

SUSAN ASH

Dr Barnardo and “The Queen’s Shades”: Liminal London, Hospitality and Victorian Child Rescue

1. Dr. Barnardo

To support his ubiquitous philanthropic enterprises, Dr. Barnardo published tales set in the typical London spaces where homeless children often took shelter: lodging houses, stairwells, archways and bridges. Promoted as “true” and “drawn from life,” these narratives render the city into recognizable tropes associated with dirt

“God’s Guiding Hand,”⁴ a short autobiographical narrative in which Barnardo accounts for the beginning of his career and his highly individual practices as a child reformer.

Barnardo promoted his work as continuous and pervasive, declaring that by “DAY ... we train, teach, visit, preach, and sometimes write,” and by “NIGHT we visit lodging houses, interview policemen” to “seek and find” children “in the most unlikely places.”⁵

Recent research has focused on Barnardo’s repressive policies and practices, informed by a penchant for melodramatic self-promotion.⁶ I will argue, however, that Barnardo’s writing suggests a more ambivalent relationship with the London “waif.” *Our Father’s Sparrows* depicts an opportunity for hospitality between children that indicates Barnardo’s capacity to recognise and even admire the agency and generosity practiced

abuses others. She demonstrates initiative by teaching Tom and Nell to pawn clothes and obtain “browns,” capital for a street-vendor enterprise selling watercress, providing profits which the children share equally. Such actions positively differentiate Carrotty Sue from the “arab” gangs of children exhibiting the “gaunt, wolfish look” of extreme hunger and neglect, who fight “as savagely as dogs” over “a morsel of fish, half-decayed and blackened.”¹² The novel emphasises both the sub-human status of these racialised “arab” boys as well as their basis in facts: a footnote in the novel assures child readers that Barnardo himself had often witnessed such bestial behaviour in the streets.¹³ Such passages indicate fears about how boundaries between human and animal have slipped to create the English urban “savage” who is neither fully human nor

Sparrows, this larrikin role is played out by a fourth significant child, Punch, a young thief introduced as he robs Tom and Nelly.¹⁸ With his gang who “look up” to him as the “nearest approach to a hero,”¹⁹ Punch lives well (if sporadically) and, as a measure of his success, is resoundingly robust. The narrator describes Punch as a braggart of “unholy deeds,” whose “utter profane words” could not be printed in the context of children’s fiction.²⁰ Nevertheless, Punch is treated as redeemable, with innate qualities “recognised” by the novel’s Evangelical reformer’s special gift in physiognomy. Barnardo himself seems to have thrived on the self-imposed challenge to differentiate between classes based on what he perceived as his highly developed skill in reading the physiognomic signs.²¹ He claimed only a two percent “failure” rate in his dealings with over 50,000 children.²² Of these “scourings of the street,” he wrote, even the most “ferocious expression” and “roguish leer” needed only a short time in Barnardo’s care for “the lines” of “physiognomy” to undergo a “complete metamorphosis.”²³ Thus, Barnardo presents both himself and, as we shall see, his narrative alter ego in *Sparrows*, Pelham, as uniquely gifted in consistently sustaining their own physical and moral boundaries while in direct contact with corrupted bodies and language exemplified by characters such as Punch.

Rachel Ablow has argued that for the Victorians emotions functioned as an epistemological tool,²⁴

period.³⁰ It is this notion of community to which I turn now, comparing Carroty Sue's spontaneous but fragile generosity to the professional reformer's version of "hospitality."

3. Thresholds, Hosts and Hospitality

For Derrida, hospitality's very possibility lies in thresholds, the liminal sites where its practical conditions are negotiated. He writes at length about hospitality's double imperative. On the one hand, hospitality implies an *unconditional welcome*: where anyone may enter as a guest and the guest's right to hospitality is absolute. On the other hand, hospitality also involves a necessarily *conditional welcome*, contingent upon answers to questions such as: Who are you? Where do you come from? Why

over it,” a restriction that Derrida says is the very “condition of the gift” of hospitality itself.³³ In the context of Victorian philanthropy, this liminal moment at the threshold is all important because what follows will either be the invitation to come in or stay out. Furthermore, the permission to enter inevitably will be followed up in the form of reciprocal obligations between host and guest. As Derrida says, it is never a “straightforward extension of an individual right” for either host or guest.³⁴ Negotiating the right to “relief” is, of course, fundamental to Victorian practices of state and religious-based charity. From the start, Barnardo took great pains to broadcast globally the policies which he believed differentiated his Homes from practices associated with the New Poor Laws which had underpinned workhouse relief since 1834 and religious-based charity monitored by the Charity Organisation Society from 1869. Support from these sources was predicated on “worthiness” and a policy of less eligibility; in other words, any indoor aid was conceived and designed as punitive deterrence.

In principle and in practice, Barnardo detested the Workhouse which, he wrote, “stamped” the “pauper child” with the “brand of his pauperism in huge barrack workhouses” where “all the inmates lost their rights and individuality, and became machine-turned figures.”³⁵ The “little pauper,” he continued, was “dressed in a hideous uniform” and “trained as one in a hundred or a thousand.” He or she “was never mothered, never loved, never individualised. He was fed, clothed, and educated by contract...” Crucial for my argument here, he argued that the boys “had neither moral control do the fibre nor physical stamina;” girls became the “prey of the destroyer, recruits in the black had

“contract” rather than any feeling. According to Barnardo, the workhouse barrack system lacked the crucial, fine divisions both spatially and socially which inspire and control human emotion. Thus, any support predicated upon the policy of punitive deterrence eliminated natural emotions from children to the detriment of the national, social body’s well-being. Barnardo advocated the “Cottage system,” especially for girls, that emulated Christian home and domesticity, with a mother figure and girls of all ages domiciled in small bedrooms as if sisters. Barnardo accounted for his decision to build his Girls’ Home (opened July 1876) in Barkingside, well beyond London’s city parameters at that time, in “How I Retrieved a Blunder.” He wrote that the nature of conversations overheard between “girl savages” in his early barrack accommodation (1870-73) were “shocking in the extreme, appalling in their revelations of neglect, degradation, and even bestiality,” ultimately motivating his desire to virtually excise girls from mass housing associated with the East End. Without the control of boundaries in small family groups, Barnardo argued that a girl did not develop any natural capacity to empathise; as an “untutored savage,” she had “no imagination... she was incapable of putting herself in another’s place.”³⁷ Thus, barrack accommodation, without fixed borders and firmly divided spaces, blunted emotionality, consequently to decrease moral stature.

I am arguing that in offering shelter in such a way that only the most desperate would accept its terms, workhouse accommodation reflects hospitality’s divided etymology, its [Latin] roots to both hospitality and hostility as articulated by Derrida. Derrida examines the lexicon of related concepts that clusters around this opposition: the patron/host who “receives,” welcomes, offers the gift of “home,” as opposed to what is fundamentally at stake, that is, remaining “master” and protector of the home (city, state). Derrida crucially asks: *must* hospitality necessarily “consist in interrogating the

new arrival?”³⁸ He asks if it is “more just and more loving to question or not to question?” raising a crucial point in the context of philanthropic shelter.³⁹ Dr. Barnardo vehemently differentiated himself in the mid-Victorian charity marketplace, first in London (and eventually globally) by his pronounced policy to admit all destitute children. His identifying brand was the “ever open doors;” a trompe l’oeil effect painted onto the doors of the Stepney Home that survived well into the twentieth century.⁴⁰ *Our Father’s Sparrows* reiterates Barnardo’s premise to admit children “...at any hour of day or night” without “recommendation, voting, money payments, or any of those other conditions so common in such institutions, and which are often found ... to cause additional trial and suffering among the very class for whose benefit they are established.”⁴¹ However, the implication that Barnardo’s Homes accepted children without question is far from actual practice. Children’s stories were rigorously investigated by a crew of Barnardo’s professional beadles. Furthermore, doors may have been “open” but neither Barnardo nor Pelham remain at the thresholds, as hosts waiting to admit (or exclude) visitants; rather they fashion their child reformer role as intrepid anthropologist-explorer.⁴² For example, accompanied by his “native informant” Punch, Pelham undertakes “investigations” of a “most searching kind” in the deep of the night in courts, alleys, empty market places, and in the “shelving river foreshore,” anywhere the street “arab” takes hidden shelter.⁴³ In both his novel and non-fiction, Barnardo’s language reflects his perception of vigorously active philanthropy, using words such as “find” “catch” “snatch” (abduct, steal) to describe his practice as opposed to the more passive terms: welcome, receive, accept.⁴⁴ Indeed, he conceived (and promoted) his own actions “not under the shelter of the law,” but as the “*philanthropic abduction pursued as a fine art* – an art painfully acquired by years of laborious

effort.”⁴⁵ Barnardo claimed that he had the “*moral law*” on “his side.” Here Barnardo privileges “duties” over “rights.”⁴⁶

in conventional missionary discourse intent on bringing the “*heathen in London*” into “Christ’s Church,” emphasising his singular capacity to penetrate the “deeper depth” of London, the “doorways of fetid, pestiferous houses in the lowest courts and alleys” and sustain contact with children, “*beyond the reach*” of any mere “*visitor*.” This account emphasises Barnardo’s capacity to sustain physical and moral contact, despite seemingly intolerable conditions, to engage in conversation and learn individual stories, a power he invests in “Mr. Pelham,” his doppelganger in *Our Father’s Sparrows*.⁵¹

Pelham bears strong physical resemblance to Barnardo himself, drawing on two recognizable tropes: the muscular Christian subject emerging at this time and an older notion of the man of sentiment, conjoining vitality with emotional sensibility.⁵² Since Barnardo was sensitive to charges that charismatic, individual-based charity could not be trusted, he deploys Pelham in the novel precisely to amalgamate a special capacity to

“The Shades,” Pelham is unable to penetrate the “narrow aperture” concealed by Sue’s single pin. He and Punch give up the search and leave. Thus, in effect, the children’s novel examines “The Shades” from the inside out, from the perspective of children who

imprisonment is fluid: indeed, Barnardo was in fact in the courts more than once for refusing to let some children *out* of his Homes.in the courts

after night; and I fear it was his impression that I had deliberately exaggerated the

one analytic frame within which child rescuers proposed corrections, but did not develop any critique of the social conditions that produced such destitution, preferring to promote the “radical action” of removing children from the “primary source of danger,” their parents.⁷² While the complete absence of such a critique is debatable, certainly Barnardo’s “tales” of child rescue symbolically support Swain’s conclusion. In “God’s Guiding Hand,” Barnardo encourages his readers to regard ‘The Shades’ and the body of the child, both in agonised deterioration, as representative of a degraded social body. The “delivered,” mewling figures who emerge at “The Shades” are neither recklessly cheerful nor able to savagely fight over bits of decayed meat, and come to signify an appalling maternal failure. Indeed, for these children, genuine sensibility is represented as not just blunted, but no longer evolving. By extension, the fate of a nation depends upon Barnardo’s last assisted delivery in “The Shades,” locating, removing and resituating children from a morally contaminated, as well as physically debilitated, environment.

Thus, in “God’s Own Hand,” “The Shades” comes to exemplify a corporeal and architectural collapse, a connection between human sensations and architectural detritus representing, I would argue, what Grace Kehler has called in her discussion of the Gothic features of early Victorian reform treaties, the “radical porousness” of the poor.⁷³

Kehler suggests, dissolving boundaries between the inanimate and animate, between building and body, constitutes a “concatenated metonymic exchange” calculated to show the misery and wretchedness of built environments.⁷⁴ In the novel, “the Shades” plays its part in a melodramatic series of events related to lost and found family, but Barnardo’s imagery in “God’s Own Hand” also evokes the Gothic, not in the least in the structure’s endless, secret passages (seventy three boys!) we might associate with the haunted house of that genre. Furthermore, the boys it “

interior spaces,” as well as the “sensory experience and physical manifestations of interiority.” She states further that these impulses produce “conflicted understandings of culpability, transgression, and victimization” which manifest in the Gothic’s capacity to elicit both horror and moral sympathy,⁷⁶ certainly an objective here for Barnardo. These “disruptive aspects of Gothic corporeality” do not work alone, she argues, but rather in conjunction with “legal-sentimental constructions” of “racialised will.”⁷⁷ Similarly, Barnardo invests “The Shades” with implications for both reforming practices as well as the legal apparatus. He skips over the rights of children (not actually legal su

“dwelling” is reduced to spaces in London to which his (middle-class) child readers had little or no access. Children are encouraged to feel fear regarding unfixed dwelling, leading to compassion. However, rather than elicit disgust,

3. I have yet to find irrefutable evidence to explain the name of this structure. In this essay I follow Barnardo's example, and use his shorter title, "The Shades."
4. Barnardo published this novel, *Our Father's Sparrows*, three times. In this essay I cite the version published serially in *The Children's Treasury* (1879). Barnardo republished the text in his second periodical, *Our Darlings* (1885-1886); he printed a somewhat revised version

10. Barnardo, *Sparrows*, 112.
11. Barnardo, *Sparrows*, 122-3.
12. Barnardo, *Sparrows*, 147-8.
13. Subsequently in *Our Father's Sparrows*, Barnardo includes an extended digression on the nature of the "city arab," describing the "wild nature" of foraging parties" who gather in markets in the "grey of morning" with "eyes sharp as birds of prey," who "greedily devour offal discarded by the salesmen such as would not be proper sustenance for an animal which the owner had any regard." (244) Indeed, he informs readers, "many animals would be quickly poisoned were they compelled to breathe the fetid atmosphere." (232) This digression had also been published almost verbatim the previous year in *Night and Day* not as fiction, but as an "essay" titled "The Street Arab's World," exemplifying Barnardo's constant blurring between fiction and exegesis in his promotional writing. (1878:75-76).
14. Barnardo, "Saved from a Crime," *Night and Day* (1887): 144. Barnardo randomly used both

audacious expression and “irresistible spirited appearance.” (“Rescued from Life: The True Story of a Young Thief,” *Night and Day* [1882]: 113) Indeed, he wrote here that Punch seemed entirely void of the “furtive glance” and nervous twitching” that exposed the child thief; all physical signs of virtue however are obliterated as soon as Punch spoke with characteristic profanity. (Ibid. 115).

19. Barnardo, *Sparrows*, 159.

Organisation Society, founded in 1869 to regulate both duplication and indiscriminate charity. Barnardo sustained an antagonistic relation with this organisation throughout his career. See Wagner on the court arbitration case in 1877 between Barnardo and agents of the COS. By his death he had initiated expansive enterprises in Australia and Canada, as well as outreach “Open Door” facilities for children in more than a dozen British cities. He ran extensive training schemes beginning in the 1870s. All were funded by donation from his multifarious schemes that used both discursive and actual bodies to recruit volunteers and money in a global community of philanthropy that virtually spanned the class system from Royal patrons to the street children themselves. My wider research investigates Barnardo’s innovative fundraising schemes, specifically the recruitment of all classes of children for active philanthropic work.

31. Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. R. Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 27.
32. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27.
33. Derrida, ‘Hostipitality,’ *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 5.3 2000: 4.
34. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 23.
35. Barnardo, *Night and Day*, “Presentation to the Editor,” (1895): 132.
36. Barnardo, “Presentation to the Editor,” 132. In the same issue of *Night and Day*, Barnardo reprinted a series of letters which demonstrated that for children of parents in remand, the workhouse operated exactly as a prison for the duration of their parents’ incarceration, although Barnardo offered to open his Homes to these children, a proposal rejected by the President of the Local Government Board. (“Children Under Remand in Workhouses,” *Night and Day*, [1995]: 133-4).
37. Barnardo, “How I Retrieved a Blunder,” *Night and Day* (1903): 57. Here he describes not only child suicides, but also attempts to maim or even kill other children. In one case, he claimed a girl, who sat on the face of an infant after filling her mouth with sand, was neither “cruel” nor “murderous,” but “simply curious to know what would happen....” (Ibid.)
38. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 27. Derrida is concerned here with an *ethics of hospitality* which might be applied to a range of thorny issues, including asylum seekers who knock at a nation’s

63. See Gillian Wagner's comprehensive and critical biography, *Barnardo* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).
64. According to Andrew Lloyd Webber's website, this meeting and the consequent tour of late night London is one episode in his first collaboration with Tim Rice, a 1965 musical based on Barnardo's early work, unperformed until 2005, its 40th anniversary, but also the hundredth

80. Michael Naas, "*Alors, qui êtes-vous?*": Jacques Derrida and the Ques