

Relevance through Ambivalence in the *Girl's Own Paper*: “Robina Crusoe” as a Popular Girl’s Robinsonade*

Girl's Own Paper'da Belirsizlik Yoluyla İlgili Olma: Popüler Bir Genç Kız Robinsonadı Olarak “Robina Crusoe”

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Abstract

One of the most outstanding literary and cultural phenomena that the Victorian period introduced was the emergence and rise of the popular juvenile magazine. Concurrent with the rise of the New Woman as an emergent notion of femininity in the 1880s, some periodical publications targeting a female audience such as the *Girl's Own Paper* also emerged and gained immense popularity. The power and exceptional popularity of the *Girl's Own Paper* lied in the way it provided a space for the articulation of subjects and structures of feeling that were relevant for the juvenile female reading audience. Using the theoretical terms and approaches introduced by Raymond Williams, John Fiske, and Henry Jenkins, the article engages Elizabeth Whittaker’s “Robina Crusoe and Her Lonely Island Home” that was serialized in the *Girl's Own Paper* in 1882-83 to explicate how this girl’s Robinsonade accommodated conventional femininity and the New Woman in the person of its protagonist, thereby communicating with both the dominant and emergent structures of feeling in the late Victorian period. One key argument presented here is that “Robina Crusoe” as a text was able to stay in touch with different structures of feeling because it was an adventure story, a genre that is characterized by fluidity, an adaptation, and a work with ambiguous discursive positions regarding colonization, gender roles, and female education. Moreover, through the magazine’s “Answers to Correspondents” section, the editor interacted with their readers, sometimes shaping their worldviews, but at other times changing the contents of the publication based on the demands of the readers. The *Girl's Own Paper* remained “relevant” and “popular” in the sense Fiske uses these terms by offering content which can be activated and made meaningful by its readers. Moreover, the magazine allowed a space for its consumers where they can participate in the creation of content in this particular media, thereby forming a “participatory culture” defined by Jenkins. Illustrating these arguments through a study of “Robina Crusoe,” the article concludes that the last few decades of the Victorian period in Britain created a prototype of modern culture, and that the mutually formative interaction between the *Girl's Own Paper* and its readers presages a similar mode of popular culture that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Adaptation studies, Robinsonades, “Robina Crusoe,” *Girl's Own Paper*, Participatory culture.

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Öz

Viktorya döneminin getirdiği en önemli edebi ve kültürel olgulardan birisi, popüler gençlik dergilerinin ortaya çıkışı ve yükselişi olmuştur. 1880'lerde yeni bir kadınlık anlayışı olan Yeni Kadın kavramının ortaya çıkmasıyla eş zamanlı olarak, *Girl's Own Paper* gibi genç kadın okuyucu kitlesini hedefleyen bazı süreli yayınlar da yayın hayatına başlayıp kısa sürede son derece popüler hale gelmiştir. *Girl's Own Paper* adlı derginin gücünün ve sıradışı popülerliğinin sebebi, derginin genç kadın okuyucularına kendileriyle ilişkilendirebilecekleri konuların ve duygu yapılarının ifade edildiği bir alan sağlamış olmasıdır. Bu makalede Raymond Williams, John Fiske ve Henry Jenkins tarafından tanımlanan kuramsal terimler ve yaklaşımlar kullanılarak, Elizabeth Whittaker'ın *Girl's Own Paper*'da 1882-83 yıllarında seri olarak yayımlanmış olan "Robina Crusoe and Her Lonely Island Home" adlı eseri ele alınmaktadır. Bu genç kız Robinsonadının baş kahramanın hem geleneksel kadını hem de Yeni Kadın'ı kendi kimliğinde barındırmak yoluyla geç Viktorya dönemindeki hakim ve ortaya çıkmakta olan duygu yapılarıyla nasıl iletişim içerisinde olduğu açıklanmaktadır. Makaledeki temel tartışma, "Robina Crusoe" adlı eserin farklı duygu yapılarıyla iletişim içerisinde kalabilme özelliğini, hem bir macera öyküsü, ki bu türün karakteristik bir özelliği akışkanlıktır, hem bir uyarılma, hem de sömürgecilik, toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri ve kadınların eğitimi gibi konulardaki söylemsel konumu belirsiz bir eser olmasına borçlu olduğu düşüncesi üzerinde kuruludur. Ayrıca, "Okur Mektuplarına Cevaplar" kısmında derginin editörü okurlarla etkileşim içerisinde bulunmuş, kimi zaman onların dünya görüşlerini değiştirirken, kimi zaman da okuyucu talepleri doğrultusunda yayının içeriğini değiştirmiştir. *Girl's Own Paper* Fiske'in tanımladığı anlamda "ilgili" ve "popüler" kalabilmeyi, okuyucularına onların harekete geçirebileceği ve anlamlandırabileceği içerik sağlayarak başarmıştır. Dahası, dergi okuyucularına bu ortamda içerik oluşturabilmelerine olanak sağlayacak bir alan da bırakmış ve Jenkins'in tanımladığı anlamda bir "katılımcı kültür" oluşturmuştur. Makalede bu tartışmalar "Robina Crusoe"nun incelenmesi yoluyla örneklenerek, geç Viktorya dönemi İngilteresinde modern kültürün bir prototipinin ortaya çıkmış olduğu ve *Girl's Own Paper* ve bu yayının okuyucuları arasındaki karşılıklı oluşturucu etkileşimin de yirminci yüzyıldan yirmi birinci yüzyıla geçilen dönemde görülen benzer bir popüler kültürün haberini o zamanlardan verdiği sonuçlarına varılmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Uyarılma çalışmaları, Robinsonadlar, "Robina Crusoe," *Girl's Own Paper*, Katılımcı kültür.

In as much as one agrees with the idea that prototypes of modern popular culture and literature came into being in the last few decades of the Victorian period, employing the theoretical terms and concepts of modern cultural theory for the study of texts from this transformative period seems to be free from any risk of methodological fallacy or anachronism. Perhaps one of the most outstanding literary and cultural phenomena that this period introduced was the emergence and rise of the popular juvenile magazine. In accounting for the popularity of the late Victorian juvenile magazine, it has been the custom to refer to the impact of the socio-culturally and politically important developments such as the Education Acts and the Reforms Acts of the nineteenth century, as well as to the technological and legislative improvements that made cost-effective publishing targeting a mass reading audience possible. Notwithstanding the formative role that these developments played for the larger phenomenon, why some juvenile magazines were more popular than others and therefore lasted longer in this competitive scene requires a separate explanation.

Contemporary cultural theory has identified "relevance" as an aspect of the "popular" which is vital for "popularity," and thus significant in making sense of the popularity of some late Victorian juvenile periodicals such as the *Girl's Own Paper* (GOP) published by the Religious Tract Society (RTS) for about 80 years from 1880 onward. As John Fiske observes in *Reading the Popular* (1989), "[r]elevance is central to popular culture for it minimizes the difference between text and life" (1989, p. 6) and such relevance can only be possible if the text can be "activated or made meaningful ... in social relations and in intertextual relations" (1989, p. 3). As such, "[r]elevance is the intersection

between the textual and the social ... therefore a site of struggle” (Fiske, 1989, p. 6) and contestation for hegemonic meaning. In Raymond Williams’s model of the “structures of feeling,” the main contestants in this struggle are the “dominant” and the “emergent” discursive entities (1977, pp. 121-35), which are in fact not completely detached from one another as distinct “structures of feeling.” On this theoretical background, this article explores the reasons behind the popularity of Elizabeth Whittaker’s “Robina Crusoe and Her Lonely Island Home,” which was serialised in the *GOP* from December 1882 to July 1883.¹

As an intra-medial adaptation,² Whittaker’s work of fiction was in communication with another text, and an easily recognisable adventure story with a mythical status at that, namely Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), for which reason the work belongs in the tradition of Robinsonades. “Robina Crusoe” was also a text that could be activated with reference to the shifting modes of social relations in late Victorian Britain in the sense that it accommodated, by its ambivalence, a conventional, dominant notion of Victorian femininity, as well as giving voice to an emergent New Woman.³ In other words, “Robina Crusoe” was a relevant text as “an intersection between the textual and the social,” as well as “a site of struggle” (Fiske, 1989, p. 6) in a period when “girl” became a contested signifier, creating a problem not only of definition, but, as many writers of the period would suggest, of identity” (Doughty, 2004, p. 7). As such, “Robina Crusoe” had all the ingredients required for popularity, which was apparent in the numerous appreciations and requests for re-prints by readers of the magazine in the letters they sent to the editor even years after the serialisation was completed. Accordingly, in what follows the relevance of Whittaker’s Robinsonade will be explored with reference first to the fluid characters of the adventure tale and thus of the Robinsonade tradition, then to the ways in which fictional text was made to speak to factual social reality, and finally to the ideological and discursive aspects of “Robina Crusoe” which could be “made meaningful” (Fiske, 1989, p. 3) by the girl readers with reference to the contemporary structures of feeling operating in the social reality of late Victorian Britain.

In fact, the centrality of relevance in this particular context has also been implied by other scholars, though articulated as part of discussions on editorial policies. In a recent essay on the *Boy’s Own Paper* (*BOP*), a publication of the evangelical RTS which first appeared in 1879 and was the predecessor to the *GOP*, Elizabeth Penner elaborates on the mediating role played by George Andrew Hutchison who “negotiated the demands of society members and readers” (2014, p. 631) as the editor of the *BOP*. As Penner observes, Hutchison’s deliberate efforts to produce a magazine that, in the editor’s own words,

- 1 The story appeared in vol. 4 of the *Girl’s Own Paper*, starting in issue no.156 (December 23, 1882), ending in no.186 (July 21, 1883); pagination of the volume is continuous, so references are limited to page numbers. The story was accessible at the website “Mostly-Victorian.com,” which offered scans of all its pages: <http://mostly-victorian.com/details/robina.shtml>.
- 2 As explained by Tara Collington, the term intra-medial adaptation refers to different adaptations of a source text within the same medium (i.e. print medium) such as from novel to short story or drama; while the term inter-medial adaptation is used to define adaptations across different media, such as from novel to film, radio, and digital media and so on (2010, p. 184).
- 3 The term “New Woman” was first used by Ouida, though in a pejorative sense, in an 1894 article that appeared in the *North American Review* with the title “New Woman” where the New Woman is referred to as an “un-mitigated bore” (p. 610) in common discourse. The term’s first positive use was in Sarah Grand’s article titled “The New Aspect of the Woman Question” that appeared again in 1894 (Utell, 2014, n.p.). However, the New Woman’s presence in British culture was already in place in the 1880s, with Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of An African Farm* (1883) recognised as the founding text of the New Woman movement and Schreiner herself called the foremother of the New Woman figure.

"appealed to boys and not their grandmothers" (qtd. in Penner, 2014, p. 631) was one of the main reasons for the success and popularity of the *BOP*. In her substantial volume on the *GOP*, Terri Doughty similarly maintains that Charles Peters, the *GOP*'s editor from 1880 to 1907, also followed an editorial policy based on "respond[ing] to market demand yet still appear[ing] to serve the conservative aims of the Religious Tract Society" and this "contributed in no small amount to the success" of the magazine (Doughty, 2004, p. 9). The key word in both Penner's and Doughty's observations is the "demand" in the market. To reconcile this language of business with the current discussion one may again refer to Fiske who argues that "[i]f the cultural commodities or texts do not contain resources out of which the people can make their own meanings of their social relations and identities, they will be rejected and will fail in the marketplace. They will not be made popular" (Fiske, 1989, p. 2). Apparently both the *BOP* and the *GOP* owed their longlasting popularity to their ability to become and remain relevant for a wide readership with an even wider variety of demands. Whittaker's "Robina Crusoe," in particular, seems to have achieved its relevance mostly through its ambivalence. One may assume that this achievement was fairly easy for "Robina Crusoe," because the fluidity that is part of such ambivalence was already a quality of the genre and the tradition that the work represented.

"Robina Crusoe" is first and foremost an adventure story. Even though seemingly unproblematic definitions of the adventure story are available, there are various different components within the forms of adventure making it difficult to give one decisive definition of the adventure story. One may generalise, however, that a list of the basic elements of a typical adventure story would include the following: Dangerous things happen unexpectedly, characters are forced to take action and make decisions and their characteristic features are courage, cunning, and ruthlessness. Endurance and leadership go along with basic survival skills and the heroes are ready to kill and be killed at the same time (Green, 1991, pp. 1-2). To all of these features of the adventure story, "one may add the quality of fluidity, which is a consequence of the interconnectedness of the hero and the action in adventure stories" (Öz, 2015, p. 4). As Green has pointed out, in adventure stories actions and the character of the protagonist are mingled with one another, so much so that "[t]he protagonist's character may be said to 'generate' or at least characterize his adventures" (Green, 1991, p. 21). In other words, due to its fluid character, the nature of the adventure is conditioned according to the adventurer and his or her social and historical context. For example, in Defoe's novel "Robinson Crusoe's character as an adventure hero, so inventive, so busy, so unerotic, and the character of his adventures, both derive from his serving – as imaginative representative – of the merchant caste" (Green, 1979, p. 20) of eighteenth-century Britain. It is to a great extent to Robinson Crusoe's ability to speak, or become relevant, to its larger social and historical context that, in time, Defoe's work "became a myth, promoting popular colonialism, representing and legitimating the British Empire to the British people," (Phillips, 1999, p. 125) and came to be considered "a classic 'megatext' of Eurocentrism" (Jeyifo, 1993, p. 382). However, Defoe's novel owes such mythical status not to its entirety, but to the part of its plot which gives the story of a central character that is shipwrecked and stranded on a deserted island in the middle of an ocean and eventually rescued after long years of survival. Generally speaking, it is, in fact, thanks to the exploration and exploitation of the "mutability or plasticity" (Zambreno, 2010, p. 118) of this episode of the Robinson Crusoe narrative that its countless adaptations in different historical, cultural, social and ideological contexts, collectively known as the Robinsonades, have been possible.

As Louis James explains, "[t]he term 'Robinsonade' was coined by J. C. Schnabel, whose *Die Insel Felsenberg* (1731-42) was the first European work to be inspired by Defoe's narrative" (1993, p.

37). To provide a wider set of definitions of the Robinsonade, one may refer to Karin Siegl who offers the phrases “desert-island romance,” “survival story,” or “castaway story” (1996, p. 8); and to Janet Bertsch who describes a Robinsonade as “a story or an episode within a story where an individual or group of individuals with limited resources try to survive on a desert island” (2004, p. 79). Similarly, in their account of the rise of adventure fiction in the mid-nineteenth century, Murray Knowles and Kirsten Malmkjær pinpoint Robinson Crusoe as the root of the adventure novel tradition and refer to the adventure novels of the period as “Robinsonades” (1996, p. 5); and Carl Fisher defines a Robinsonade as a text that “repeats the themes of Robinson Crusoe; usually it incorporates or adapts specific physical aspects of Crusoe’s experience and is an obvious rewriting of the Crusoe story” (2005, p. 130). In many different retellings of Defoe’s story, even though the main plot structure remains intact, the ideology that is reflected in the narrative changes in line with the conjuncture of the historical moment of each adaptation. Again due to this fluid quality, by the end of the nineteenth century “at least 200 English editions, including abridged texts; 110 translations; 115 revisions and adaptations; and 277 imitations” (Rogers, 1972, p. 11) of Defoe’s novel appeared and “the robinsonade developed in the nineteenth century into one of the most popular genres for child readers” (Smith, 2011, p. 161). Under different forms and names, “[t]he production of Robinsonades peaked in the Victorian period, with an average of more than two per year” (Phillips, 1997, p. 23). Moreover, Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard also maintain that in Victorian Britain the Robinsonade was “the dominant form in fiction for children and young people” (1984, p. 458). On this background, it may be argued that when Whittaker’s “Robina Crusoe” appeared in 1882, it did so with an intertextual strength that linked it to a legacy of about two centuries of adapting and staying relevant, and thus popular.

Whittaker’s story that tells about the life of Robina Crusoe who is a “*descendant* of the world-famed Robinson Crusoe” (Whittaker 184) opens when a sixteen-year-old Robina takes a journey with her family to one of the colonies because her father is appointed to a new post. Even though the outbound voyage from England to the un-named colony and Robina’s “four ensuing years” end uneventfully, “[a]t the end of that period” she sets out for another voyage:

[T]wo of our friends, an officer and his wife, being about to take a trip to England, and to spend a few months on the Continent, invited me to accompany them; and my parents, thinking it would be beneficial for me in many ways, consented to part with me; and now began, indeed, a life of real adventure, and of danger, seldom if ever surpassed . . . (Whittaker 184)

Predictably enough, this second journey results in real adventure and danger in the form of her being a castaway and the victim of an unfortunate sea accident. Being the first-person narrator of the story, from the very beginning Robina constantly mentions her love of adventure and how she has always yearned for a life like her ancestor. She declares:

I am a *descendant* of the world-famed Robinson Crusoe, and it was my father’s pride in this fact that led to the choice of the name of Robina for his only daughter. As a matter of course, I had, at a very early age, read the history of my renowned ancestor; and deeply I regretted that my sex precluded me from a seafaring life, which I regarded as the only one likely to gratify the love of adventure, seemingly inborn with me. (Whittaker 184)

It is worth noting that Robina introduces herself, before anything else, with her relation to Robinson Crusoe, in other words, as an adventurer by blood; thereby forming a link to the tradition that represented the legacy of Defoe's novel. The fluid quality of the adventure story and the Robinsonade tradition was the essence of this legacy. Another important point is that this intertextual space also becomes an opportunity for Robina to openly express, but also implicitly complain about, her regret of how her sex prohibited her from what she yearned for. How this intertextual strength - which basically offered the readers of "Robina Crusoe" a text they could relate to and activate - itself was made relevant to the late Victorian social reality and relations, that is to say, the interplay between factual and fictional writing, is the next point that needs to be elaborated.

Adventure stories are narratives that usually describe and also partly construct the social and cultural realities of their times, and for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European culture, these realities were shaped mainly around the imperial "motifs of expansion and self-assertion" (Green, 1991, p. 25). In this context, one major function of the adventure story was to manipulate the mainstream culture, especially of the young generation, towards the deeds of the Empire. To guarantee cultural legitimacy at least at the initial stage, rather than receiving the adventure story in the form of fiction, the reader was introduced with narrative forms which had less questionability or more credibility. Accordingly, in these centuries, the adventure story was presented under the names of biography, journalism, and history, therefore as transformed into so-called realistic stories that found voice in diaries, traveller's tales, secret histories and similar personal writings. It was especially in the case of adventure stories that were presented in the form of nonfiction that the ultimate effects were the construction of social and cultural history through essentially fictional literary texts and the shaping of various "structures of feeling" (Williams, 1977, p. 132) through these texts.

Even though Raymond Williams himself explained his choice of the word "feeling" as a deliberation to avoid "more formal concepts of 'world-view' or 'ideology'" (1977, p. 132), as suggested also by Graeme Turner (2005, p. 47), what Williams means by a "structure of feeling" is still a concept closer to an encompassing "ideology" within which there are "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" elements and discourses. Based on Williams's understanding, in a study of the structures of feeling of a given historical period, which influences the discursive context of any work of adaptation such as "Robina Crusoe," what is important is to find the elements in texts that are conflicting or in tension with one another and relating those features to their period. Another important point to remember here is that the relevance and acceptability of the texts by the audience relies on their contents which should include values and situations that are recognisable by the audience. That is why "Robina Crusoe" has a double-sided nature which can enter into dialogue with both the emergent and the dominant forms within the structures of feeling of the late Victorian British culture and society. Since the structures of feeling are the conceptual media that enable communication, without this duality and the consequent ambivalence it would have been extremely difficult for Whittaker to make her story relevant. In a society, what is called dominant, in other words hegemonic, also reveals what is emergent. Emergent characteristics of a culture are the discourses which represent the new values and ideas, and sometimes even the future dominant discourses of the society. That is to say, the emergent discourses are essentially born out of the dominant ones. As such, the emergent may at times conform to the dominant, but at other times represent an opposition to the dominant, thereby creating a tension. When describing the emergent, Williams himself clarifies this aspect as follows:

By ‘emergent’ I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture (and in this sense ‘species specific’) and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it. (Williams, 1977, p. 123)

Robina Crusoe provides an excellent example of this, particularly in the way it accommodated the newly-emergent New Woman – “a significant cultural icon of the of the *fin de siècle*, [who] departed from the stereotypical Victorian woman. [A woman who] was intelligent, educated, emancipated, independent and self-supporting” (Diniejko, 2014, n.p.) – in a publication of the RTS, a conservative organisation typically representing the dominant forms of Victorian British culture.

The RTS was founded in 1799 to aim the diffusion of religious doctrines within the community via religious tracts. While one of the most important missions of the Society was to spread evangelical teachings around the world and do missionary work, the organisation was also influential in the dissemination of a consciousness about the Empire among the British youth. In Britain, the Society collaborated informally but closely with different educational institutions to disseminate the discourse and the consciousness of the Empire especially among lower-middle- and working-class people, and in this way also supplied “wholesome and scriptural aliment to the appetite created and stimulated by education” (Jones, 1850, p. 12). Accordingly, the *BOP* and the *GOP* were designed as magazines which contained different works of serialised fiction and stories that promoted the dominant views about the roles and duties of the young people in the British Empire. At first, the *BOP* was founded in 1879 and published issues, especially for a lower-middle-class and working-class audience. By publishing literature of this influential kind, the *BOP* taught patriotic values to young men of the Empire and “brought Henty, Ballantyne, Michael Fenn, and W.H.G. Kingston to large audience, and made patriots of its readers” (Green, 1979, p. 222). The potential of the format of this juvenile publication for young boys seemed so promising that soon after the success of the *BOP*, the Society decided to publish a magazine for girls who were increasingly becoming a valuable and relevant group of readers to be targeted. As a result, the *GOP* that aimed at teaching domestic values to “young angels in the house” was founded in 1880 and “doubled the readership (260,000) of the *B.O.P.* after its first year” (Smith, 2011, 25).

As reported by the Society in one of its publications, thousands of young girls from various parts of the world who belonged to different cultures and social classes were mentioning in the letters that they sent to the editor about how much that they had learned from the issues of the magazine: “The mother as well as the daughter, the peeress as well as the cottager, the invalid as well as the healthy schoolgirl, have found the *Girl’s Own Paper* a help in the duties and pleasures of the home, and a guide in those things that make for their eternal peace” (Religious Tract Society, 1898, p. 27). To influence the women of the not so distant future as intensely as possible, in addition to the regular writers of the *GOP*, the magazine also featured contributions in various issues by extraordinary figures such as “Queen of Romania, the Duchess of Teck, Countess of Aberdeen” (Religious Tract Society, 1898, p. 26). Queens, duchesses and countesses were acting as role models for young girls in showing how to be a perfect woman in the traditional sense. Angela Williamson and Norman Williamson have commented on this particular aspect of the *GOP* by observing that “[t]he practical purpose of the literature was to teach the girl child by means of distinctive role models, particularly those of virgin and wife. These literary lessons were expected to augment the practical experience provided by the sisters

of girlhood" (1984, p. 54). Thus, the *GOP* was playing the role of an imaginary sister for the young girls of the Empire to instruct them, as the editor Charles Peters put it, "in moral and domestic virtues, preparing them for the responsibilities of womanhood and for a heavenly home" (qtd. in Rodgers, 2012, p. 278). Similarly, according to Smith, "the domestic, maternal contribution was an important element of girls' imperial role" and this role was "formulated for girls in late Victorian and Edwardian print culture" (2011, p. 3) as exemplified by the *GOP*.

Notwithstanding the promotion of Victorian ideal femininity, between 1880s and 1890s a new emergent girl culture was also evolving and the *GOP* was deliberately trying to stay relevant to the cultural shifts to be able to meet the market demand, but without losing its touch with the dominant discourses. As Amy Murphy suggests in her review of Doughty's *Selections from the Girl's Own Paper, 1880-1907* (2004), "[t]hese periodicals catered to the interests and concerns of young women, yet also by functioning prescriptively to define their interests and their values, these publications demonstrate the qualities and traits of ideal girls" (2006, p. 76). Accordingly, in Doughty's work, the sections are divided according to the area of interests which also displays the different tendencies in the society. While the "Contents" of the book lists sections under the headings of "Household Management," "Self-Culture," "Education," "Work," "Independent Living," and "Health and Sport," the articles and stories that were selected for these headings also display the cultural differences in the society. In the *GOP*, articles titled "Good Mistresses" and "Etiquette for Ladies and Girls" appeared side by side with pieces on "Pharmacy as an Employment for Girls" and "On Recreations for Girls" (Doughty, 2004, p. 5-6). Nonetheless, the entirety of the given *GOP* issue ultimately aimed at preserving the superiority of conventional femininity over the new girl. Whatever appeared to have contradicted, at least initially, this conventional attitude, did not last long and eventually gave in to the power of the dominant: "The editor of *The Girl's Own*, Charles Peters, was particularly skilled at containing the new girl by providing content that fed into the development of an idealized girl culture while still seeming to direct girl readers away from the more 'dangerous' aspects of that culture" (Doughty, 2004, p. 9). Thus it will be appropriate to maintain that even though the *GOP* was reflecting the dominant conservative and conventional feminine discourse, it was also representing a certain amount of the emergent and slightly aggressive tone that "cater[ed] to the New Girl's desire for guidance on how to negotiate the changing social status and identity of women" (Doughty, 2004, p. 9). By this means, this tension between the dominant/traditional woman and the emergent/New Woman made itself visible even in the works of one of the most religious and conservative publishing companies.

Since the juvenile magazine culture of the late Victorian period acted as the medium in which meanings were "contested and made" (Beetham, 1996, p. 5), contradictions and conflicts that were in the society could easily be seen in the works as well. According to Margaret Beetham, this duality "exploited to the full the heterogeneity of the magazine formula which allowed different models of the self to sit side by side on the page without interrogating each other" (1996, p. 183). Also, these two different and distinct ideas about femininity did not contradict one another only in the works of different authors, but "could certainly be classified as both progressive and threatening within the same issue, or indeed within the same contradictory article" (Liggins, 2007, p. 230). Thus, even the works of a given writer would be struggling to adapt themselves to the changing ideals of the time, which, in turn, would result in duality and ambivalence. In other words, the "mixed messages offered by the *Girl's Own Paper* as combining the 'radical with the domestic and reactionary' and as promoting 'numerous eclectic, and frequently contradictory, notions of ideal femininity' in response to the uncertain

place of women in late Victorian society” (Patton, 2012, p. 114) shows the ambivalent position of the *GOP* as regards the New Woman culture and “demonstrates how girls’ magazines frequently occupied an ambivalent position between instruction and entertainment as well as between adherence to traditional values and the promotion of certain aspects of advanced womanhood” (Rodgers, 2012, p. 283). In this context, the *GOP* functioned as one of the “aesthetic organizers of contradictory experiences” (Drotner, 1988, p. 4).

With the new opportunities for women in terms of education and employment, “[t]he New Woman was a very *fin-de-siècle* phenomenon. Contemporary with the new socialism, the new imperialism, the new fiction and the new journalism, she was part of cultural novelties which manifested itself in the 1880s and 1890s” (Ledger and Ledger, 1997, p. 1). In the multiplicity of her image,

[i]n society she was a feminist and a social reformer; a poet or a playwright who addressed female suffrage. In literature, however, as a character in a play or a novel, she frequently took a different form – that of someone whose thoughts and desires highlighted not only her own aspirations, but also served as a mirror in which to reflect the attitudes of society. (Buzwell, 2014, n.p.)

That is to say, no matter how differently perceived, the New Woman was a fact of the late Victorian British social and cultural context and was featured in the texts that communicated with this context in increasingly visible ways. The redefinition and the representation of women in texts “was only one aspect of the cultural upheaval which characterized this period, but it was certainly one of the most interesting of the many breaks with Victorian ideology which took place at the end of the century. . . [W]hat took place was an evolution, not a revolution in the portrayal of women” (Stubbs, 1979, p. xv). It was exactly during this evolution that new conceptions of femininity gradually emerged out of dominant ones, creating an ambivalent discursive space during the transition. One of the most significant examples of the writings that used this space was Whittaker’s “Robina Crusoe” which was, as an adventure story, a site of struggle and therefore relevant and popular as it introduced to the girl reader of the late Victorian period a New Woman identity emerging out of the dominant discourse on femininity. In an ambivalent manner, Robina’s story not only exemplified the conventional woman character of the period – the type promoted in mid-century by Sarah Stickney Ellis⁴ – but also highlighted the changing relationships between the Empire and the woman, which, in turn, gave voice to the New Woman in this same period.

Robina as a character has a double feature: she displays ambivalent attitudes in her story, and therefore, both the dominant and the emergent characteristics of her era can be observed in her actions. While her dedication to adventure, her approach to the land as an empire builder and as a coloniser, and her Christian piety and morals represent the dominant structures of feeling of her society; her dressing style, use of tools and techniques, her perception of womanly labour, and her approach to ed-

4 As listed by Ockerbloom (2014, n.p.), Ellis wrote more than fifty books and gave instructions to the women of England and dedicated her books to the Queen. Her sequential books *The Women of England Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (1839), *The Daughters of England Their Position in Society Character and Responsibilities* (1842), *The Mothers of England Their Influence and Responsibilities* (1843), and *The Wives of England Their Relative Duties Domestic Influence and Social Obligations* (1843) all portray the position of women in the society, their duties, obligations, manners, attitudes, and all the relevant ideas that represented their socially or culturally constructed identity according to the dominant ideologies or “structures of feeling” of the time.

education methods make her the representative of the New Woman type. The colonial setting gives her the capacity to make her voice heard beyond the restrictions of the Victorian culture by offering her a new space. When Robina is stranded on the island she is twenty years old and leaves the island almost twenty years after the shipwreck. Throughout her life on the island Robina manages to survive with the help of her education, "part of [which] was self-imposed," (Whittaker 244) and a better replication of what her ancestor did while transforming the island into her own little empire. As her father told Robina, she remembers her ancestor and proves herself "worthy of the name" (Whittaker 196). She says: "and now began, indeed, a life of real adventure, and of danger, seldom if ever surpassed, and a description of which will, I believe, interest my young readers" (Whittaker 184) and starts to tell the story of her castaway life and what happens afterwards.

Robina represents the dominant forms of late Victorian British culture through her various imperialistic attitudes. All her life on the island, while surviving on her own she does not hesitate to tame the flora and the fauna as well. She is an energetic explorer who does not satisfy herself with basics and she is always after improvement and cultivation: "[A]fter some days of repose, I prepared myself for a further inspection of the coast, being most anxious to discover a more convenient resting place" (Whittaker 260). During her journey she tames a wild cat, a parrot, a herd of chickens, and pigs. She also cultivates the land according to her needs. Another important indication of Robina's imperialistic attitude is her naming and defining the places on the island. She gives the name "Cave Castle" to the place where she lives, and as indicated by the name "castle," she sees herself as the monarch of the place. Also she gives the name "Mount Desire" to the mountain on which the habitat is flourished and names one of the valleys on the island as Egypt. When she sees the river that is running through the island what she reflects: "On my side the shore was not precipitous outlet to the waters of the river, which I suspected to be the source of the 'Nile'" (Whittaker 357). Since finding the source of the River Nile was a famous part of the British expeditions in Africa, Robina, with this allusion, exploits the imagery and mythology of the Empire and creates new colonial space in which her New Woman identity can freely develop.

When she is eventually rescued by her brother, the imperialistic woman inside Robina becomes more explicit. After she is rescued, she begins to worry about the gold reserves on the island which she sees as useless in her former circumstance. She admits:

Confession is good for the soul, they say; so now I am about it, I may as well mention another naughtiness of mine, which rather increased-the love of amassing gold, knowing what an instrument for doing and getting good this shining metal is when rightly used. So you see, my young friends-you who have been ready to think Robina Crusoe a horribly strong minded woman-that she was not altogether devoid of weakness, albeit the latter-mentioned phase of it cannot be said to be essentially feminine. (Whittaker 653)

With these words, Robina not only expresses her coloniser identity but is also aware of her attitude's inappropriateness when compared to the conventional Victorian woman. Referring to Robina, Smith states that "[t]hese girl-Crusoe texts therefore make a fitting close to the study of British girlhood and empire, marking the endpoint of a trajectory in which girls not only might be imagined sailing boats, wielding weapons, and surviving in the elements without male assistance, but also might remain unmarried and make their own fortune, or indeed their own empire" (2011,

p. 163). However, in Robina's story, though she stays unmarried and turns back to the island, the colonisation process is accomplished not by herself but her son-in-law Henry whom she previously saves from the hands of pirates. When Robina, her adopted native daughter Undine – who not only is the counterpart of Man Friday in Defoe's novel, but also, and quite tellingly, has the name of the eponymous protagonist of Olive Schreiner's *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), the founding text of the New Woman movement – and Henry are rescued and turn back to England, Henry spends two years of his time to plan his return to the island as a coloniser. Thus, the story itself, like the *GOP's* tone, stays ambivalent in terms of changing cultural norms as regards colonisation.

While gradually adapting herself to the life conditions on the island, Robina also develops her skills. During her twenty years of solitude on the island, she builds and manufactures quite a lot of things including a boat, a fireplace, gunpowder, bricks, clothes, arrows, bows, candles, pots, ink, a flour mill, soap, needle, hut, fishing lines, baskets, and several houses in different locations of the island. Moreover, what she accomplishes with her own hands is also supported by her self-education in geology, chemistry, physics and other practical knowledge areas in which she also educates her daughter Undine. In other words, in Robina as a middle-class woman, the girl reader witnesses a woman who goes outside and does without hesitation what the men of her class do. While gradually re-shaping herself to fit in her new identity, Robina begins with her clothes. When she is about to leave the sinking ship, for instance, she cuts the skirts of her dress with her knife, in order not to hinder herself in necessity of swimming. After a considerable time on the island and having met the essential needs, Robina makes her dresses not for elegance but for practical use. She feels proud of herself as she makes a skirt that is below the knees and trousers with pockets that are "more common-sense in style than some of the ever-varying phantasies of fashion" (Whittaker 381). Moreover, what take the place of ornaments in Robina's new style are her weapons: "I equipped myself for a journey, having on a short skirt and pantaloons, and a straw hat, knife and pistols in my belt, my staff in my hand, and my bow and arrow slung on my back" (Whittaker 260).

Commenting on fictional characters like Robina, Smith suggests that "[t]hese girl Crusoes actively seek adventure, often have the capacity to defend themselves physically, and, as a result, constitute the core of these texts rather than inhabiting their periphery as did the girls and women of earlier children's robinsonades" (2011, p. 21). In the use of weapons, Robina acts like an English man who uses his weapon not only for self-defence but also for hunting and sports as well, which is another indication of her creating a replica of the imperialistic English culture on the island she inhabits. This quality is an aspect of the change of her feminine identity through colonial adventure. While Robina mentions how she was let by her father to shoot a weapon she describes her experience as follows: "I had sometimes been permitted by my father to take a shot, when out with him on some of his shooting expeditions, so that notwithstanding a certain shrinking from taking life, natural to the feminine nature, I could, if necessity compelled me, make some efforts towards self-preservation" (Whittaker 261). As this remark suggests, taking life was considered unnatural to the feminine nature, but as Robina gets used to using weapons as part of her new life and identity, her use of self-defence tools even turn into enjoyment: "[O]n these I discovered a host of rabbits, their holes burrowed in every direction. My dog and I had splendid sport. . . ." (Whittaker 390).

In addition to the tools she uses, what is manufactured by Robina is an important indicator of her character as well. Besides daily used products such as candle and soap, Robina also makes things that have a significant value while preserving and shaping the island. Her unconventional curiosity and self-ed-

ucation in chemistry make these discoveries possible. Robina herself indicates the importance of her self-education which is not a part of the conventional woman characteristics. In one instance, Robina refers to her "knowledge of botany teaching [her] what was useful and what [was] hurtful . . ." (Whittaker 381). As in this example, throughout the story she constantly expresses the benefits of her self-imposed education in areas that are typically and conventionally reserved for men. She even advises her readers to invest some of their time, like she did in her youth, in areas like geology, chemistry, botany, cookery, and medicine:

This early penchant of mine for diving into subjects which have far too long been considered not a necessary part of a woman's education, proved most advantageous. This may make me feel more strongly on the matter than I otherwise should have done, but I cannot but wish that teachers and parents would strive to awaken a taste in their girls as well as their boys in natural science and history, as an intelligent interest in such is one means of preparing useful and common-sense wives and mothers. (Whittaker 244-45)

Although the ambivalent attitude of Robina is represented through this quotation, which eventually arrives at the conclusion that it prepares "useful and common-sense wives and mothers," she also adds that "my studies in them had been carried on in such hours when, thankful to escape from the confinement of the schoolroom, I hid myself with a favourite book in my imaginary desert isle. And here I would strongly advise my young readers to devote some portion of their time to similar study" (Whittaker 245). It is with this self-imposed and subversive education that Robina manages to survive in her castaway life. According to Jochen Petzold, Robina's advices to young readers regarding education and her criticism about the issue "could be read as an advertisement for *The Girl's Own Paper*, which regularly covered most of the topics she suggests for study. [...] Particularly interesting in this respect are articles that combine scientific knowledge with practical application or advice . . . all of which were printed during or shortly after the serialization of 'Robina Crusoe' (2012, p. 359).

The *GOP* in general, and "Robina Crusoe" in particular were positioned as influential resources for young girls when they sought for help and advice. Not surprisingly, Robina's influence seems to have survived the story's life time in serialisation. As Petzold mentions, in the "Answer to Correspondents" sections of the *GOP* there were five readers who directed their comments and questions with the name Robina Crusoe even two years after the story was finalised. Also, after fifteen years from the publication of Whittaker's story, there was a person with the nickname of "Lover of the G.O.P." who wished from the editor to publish "Robina" as a separate book (Petzold, 2012, p. 360). As Patton argues, "in the correspondence columns of the *Girl's Own Paper*, [there] was a readiness to seek out advice from decidedly untraditional authorities: not parents or elder siblings, not teachers or clergymen, but the faceless editors and contributors of the new niche periodicals aimed at girls. This attitude had elements in it that crossed class lines . . . (2012, p. 113). Put differently, the *GOP* issues did not only bring women from different classes together but it also helped with their problems in their "Answers to Correspondents" sections. Since the late Victorian period was a time in which the New Woman and the conventional woman coexisted with different qualities and ideals, "[t]he adolescent girl, lodged between feminine docility and intellectual independence, found her mother no model of identification, and [in this period of shrinking family sizes] she rarely had an elder sister or cousin close by whom she might emulate or consult (Drotner, 1988, pp. 135-36). It was exactly this socio-cultural gap the *GOP* and other girl's magazines filled in the late Victorian Britain. However,

it was not only that the young girls of Britain were shaped by the teachings of the *GOP*, but also the magazine itself was shaped according to the needs of the community and the market demand. As the *GOP* remained relevant, at times by presenting ambivalent content as in the example of “Robina Crusoe,” it continued to be activated and made meaningful by its audience and this was the reason behind the magazine’s popularity.

To conclude, the last few decades of the Victorian period in Britain created a prototype of modern culture. The mutually formative interaction between the *GOP* and its readers presages a similar mode of popular culture that emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. In his seminal work *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins states, with reference to the 1990s and the first few decades of the new millennium, that “[t]he media industries are undergoing another paradigm shift” as “[i]t happens from time to time” (2006, p. 5). As a student of John Fiske, whom he defines as “one of the most important intellectual influences on [his own] work” and whose “strong defense of popular culture as offering a series of resources through which active audiences struggled over meaning was a foundation for [his own] ongoing investigation,” (Jenkins, 2010, n.p.), Jenkins carried forward Fiske’s concepts of relevance and activated texts in explaining popular culture and called the particular form of the popular as it exists in the age of new media as “participatory culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3) That is to say, the epistolary channel of interaction between the *GOP* and its girl readers in late Victorian Britain presaged a relation between a popular cultural commodity and its young consumers in which producers and consumers were to be “participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules” and “participate in this emerging culture” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3) a century later.

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