The article notes "the not unimportant part boys have played in the formation of that national character which is now considered the type of true manliness, and which is the true cause of England's moral as well as physical supremacy over the other nations of the earth."<sup>33</sup> The author constantly searches for examples of the modern boy's filiation with boys in the past by describing the way of life that boys experienced in various periods of British history and pointing out how the past lives of boys compare to their present lives. A moral lesson can be drawn from this past; for example, modern boys could imitate chivalric behavior "in behaving courteously to their schoolfellows, and in protecting younger boys from the oppression which is pretty certain to greet the appearance of a new-comer at school."<sup>34</sup> Boys are also called upon to emulate the patriotic behavior of boys in the past: "The boys of a past generation helped to bring our land to its height of glory. To the boys of the present day is committed the proud task of still maintaining England's greatness, both at home and abroad, in the field of battle, on the mighty ocean, in the paths of science and commerce; in fact, wherever fame beckons, there our boys must rush obedient to her call."<sup>35</sup> Despite these ways in which the modern and the primitive connect, the general point of view is that the modern boy enjoys the advantages of being more evolved, of having surpassed his primitive counterpart. The

author asks, "What magic has transformed the howling young savage of the wilderness—the wolf hunter of English woods and hills—into the brave yet refined, muscular, yet withal gentle, boy reader of this Journal?"<sup>36</sup> and the answer celebrates a belief in evolutionary progress that serves a nationalistic and imperial agenda: "The mighty magician has been civilization. Civilization which, first introduced by the Romans, alternately swamped then restored by hordes of fighting Picts, Saxons, Danes, and Normans, has still kept its onward course, levelling obstructions, overcoming difficulties, humanising mankind, and brightening the earth, till this present day, in which Britain's name is hailed as its harbinger and representative."<sup>37</sup>

A quick glance through this periodical will reveal that this modern boy who has all the civilized advantages over his primitive brother is nevertheless given a great number of medieval stories from the more primitive boyhood of his nation. In various issues in this periodical from 1888 to 1890, major stories include "Edward the Martyr," "Trial by Battle (a story of the year 1163)," "Æthelred, the Unready; or, The Young Outlaw's Revenge," "Eric the Thane; or, The Stroke of Vengeance," "Godwin the Saxon or the Pirates of the Channel." Even when the story takes place in the present, as does the continuing tale of "Stanley St. Leonards," published in 1890, the young men are compared to medieval heroes: one chapter, in which a young man and his chum rescue a fainting maiden from a villain, bears the title "A Roland for an Oliver." Not yet fully grown into their manhood, these young boys of the empire were expected to identify with medieval characters who had not yet fully evolved into the civilized, modern adult.

The articles in this periodical retell stories from British history. Other publications present the literature of the Middle Ages more directly to children through translations or adaptations of the original texts. The association of the child with a more primitive medieval era is frequently cited as the justification for doing so: for example, Thomson and Speight, the editors of the 1900 *Junior Temple Reader* choose "the lays that lulled the infancy of the races"<sup>38</sup> as stories that especially appeal to modern children, including in their anthology "Beowulf and Grendel," "Balin and Balan," "The Death of Arthur," and "The Vision of Cædmon." The belief in the greater simplicity of the medieval era is carried even further in the works of Mrs. H. R. Haweis, author of *Chaucer for Children*, first published in 1877, and a later revision, *Chaucer for Schools* (1881). Haweis extends the idea that earlier forms of the language developed from a simple to a more complex form by explicitly connecting the earlier stage of development with the present state of children. In her *Chaucer for Children*, she explains in a foreword "To the Mother" that

"much of the construction and pronunciation of old English which seems stiff and obscure to grown up people, appears easy to children, whose crude language is in many ways its counterpart."<sup>39</sup> Alluding to the theory of survivals by drawing analogies between children, the Saxon past, and the "servant class," reminiscent of Lang's "non-progressive" class, Haweis offers this explanation in *Chaucer for Schools* of why children are more naturally attuned to Chaucer's language:

the younger they are, the less they boggle over the final *e*, which seems to be the grand stumbling-block to older readers. Indeed the final *e* comes easy naturally to children, who are used to say "doggie," "horsie," "handie," long before dog, horse, and hand; a peculiarity which may actually be a relic of the old Saxon pronunciation, lingering like many interesting old words among the servant class. Children's habit of saying *this*, *this dog*, *this fairy*, &c., is quite Chaucerian, who habitually speaks of his characters as "this knight," or "this Emelye," "this yeoman," as the case may be.<sup>40</sup>

Having reduced Middle English to the level of baby talk, she further explains that Chaucer's style is childlike as well: "The narrative in early English poetry is almost always very simply and clearly expressed, with the same kind of repetition of facts and names which, as every parent knows, is what children most require in story-telling."<sup>41</sup> This view of the evolution of the language extends even to the evolved capacities of the brain. Haweis explains that "our talking is much faster than talking was in Chaucer's time" because "As we think faster, we speak faster."<sup>42</sup>

Haweis's views on Chaucer's language and style emphasize this difference between the medieval and the modern, a difference that can be bridged only through reference to modern children or the servant class. However, that difference only serves to point to Chaucer's era as a site of origins in which Chaucer is seen as the founder of the English language and as the originator of all of English poetry: "Chaucer founded the whole fabric of English poetic literature,"<sup>43</sup> an opinion that is consistent with the persistent scholarly declaration that Chaucer is the "Father of English Poetry."<sup>44</sup>

Other writers who look even further back in time to the Old English period also argue that the language and literature express the origins of national features. Stopford A. Brooke's *English Literature from A.D. 670 to A.D. 1832*, one of the Literature Primers series, was first published in 1876. The third edition, reprinted in 1898, points out that Old English, though "very different from modern English in form, pronunciation, and appearance," is still the same in its fundamental features: "It is this sameness of language,

as well as the sameness of national spirit, which makes our literature one literature for 1,200 years."<sup>45</sup> Brooke maintains that national spirit can be embodied in works such as *Beowulf*: "The whole poem, Pagan as it is, is English to its very root. It is sacred to us, our Genesis, the book of our origins."<sup>46</sup> Just as with adults, children are advised to study the medieval tale as an historical account of the past. Thomas Cartwright, the author of the 1908 publication *Brave Beowulf*, states, "If you read it carefully, you will learn from it much about the manners and customs of the Anglo-Saxons, before they crossed the seas and came into Britain."<sup>47</sup> M. I. Ebbutt, author of *British Myths and Legends*, first published in 1910, turns her attention to *Beowulf*, "this grand primitive hero who embodies the ideal of English heroism. Bold to rashness for himself, prudent for his comrades, daring, resourceful, knowing no fear, loyal to his king and his kinsmen, generous in war and in peace, self-sacrificing, *Beowulf* stands for all that is best in manhood in an age of strife."<sup>48</sup> Reginald Horsman discusses this preoccupation with racial classification and points out that by the mid-nineteenth century a belief in Teutonic greatness and destiny increased, with the British and Americans particularly "attracted to the idea of their race as a regenerating force for the whole world."<sup>49</sup> Sir Walter Besant's *The Story of King Alfred* (1901) exemplifies that attitude: "Alfred is, and will always remain, the typical man of our race—call him Anglo-Saxon, call him American, call him Englishman, call him Australian—the typical man of our race at his best and noblest."<sup>50</sup> Ebbutt provides a detailed racial recipe of the English character, beginning with "cave men" and then moving on to the "proud Aryan Celtic race"—"Tall, blue-eyed, with fair or red hair. . . . To them belongs more especially, in our national amalgam, the passion for the past, the ardent patriotism, the longing for spiritual beauty, which raises and relieves the Saxon materialism."<sup>51</sup> The Anglo-Saxons demonstrated "a sturdy loyalty, an uprightness, a brave disregard of death in the cause of duty, which we can still recognise in modern Englishmen."<sup>52</sup> The Scandinavians further contribute "the power of initiative, the love of adventure, and the daring action which have made England the greatest colonizing nation on the earth."<sup>53</sup>

Boys were expected to emulate these national and racial heroes, but often these figures provide personal moral guidance as well. Sidney Lanier, in his introduction to the *Boys' Froissart*, explains how boys can aspire to be good knights in the present by allegorizing the meaning of knightly combat:

A good deal of what is really combat nowadays is not *called* combat. Many struggles, instead of taking the form of sword and armor, will present themselves to you after a few years in the following shapes: the strict payment of

debts; the utmost delicacy of national honor; the greatest openness of party discussion, and the most respectful courtesy towards political opponents; the purity of the ballot-box; the sacred and liberal guaranty of all rights to all citizens; the holiness of marriage; the lofty contempt for what is small, knowing, and gossipy; and the like. Nevertheless the same qualities which made a manful fighter then make one now. To speak the very truth; to perform a promise to the uttermost; to reverence all women; to maintain right and honesty; to help the weak; to treat high and low with courtesy; to be constant to one love; to be fair to a bitter foe; to despise luxury; to preserve simplicity, modesty, and gentleness in heart and bearing: this was in the oath of the young knight who took the stroke upon him in the fourteenth century, and this is still the way to win love and glory in the nineteenth.<sup>54</sup>

These children's periodicals, schoolbooks, and anthologies demonstrate a conflation of ideas about the child and the medieval through a primitivist and evolutionary discourse, which often determined the kind of reading material that would be given to children. However, the common discursive grounds on which the child and medieval were to be found also influenced how the child became an object of scholarly and popular scrutiny, just like medieval authors or medieval fictional characters. In 1897, Alice Meynell published a rather poetic appreciation of childhood entitled *The Children*, a book that described the appearance of children, features of their language, and their behavior. Meynell points out that children had not always been such a focus of attention: "Time was when childhood was but borne with."<sup>55</sup> But Meynell attributes the newfound attention to childhood to the influence of evolutionary thinking, which had created "a disposition, a general consent, to find the use and the value of process . . . a delight in those qualities that could not be but for their transitoriness."<sup>56</sup> Natural images are used to describe the child—he or she is like a bird that "alights and escapes out of time to your footing"<sup>57</sup> or children are "so flowerlike that it is always a little fresh surprise to see them blooming in winter."<sup>58</sup> Their language is described in similar terms: "The mere gathering of children's language would be much like collecting together a handful of flowers that should be all unique, single of their kind."<sup>59</sup>

While Meynell places her children mainly in an idyllic world, other writers on childhood emphasize a harsher view of childish primitivism, such as William Dean Howells, who writes about boys living in an American town and describes the boys' world as having "its own ideals and superstitions, and these are often of a ferocity, a depravity, scarcely credible in after-life."<sup>60</sup> Although Meynell and Howells represent two views of childish primitivism,

one idyllic and the other savage, both writers reveal clearly the racist emphasis in primitivist thinking, which infantilizes races deemed to be primitive by identifying them with a childish, savage state of being beyond which the observer has been able to progress. Meynell describes how twilight seems to incite children to run and pursue each other in play and then asks, "What remembrances does this imply of the hunt, what of the predatory dark?"<sup>61</sup> At another point, she describes a four-year-old's reaction to a bedtime threat as both fearful and playful, likening the response to a Japanese adult: "Whatever that extreme Oriental may be in war and diplomacy, whatever he may be at London University, or whatever his plans of Empire, in relation to the unseen world he is a child at play. He hides himself, he hides his eyes and pretends to believe that he is hiding, he runs from the supernatural and laughs for the fun of running."<sup>62</sup> Howells also describes a group of Indians who visit a town and how one bashful boy "could only stand apart and long to approach the filthy savages, whom he revered."<sup>63</sup> Howells adds that all of the boys were more than willing to follow the Indians and "be barbarians for the rest of their days."<sup>64</sup>

Neither Meynell nor Howells identifies children with the medieval past specifically, but in pedagogical guides such as that of William Byron Forbush, who published *The Boy Problem* in 1901, primitivism is defined through the progression of literary genres and historical periods in which the medieval does play a crucial role. Using an historical analogy for human development, Forbush explains the evolution of the child in the womb and then describes what happens afterward: "After birth this 'candidate for humanity' continues this evolution, this 'climbing up his ancestral tree,' in which he has already repeated the history of the animal world, by repeating the history of his own race-life from savagery unto civilization. 'The child,' says Chamberlain, 'is father of the man, and brother of the race.'"<sup>65</sup> Each phase in the life of the boy is defined by an appropriate level of literature: childhood is the Old Testament phase, according to Forbush, akin to other races and times deemed to be primitive, while the older child achieves a new level: "Adolescence is bounded at the beginning by approaching puberty, and at the end by complete manhood. The so-called American boy, who was really a Persian in his love of war, or an Athenian each day telling or hearing some new thing, or a Hindu in his dreams, or a Hebrew in his business sense, is rapidly coming down through the millenniums, and has reached the days of Bayard and Siegfried and Launcelot."<sup>66</sup> It should not be surprising that the idea of the medieval era as a metaphor for a stage of childhood easily transforms into a literal prescription for the kinds of things that children at that particular

stage should read. Forbush outlines which stories define childhood and adolescence: "Fairy stories not only appeal to but are the actual translation of child-life, which is fairy life, in its wonder, credulity and ignorance of boundaries and limitations. Stories of courage and adventure also reflect that era of hero-worship and out-of-doors in which the adolescent lives."<sup>67</sup> He cites with approval a reading scheme being used in boys' clubs, beginning with "Race stories, especially Teutonic myths, legends, and folklore. Stories appealing to the imagination and illustrating the attempts of the child race to explain the wonders of the world in which he lives."<sup>68</sup> The progression is then to "Stories of nature; animal and plant stories" and "Stories of individual prowess; hero tales" followed by "Stories of great leaders and patriots" and culminating in "Stories of love; altruism; love of woman; love of country and home; love of beauty, truth and God."<sup>69</sup>

To put these beliefs into action, Forbush created a society for boys called the Knights of King Arthur, "an order of Christian knighthood for boys" whose goal is "to bring back to the world, and especially to its youth, the spirit of chivalry, courtesy, deference to womanhood, recognition of the *noblesse oblige*, and Christian daring, and ideal of that kingdom of knightliness which King Arthur promised he would bring back when he returns from Avalon."<sup>70</sup> Forbush describes the group's rituals: the boys sit in a circle as if sitting at the Round Table, and they take turns being the king. An adult leader plays the role of Merlin. The boys are divided into "castles" with each boy known by the name of a hero, either medieval or modern, whose life provides a role model for him. The initiations progress through the stages of page, esquire, and knight. The boys read heroic books, among other practices imitating knighthood, including "quests" to local historic sites. As Forbush points out, "Almost everything can be clad in imagination with the knightly character."<sup>71</sup> In Forbush's youth groups, medieval literature is at once the definition of a stage of childhood and its moral guide to what the child can become. "It is easy to overemphasize the fact that the child is a savage. He is also a seer,"<sup>72</sup> declares Forbush, identifying a certain tension that we can find in most formulations of primitiveness. One can look back to a point of origin, but that originary state contains within it the seeds of what the primitive will evolve into. This tension between what Bivona calls "filiation and opposition" is what allows childhood to be identified with primitive medieval literature while at the same time having that literature provide role models for becoming an adult. Like Forbush, other educators also referred to medieval ideals of chivalry or courage in order to shape the behaviors of boys. Youth groups such as the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry and the Boy

Scouts, for example, made use of a chivalric code as a moral guide while at the same time putting boys in a more primitive outdoor setting, which is, of course, where they were naturally supposed to belong.

The unquestioned acceptance of medieval stories for children obscures the fact that a certain kind of medieval literature had to be constructed for children. This fact becomes most obvious when one looks closely at the nature of the adaptations made in stories intended for young readers. Lang's explanation that the fairy tales "have been altered in many ways to make them suitable for children"<sup>73</sup> should give one pause to question just what is the childlike quality of these stories if they require bowdlerization? Haweis claims that "[t]here is no clearer or safer exponent of the life of the fourteenth century"<sup>74</sup> than Chaucer, but many adaptors of the *Canterbury Tales* have to ensure their "safety." Francis Storr and Hawes Turner, editors of the *Canterbury Chimes or Chaucer Tales Retold for Children* (1878), admit that the "occasional coarseness" of the *Canterbury Tales* makes them unfit for children, and so, like almost all Chaucer adaptors, they present a pared-down version, omitting tales such as the Miller's or Reeve's.<sup>75</sup> Extended prologues of characters deemed unsavoury, such as the Wife of Bath, are generally omitted. Eva March Tappan in her 1908 publication, *The Chaucer Story Book*, skips the Wife of Bath's Prologue entirely and introduces the tale as a simple Arthurian story: "The next pilgrim called upon for a tale was the wife of Bath. She chose to tell one of the days of King Arthur."<sup>76</sup>

The tales of King Arthur, however, also pose myriad problems especially in dealing with sexual details. For example, Howard Pyle's *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* glosses over the conditions of Arthur's conception, the disguising of Uther Pendragon, and the deception of Igraine, as outlined in Malory. Pyle makes the marriage sound completely proper: "After Uther-Pendragon had ruled his kingdom for a number of years he took to wife a certain beautiful and gentle lady, hight Igraine. This noble dame was the widow of Gerlois, the Duke of Tintegal."<sup>77</sup> In *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table*, Pyle goes out of his way to defend the propriety of Lancelot and Guinevere's relationship:

[T]hey two became such friends that no two people could be greater friends than they were. Now I am aware that there have been many scandalous things said concerning that friendship, but I do not choose to believe any such evil sayings. For there are always those who love to think and say evil things of others. Yet though it is not to be denied that Sir Lancelot never had for his lady any other dame than the Lady Guinevere, still no one hath ever said with truth that she regarded Sir Lancelot otherwise than as her

very dear friend. For Sir Lancelot always avouched with his knightly word, unto the last day of his life, that the Lady Guinevere was noble and worthy in all ways, wherefore I choose to believe his knightly word and to hold that what he said was true.<sup>78</sup>

Even in tales without overt expressions of sexuality, such as *Beowulf*, translators made numerous adjustments to the originals in order to emphasize a masculine heroism deemed appropriate for national heroes.<sup>79</sup> Pyle's defensive position reveals the extent to which translators had to make adjustments so that the literature of that supposedly primitive and childlike era would fit the evolutionary paradigm of human and historical development.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this idea of human and historical evolution formed a powerful discourse that constructed the academic study of the medieval period and eventually, the study of the child. What began as a metaphorical association of the medieval with the child became a literal identification of children with medieval heroes, conduct, and literature. One could say, therefore, that not only did the idea of the child construct the medieval but also the obverse: that the idea of the medieval constructed our notion of the child. The disciplines studying the medieval and the child shared a primitivist and evolutionary discourse which offered a broad ranging explanation of the past's relation to the present. Cast as the "other," the child, the primitive, and the medieval served to define the adult, the civilized, and the modern, but in their position of alterity they were rendered as single, unvarying classes. The racist implications of treating primitives around the world as a single class are abundantly clear when proponents of the survivals theory represent other races as childlike and inferior, requiring more "adult" guidance. The child is also viewed as a class which is defined, in one way, by its single-minded taste in literature, as if all children like a progression of folktales, myths, and legends if given a choice in their reading material. As well, the Middle Ages become a single category whose literature, even though it covers roughly a thousand years, is viewed as an unvarying means of direct, simple access to a more natural period of history, its documents seemingly devoid of ironic filters or satirical intent or historical, linguistic, and geographic variations. One might consider the effects of these disciplinary formations even further. If the paradigm of progress values more highly what is considered to be the more evolved state rather than the point of origins, one may well question what effect the persistent association of the child and the primitive with the medieval has had on the contemporary status of medieval literature. Even today, if someone were to

ask for stories of King Arthur or Robin Hood, it is likely that most people would assume that simple children's stories or at least stories that appealed to adolescent tastes were being requested—in other words, literature that is not as complex or as serious as that typically defined as modern, adult literature. Medievalists, of course, know better, but in order to understand clearly how medieval studies developed to this point, it is important to recognize the conflation of the child, the primitive, and the medieval in the disciplinary formations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That intersection is perhaps most evident to us when we examine the particular kind of medieval hero presented to us in texts from this time, an exemplar of the nation and the race, who reveals to us quite sharply the primitivist and evolutionary foundations on which he was constructed.

## NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of a Mount Saint Vincent University Research Grant. I am grateful for having been given access to the collections of the British Library and the Osborne Collection of Early Children's Books in Toronto.

1. John Mitchell Kemble, *The Saxons in England: A History of the English Commonwealth till the Period of the Norman Conquest*, rev. ed., ed. Walter de Gray Birch (London: Bernard Quartich, 1876), p. 433.

2. *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, selected and ed. by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p. 298.

3. Hamilton Wright Mabie, ed., *Heroes Every Child Should Know: Tales for Young People of the World's Heroes in All Ages*, Every Child Should Know Series (Garden City: Doubleday, 1913), p. 4.

4. Kenneth Kidd, "Farming for Boys: Boyology and the Professionalization of Boy Work," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1995–96): 148–54, discusses the development of "boyology," a term first used in 1916. Kidd states that boyology—"the pseudo-science of boy education and management" (p. 148)—became a new focus of interest in the second half of the nineteenth century. Kidd points out how academic child study, which was organized at the beginning of the twentieth century, "did codify boyology and influence the institutionalization of child psychology and children's literature" (p. 150). Kidd deals with American examples of boyology and the influence of the theory of recapitulation, but basically the same beliefs are evident in, for example, British literature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Kidd expands his study of boyology in *Making American Boys: Boyology and the Feral Tale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

5. Elizabeth Elstob, *Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue, First given in English: With an Apology for the Study of Northern Antiquities*, Augustan Reprint Society 61 (London: W. Bowyer, 1715; repr. New York: Kraus, 1967), pp. i-xxxv, xxx.
6. Jonathan Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (London: Benj. Tooke, 1712; repr. Ann Arbor: Augustan Reprint Society, 1948), p. 18; this essay was a renewal of arguments raised by Swift in the *Tatler* 230 (28 September 1710).
7. Quoted in Arthur Johnston, *Enchanted Ground: The Study of Medieval Romance in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Athlone, 1964), p. 33.
8. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," in *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1971), p. 34.
9. See Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990) and Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
10. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 29, 30.
11. John Guillory, "Literary Study and the Modern System of the Disciplines," in *Disciplinarity at the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Amanda Anderson and Joseph Valente (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) pp. 29-30, outlines how philology "was able to defend its claim to scientificity through the end of the nineteenth century and beyond, and even to erect its theories alongside the powerful monument of Darwinian biology." Other studies provide further evidence for the primacy of philological study in university departments. For example, Gerald Graff and Michael Warner, *The Origins of Literary Study in America: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 1989), document the struggle in American English departments; Robin S. Harris, *English Studies at Toronto: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), provides details of the English curriculum in Canada at the University of Toronto; and Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), covers disciplinary developments in England.
12. Kemble, *Saxons in England*, p. viii.
13. W. S. W. Anson, introduction to *Epics and Romances of the Middle Ages*, adapted from the work of W. Wagner, 10th ed. (1882; repr. London: Routledge; New York: Dutton, 1917) (repr. as *Epics and Romances of Our Northern Ancestors: Norse, Celt, and Teuton* [London: Norroena Society, 1907], p. 4).
14. Kemble, *Saxons in England*, p. 1.
15. Kemble, *Saxons in England*, p. xxxii.
16. Stopford A. Brooke, *The History of Early English Literature*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 1:36.
17. Andrew Lang, *History of English Literature from "Beowulf" to Swinburne* (London: Longmans, 1912), p. 149.
18. Sharon Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, 5th ed., 3 vols. (London: Longman, Rees, 1828).
19. G. G. Coulton, *Chaucer and His England* (London: Methuen, 1908; repr. New York: Russell, 1957), p. 114.

20. R. Howard Bloch, "New Philology and Old French," *Speculum* 65 (1990): 42.
21. Alice Chandler, *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 7.
22. Quoted in E. G. Stanley, *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), p. 34.
23. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, p. 8.
24. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 56-57.
25. Daniel Bivona, *Desire and Contradiction: Imperial Visions and Domestic Debates in Victorian Literature, Cultural Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p. 75.
26. Bivona, *Desire and Contradiction*, p. xi.
27. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," p. 34.
28. Andrew Lang, "The Method of Folklore," in his *Custom and Myth*, 2nd ed. (London: Longmans, Green, 1885), p. 25.
29. Andrew Lang, ed., *The Green Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, 1892; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), p. ix.
30. Andrew Lang, ed., *The Blue Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, 1889; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), p. 349.
31. Edwin J. Brett, ed., "Progress of the British Boy: Past and Present," *Boys of the Empire: A Journal in Colours, of Fun, Instruction, and Romance* 1 (6 February 1888): 12+; 12 (23 April 1888): 188+.
32. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 1, p. 12.
33. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 1, p. 12.
34. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 12, p. 188.
35. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 12, pp. 188-89.
36. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 1, p. 14.
37. Brett, "Progress of the British Boy," no. 1, p. 14.
38. Clara Linklater Thomson and E. E. Speight, eds., *The Junior Temple Reader: Being a New Collection of Heroic Folk and Fairy Stories, Children's Poetry, Play Rhymes and Animal Stories, for School and Home Reading* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1900), p. 1.
39. Mrs. H. R. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1881), p. xi. See also her *Chaucer for Children: A Golden Key*, rev. ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1882).
40. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools*, p. ix.
41. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools*, pp. ix-x.
42. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools*, p. 27.
43. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools*, p. 3.
44. David Matthews, "Infantilizing the Father: Chaucer Translations and Moral Regulation," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 22 (2000): 93-114, discusses the paradoxical representation of Chaucer as a fatherly figure who is also infantilized in nineteenth-century translations. He comments on Haweis's translations of Chaucer in the context of children's versions of Chaucer at the time, pointing out that such translations

generally presented in novelistic prose a limited number of tales (usually excluding the fabliaux). In such translations, according to Matthews, the relationship between tellers and tales is often obscured, and Chaucer appears as a controlling narrator who makes moral observations about the exemplary characters being presented. Matthews also examines how nineteenth-century translators like Haweis believed that Chaucer could be presented to the working classes as an ethical guide by scholars such as herself, who assumed the superior position of moral guide and teacher to the lower classes by determining what they should read in Chaucer and what they should not. A different perspective on Haweis's work is offered by Mary Flowers Braswell in "The Chaucer Scholarship of Mary Eliza Haweis (1852–1898)," *Chaucer Review* 39 (2005): 402–19. Braswell assesses Haweis as a serious Chaucer scholar in a male-dominated field. A general description of Haweis's *Chaucer for Children and Chaucer for Schools* is given in Velma Bourgeois Richmond's *Chaucer as Children's Literature: Retellings from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), pp. 36–48.

45. Brooke, *English Literature*, p. 4.
46. Brooke, *English Literature*, p. 11.
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48. M. I. Ebbutt, *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race* (London: Harrap, 1910) (repr. in the British Myths and Legends Series [London: Mystic Press, 1987]), p. i.
49. Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 77.
50. Sir Walter Besant, *The Story of King Alfred* (London: George Newnes, 1901), p. 206.
51. Ebbutt, *British Myths and Legends*, p. v.
52. Ebbutt, *British Myths and Legends*, p. vii.
53. Ebbutt, *British Myths and Legends*, p. viii.
54. Sidney Lanier, introduction to *The Boy's Froissart* (1878), repr. in *The English Novel and Essays on Literature*, ed. Clarence Gohdes and Kemp Malone, vol. 4, *The Centennial Edition of the Works of Sidney Lanier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945), p. 349.
55. Alice Meynell, *The Children* (London: Bodley Head, 1897), p. 28.
56. Meynell, *Children*, p. 28.
57. Meynell, *Children*, p. 9.
58. Meynell, *Children*, p. 21.
59. Meynell, *Children*, p. 15.
60. William Dean Howells, *Boy Life: Stories and Readings Selected from the Works of William Dean Howells and Arranged for Supplementary Reading in Elementary Schools by Percival Chubb* (New York: Harper, 1909), p. 65.
61. Meynell, *Children*, p. 44.
62. Meynell, *Children*, p. 49.
63. Howells, *Boy Life*, p. 126.

64. Howells, *Boy Life*, p. 129.
65. William Byron Forbush, *The Boy Problem: A Study in Social Pedagogy*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Pilgrim, 1902), p. 9.
66. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 18.
67. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 143.
68. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 144.
69. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 144.
70. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 97.
71. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 99.
72. Forbush, *Boy Problem*, p. 34.
73. Andrew Lang, *The Orange Fairy Book* (London: Longmans, Green, 1906; repr. New York: Dover, 1968), p. vi.
74. Haweis, *Chaucer for Schools*, p. x.
75. Francis Storr and Hawes Turner, eds., *Canterbury Chimes or Chaucer Tales Retold for Children* (London: Kegan Paul, 1878), p. v.
76. Eva March Tappan, *The Chaucer Story Book* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), p. 115.
77. Howard Pyle, *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903; repr. New York: Dover, 1965), p. 1.
78. Howard Pyle, *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905; repr. New York: Dover, 1968), pp. 23–24.
79. Anna Smol, "Heroic Ideology and the Children's *Beowulf*," *Children's Literature* 22 (1994): 90–100.