

Of saints and scientists. Famous women in girls' periodical *Girl*.

### **Introduction.**

In exploring the theme of women and comics, this article focuses on the comic strips about famous women that appeared in British weekly publication *Girl* (Hulton Press 1952-1964) and looks at the artistic, narratorial and ideological approaches the strips took to biography and considers the intended impact upon readers. The article is based on a close reading of a sample of comics from the overall run of the title<sup>1</sup>. To contextualize, *Girl* was part of a thriving girls' periodical culture that existed in the late twentieth century in Britain. Aimed predominantly at middle-class readers, it was comparatively expensive and employed full color printing for some content. It offered adventure and career narratives in comic strip form along with comic strips and other items that engaged with what were seen by the creative and editorial team as female white middle class-orientated leisure activities, such as horse riding and ballet, and sold around 650,000 copies per week (Gravett & Stanbury, 2006, p. 133). The focus on whiteness appears in all the stories (and is projected by the team onto the assumed reader) and is articulated in several ways, as the article discusses.

The publication team additionally aimed to encourage reader participation in what they considered 'appropriate' real life activities for girls, so they worked with, for instance, Sadler's Wells Ballet School to offer an annual competitive scholarship (Gibson, 2023). This link between narrative and actuality is relevant in how the biographies were positioned as potential models for girl reader's behavior and aspirations as women. As Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig describe it, this title combined 'entertainment value' with 'respectability', the latter term implying that it was partly engaged with the social construction of girlhood, and in turn, attempted to direct actual girls (1976, p. 329) into behaving in line with ways identified as representing a specific set of middle-class white British values<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the comic strips were combined with text-only narratives and factual items, sometimes depicting reader's lives and hobbies, a mixture of materials that continued throughout the life of the title, with these features again functioning as directive as well as building a *Girl* community.

Because of the didactic nature of aspects of the periodical, the biographical narratives were initially about saints, missionaries, and royalty, and focused on duty, faith and self-sacrifice, although also often presenting the characters in ways that suggested these roles enabled female agency and independence (depicted as a positive and attractive possibility). However, examples appeared later that moved away from this core set of narratives such as strips exploring the lives of, for example, Florence Nightingale and Marie Curie. These narratives expanded the initial focus, reflecting rather than curtailing the wider range of potential role models and options for girls and young women appearing in the wider culture and advocating

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<sup>1</sup> This involved sixty editions from the author's collection and a selection of material shared with the author by some kind collectors of the artwork by Gerald Haylock.

<sup>2</sup> Having fun was possible in this model, but these were moments of frivolity rather than it being dominant.

engagement with education. Yet they also continued to be problematic in terms of maintaining an ideology of white British cultural and moral superiority.

### **Contextualizing the narratives within the periodical.**

The narratives typically begin with a statement along the lines of 'the true story of...' although it can be argued that the level of truth varies quite considerably. These are, in the end, romanticized, dramatic and idealized versions of lives and although many of the lives chosen were full of activity, the length of the narratives and the need for cliffhanger endings each week made the stories usually rather more violent and action-packed than was generally actually the case.

The biographies filled the back page of the periodical each week and were printed in color. Each episode consisted of 12-15 panels and each story arc could run for up to 40 weeks (about 9 months). Although just as dramatically written as the other stories, and containing some excellent artwork, the narratives featuring famous women were intended to cement girls' values and aims in and were ideologically driven by traditional (and socially conservative) perspectives on femininity and middle-class British cultural norms. Further, nearly all of the characters chosen as the subjects of the biographical narratives were white and this may be seen as signifying, as Nicola Lauré al-Samarai and Peggy Piesche state 'Whiteness [as] a comprehensive social positionality within capitalist, racialized, patriarchal societies [...] part of a structural equipment to dominate, categorize and order the world' (2018, p.169). Created shortly after the London Declaration of 1949 about the Commonwealth of Nations (largely former territories of the British Empire), these are narratives implicitly aimed to inculcate a belief in Britain as a continuing world power, in which the girl reader's roles as adults could be to embody these ideologies on the world stage. There is also potentially a secondary appeal here, as this was the page that parents would see as their child was reading the start of the comic (should they reading be in public), and it would suggest reading *Girl* was a 'safe' activity given a similar ideological drive on the parents' part<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, although the subjects of the narratives come from a range of time periods, locations and sources, these core values remain the same, making the strips a form of propaganda and indoctrination that perpetuate aspects of dominant ideologies around a specific ethnicity, nation and faith, whilst insisting these values are in some way universal.

In addition, to further contextualize the stories, the creation of these biographies is partly led by faith in the form of Anglican Christian beliefs. Some of the Christian aspects had a campaigning edge regarding social change, but the ideological mix does tend to skew towards social conservatism and paternalism. Whilst the author is unnamed in the first biographical strip, later stories credit the Reverend Prebendary Chad Varah as the writer<sup>4</sup>. The head editor,

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, families who disapproved of this conservatism were unlikely to sanction the purchase of *Girl* for their children.

<sup>4</sup> He actually wrote all of these stories, so they partly reflect his personal values, as well as that of the team.

Marcus Morris, was also a Reverend and thus the Anglican church is a key implicit ideological driver in the publications for children and young people that Hulton published. Although the narratives are conservative around gender, both Reverends were involved in social activism and had liberal views, which does feed into both the stories and the general tenor of the periodical (Mennell, 2008). For instance, in addition to founding the Samaritans, Varah was a supporter of women priests, something which may have had an impact upon how he portrayed famous women and what he saw as future roles for the readers.

Finally, in terms of the biographies, the impact of faith is clear from the way that biblical characters are included and are implicitly located as historical figures. The series began, for instance, with a narrative entitled 'Daughter of the Nile', focusing on Miriam, older sister of Moses.

### **Film star glamour and links between past and present.**

Visually, whilst there are several different artists involved in illustrating the biographies, a common strand in the depiction of the characters is that they are drawn in ways that suggest classic Hollywood film star glamour (and sometimes specific actors) from the 1930s onwards, which suggests that the narratives were partly designed to engage the adult secondary reader (Brown, 2018). This visual approach was not used in other stories within *Girl* which tended to focus on young characters who might be seen as peers. Given that a desire to assert what the publication team identified as British values is part of these narratives, drawing on Hollywood productions could be seen as hypocritical. Typically, however, the images are derived from those of actors who were originally from Britain or the Commonwealth, so this adaption of their looks and presentation in film could also be seen as acting as an assertion of Britain's importance in media, another claim for ongoing global significance and hint about adult roles<sup>5</sup>. The article will discuss the single exception to this shortly, a story which still worked with film star glamour and the notion of 'the coolly aloof and beautifully coiffed personality, hovering above the indignities of life on the ground' (Brown, 2018, p.100), wherein the star whose image was a reference meant a fairly complex depiction of the chosen character could be created.

In addition, visual points are made that link past and present with film, again directing the readers to draw certain conclusions from what they read (although they could, of course, choose to read against the grain of these ideological messages). For example, the title image that begins each week of the story of 'Elizabeth of England. The enthralling life story of the first Queen Elizabeth', is not a straightforward depiction of that monarch, as it also draws on images of Elizabeth the Second as both princess and queen (the story's publication was aligned with her coronation in June 1953) (see Figure 1)

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<sup>5</sup> This focus on individuals from Britain and the Commonwealth was reflected in other aspects of the title as well. For instance, when human subjects were depicted in posters, they initially had to be either from these locations or from royal families from around the world. The images appeared in printed frames and were described as from a series called 'The Girl Picture Gallery'.



(Figure 1. Varah & Sindall, *Girl*, 15 July 1953, p. 16).

This implies a sense of continuity between the monarchs, although the latter is not directly descended from the former. This also ties in with what was labelled the New Elizabethan Age, which was influenced by the historical Elizabethans and so channeled modernity whilst retaining a reverence for the past (Morra & Gossedge, 2016).

However, in contrast, in the body of the strip the depiction of Elizabeth the First draws rather more on Vivien Leigh<sup>6</sup>. The overall effect is to impart film star glamour to both Elizabeths, and it is additionally possible to link this to the idea of Leigh as Hollywood 'royalty' at that time. Here, as Judith Brown suggests, is a model of 'Celebrity: those combined attributes of fame, wealth, public recognition, adulation, and the remove from the prosaic routine of everyday life that together produced an intoxicating distance across which the ordinary mortal could not reach' (2018, p. 100)<sup>7</sup>. In addition, this narrative is also part of the intense media coverage around the

<sup>6</sup> Except with red hair. There might also possibly be a little reference to Maureen O'Hara too, although that would not be in line with where those featured usually originated.

<sup>7</sup> Film is also important in this narrative in terms of how, for instance, the Armada is depicted. Here the strip may owe a debt to *The Sea Hawk* (1940).

royal family that was dominant in periodical and newspaper publishing. This focus on royalty in texts of the 1950s was not without critics, however. For example, Cadogan and Craig (1976, p. 329), speaking of another princess-based comic strip of the time summed up their perspective on such materials by saying 'all the worst aspects of the decade were aired; [including] princess worship [and] vapid romanticism'.

To return to the first biographical story published in the periodical, 'Daughter of the Nile', the approach taken to this narrative, as with many others, is to flesh out the information available. In this story the minimal information offered about Miriam as prophetess in the Book of Exodus is expanded into a fuller narrative, focusing on she and Moses' youth, at least initially. Both lead characters are drawn as attractive, slender people with brown eyes and pale brown skin (although the tone of their skin varies across issues), yet their facial features are clearly based on notions of beauty as shown in Hollywood films, as noted above.

In this narrative the key visual reference for Miriam is most probably Merle Oberon, as a comparison of the illustrations with publicity stills of Oberon suggests. Consequently, this, as possibly the only narrative amongst these biographies which does not have a protagonist depicted as having white skin, could be seen as problematically drawing on Oberon's, 'performance of upper-class Englishness offscreen and onscreen to render herself opaque in the face of life-long scrutiny regarding her ethnicity' (Sinha, 2016, p.221). Miriam is depicted as knowledgeable, politically skillful, and physically quite still and dignified, characteristics which Oberon personified. The artist, John Worsley, later drew key ballet story 'Belle of the Ballet', where the willowy frames of the dancers were emphasized, and this similarly suggest beauty is about elegance and poise. In the introduction to the narrative, she is described as getting Moses adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter and educating Moses to be 'both an Egyptian Prince and a humble, God-fearing Hebrew' (Varah & Worsley, Vol.1 No. 21, March 21, 1952, p.16). The depiction of her skill at moving across several worlds and having tentatively achieved power and upper-class status (although that is often threatened by Moses' behavior) is in line with both how Oberon negotiated the extensive press reporting of her history and identity, and with her performances, which were restrained, although the characters she played were often notable for their emotional intensity (Sinha, 2016, p. 221). A broad knowledge of classical Hollywood film would mean that the creators had a familiarity with the press commentary about the actor, and this may be seen as feeding into the narrative.

### **Stereotypes are employed to show the moral superiority of the central characters.**

To continue to analyze aspects of 'Daughter of the Nile', in contrast to Miriam's beauty, the Egyptian characters are usually shown as unattractive, overweight, or ungainly, especially the males ones, so employing bodily stereotypes and connecting them to nationality to suggest a lack of positive moral qualities. This gives an implicit direction to the reader as to whose 'side' they should take but also suggests what they should look like themselves (Holland et al., 2015). This use of stereotyping can be seen in Figure 2. The narrative starts with Miriam and Moses discussing Moses' inability to keep in favor with the Pharaoh's son Mineptah, as Moses has just

beaten him in a chariot race rather than allowing himself to lose. This narrative of politicized strategizing to ensure the overall safety of the Hebrew people in the face of a potentially weak and cruel future Pharaoh is followed by Moses coming across an Egyptian (depicted as fat and ugly) beating a Hebrew slave. Class is implied in the costume, as Moses and Miriam wear formal clothing, whilst the slave and the slave driver are shown in loincloths. Moses' anger having been roused; he cries 'What you do to my people you do to me!' (p. 16) and kills the unnamed Egyptian character (Varah & Worsley, March 21, 1952, p.16). The lack of name, wording, body shape and the role all contribute to the character being stereotyped within the text, in contrast to Miriam whose depiction positions her as like the reader in terms of class and femininity.



(Varah & Worsley, Vol.1 No. 21, March 21, 1952, p.16).

This encounter takes up seven of the fifteen panels of that week's episode and incorporates a wordless panel where Moses is shown striking the Egyptian. At this point he returns to Miriam to tell her, and she urges him to keep this act secret. The strip ends with a close-up of Miriam's face and a speech bubble where she declares the need for secrecy, the visuals reflecting the way it began, with Miriam's image in a panel along with the story title. Whilst the final panel

functions as a cliffhanger, a dramatic ending intended to ensure the readers' return to the story, Miriam's centrality to the narrative is also reinforced. Although it is an act of violence that is central, the emphasis is on this as righteous, although politically dangerous. Here, then, Miriam is positioned as knowledgeable and politically astute, and Moses is shown as in need of her guidance to ensure his safety and that of his people.

This positively presented stereotype (though a stereotype, nonetheless) of the thoughtful and morally superior girl or woman, who often guides an erring male, whether relative, friend or partner, appears frequently in the biographies. Unlike later narratives the image at the start each week varies according to aspects of the narrative, rather than being consistent, so Miriam may appear with loose hair and a simple shift dress, or in an approximation of a formal Ancient Egyptian costume with wig, so indicating the differing personae she adopts in negotiating the political space of the narrative. All the same, the model for the female reader is one that suggests that to be female is to be influential, politically aware, effective and morally superior to many of the males they encounter, something that is often linked with faith, self-sacrifice and nation. There is a further slant in this narrative that amounts to saying that this model is biblical and should be emulated in contemporary society.

This stereotyping of those considered evil or misguided appears elsewhere in the biographies, but takes different forms, including the way that male Russians are uniformly depicted as ugly in 'Lone Mission. The real life story of Gladys Aylward' (Varah & Haylock, 1959), and in the ruddier skin and cruder features of working-class characters and use of gender in 'Royal Margaret. The True Story of a Princess who became St Margaret of Scotland' (Varah & Sindall, 1952). In the latter story, the younger brother of Margaret, Edgar, is described early in the narrative as 'the youngest and a rather unpleasant boy' (Varah & Sindall, Vol. 1, No. 37, 9 July 1952, p.16). Frequently depicted in movement, usually to the end of asserting his dominance, much of the early part of the narrative describes his aggression towards his older sister and his naked ambition for power. Uncontrolled boyhood is contrasted here with female tolerance and patience, with Margaret even covering up some of his misbehavior<sup>8</sup>. He is depicted as having red hair, a stereotype suggesting emotional instability (unlike the red hair of Elizabeth the First, which is coded as representing her dynamism). Further, the color of his clothes clash with his hair, making him visually distinctive (see Figure 3). His role as antagonist involves his failed attempts to become King of England as both boy and man, a failure that in this version of the narrative, he blames everyone for but himself.

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<sup>8</sup> Unlike Moses, Edgar does not learn from his sister, so the narrative depicts him as irredeemable.



(Figure 3. Varah & Sindall, Vol. 1, No. 35, 25 June 1952, p.16).

In the narrative, part of Margaret's role is to suffer at his hands, whilst trying to balance her desires, public works, piety, agency and sense of duty. It is this constant sense of trial combined with her virtuous qualities which leads to her being considered 'saintly' in the comic strip. In this title for girls, whilst the female characters may form an alliance, or relationship with a male character, as is the case with Margaret, romance is not the key to the stories. Rather it is the moral qualities of the female characters, which the narratives attach to beauty (seen as needing to be aligned both internally and externally, itself a problematic and stigmatizing construction). The negative stereotype, then, in these narratives, is typically, although not always, used to embody physical and mental qualities that are seen as morally and visually antithetical to those of the female star character who is positioned as a positive stereotype.

### The white female missionary as representing agentic and dynamic womanhood.

One of the most problematic sets of narratives included amongst these biographies are those about missionaries. Again, the exclusively white female missionaries (including Mary Slessor) are visually depicted as beautiful, typically as if seen through a Hollywood lens. For example, there are several gloriously drawn examples by Gerald Haylock, including 'Lone Mission. The



real life story of Gladys Aylward' (Varah & Haylock, 1958-1959). The final page of this narrative gives a rare example of citing other versions of the same text, so connecting it to wider popular culture. In the final panel the information box mentions Aylward's return to England and the panel also incorporates a sketch of the cover of the hardback version of Alan Burgess's (1957) biography, *The Small Woman*, plus the backdrop for this panel is taken from the film, *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (Robson, 1958), where Aylward is played by Ingrid Bergman. This leads to the juxtaposition of two versions of Aylward, with very different film star looks, as throughout the narrative it seems to be Audrey Hepburn who is the model. The previous panels on this final page center on her continuing sense of mission, and her instance on her life belonging to God and to all the people of China. The importance of her final statement is emphasized further by the way her face dominates the penultimate panel and, indeed, overlays one in the row above, whilst her rejected love is contained within the panel (see Figure 4)



(Figure 4. Varah & Haylock, Vol. 8, No. 10, 7 March 1959, p.16).

These narratives tend to put an emphasis on youth, early poverty, faith and the idea of the missionary as a career in the form of a life-long calling, so theoretically offering younger readers a sense of connection. The early stages of the individual's life, showing them working towards

becoming a missionary, is as much a focus as their later work. In this the foundation for aspiration is set for the (assumed to be) white, middle-class girl reader, through showing what problems there might be and how historical figures overcame their own. The depiction of challenges is intended to encourage empathy, and there is a use of emotional realism, for instance in depicting embarrassment in the face of bullying and teasing from siblings, peers or adults, to position the character as underdog, and encourage reader sympathy. With Aylward this is additionally indicated by the fact that she was rejected by the mission agencies and found the money herself to go to China through working as a parlor maid.

Later in the narratives the adventures are depicted as exciting and dangerous (presented as an enticing possibility for self-determination and independence), the mission worthy (meaning that embarking on this route is virtuous, not hedonistic), and Christianity is suggested to be an unalloyed force for good through improving the lot of others in the world. This is tied to the values that the publishers would like to encourage readers to embody, which, in effect, are attached to white privilege. These are, in addition, narratives that present Christianity as monolithic, despite the many missionary societies that existed attached to different Christian sects, which often had very different views about the approach to missionary work and about Christianity itself. Indeed, even whilst the narrative shows that Aylward was self-funded, the idea of a monolithic and united Christianity is largely maintained.

Ideologically, these narratives problematically position non-British countries, peoples and individuals as 'other' and as inherently in need of white Christian guidance. As Tariq Modood describes it, 'othering' sees a minority in terms of how a dominant group negatively and stereotypically imagines that minority as something 'other', as inferior or threatening, and to be excluded. Indeed, the dominant group typically projects its own fears and anxieties onto the minority' (Modood, 2019, p. 78). This suggests why Christianity is pictured across these narratives as it is, despite actual internal divisions, as that creates the impression of a large grouping that is then positioned as dominant through faith and ethnicity.

Consequently, the basic thrust of the narratives can be seen as unreflective and racist in the emphasis on the white protagonists as representing 'civilization' and 'maturity' rather than being recognized as colonialist. These white women characters can be understood, as al-Samarai and Piesche argue, as indicating that 'Since the unmarked marker defines him\*herself as 'neutral' and creates what is called the 'norm', whiteness remains unnamed in its processes to construct racialized 'other/s' and demarcates this void through explicit and implicit parameters. Bearers of whiteness benefit from discriminatory categories of differences which have been implemented as an increasingly globalized matrix of domination and norm/alization' (2018, p. 169). This is played out in the narratives, as whilst the use of women characters incorporates an essentialist view of womanhood (through their assumed collective caring nature), their individual and personalized narratives are positioned to counter the idea that their actions could be in any way constructing an 'other' or undermining a state or people. For example, an incident in Aylward's story is one of initiating prison reform via quelling a riot in a

men's prison in China and then ensuring that the convicts **have work to do (Varah and Haylock, *Girl*, 16 August 1958, p. 16)**. This is presented both as 'common sense' and as something previously unconsidered in the cultural context. Further, whilst drawn as individuals of all ages, rather than collectively stereotyped, much of the Chinese characters' speech is child-like, for example in their admiration of the Japanese planes that, shortly after it is expressed, bomb their **location (Varah and Haylock, *Girl*, 27 Sept 1958, p. 16)**.

In effect, the narratives structure the reading experience to imply the superiority of Christianity and whiteness. This is despite the stated intention of the editor and creators to resist negative characterization. For, as Jan Morris and Sally Hallwood (1998) state regarding the *Eagle* it was 'agreed that Germans, Japanese and other foreigners were not to be 'villains'; in any group of children, one or two should be, in today's jargon, from ethnic minorities' (p.130). Note, however, that the children mentioned are not positioned as central characters, so this becomes (after Miriam's narrative) largely a tokenistic exercise across the periodical. In the end, as with some of the other initiatives that Hulton put into play in their publications, the overall thrust of the text supported and encouraged ideas that resisted disturbing a supposed status quo in an era in which social change at national and international level was significant.

### **The 'Girly/Girly Swot'<sup>9</sup>.**

Another strategy used in the biographies, which appears in relation to the later narratives where scientists begin to appear, is to show a girl focused on education, at times in the face of others insisting that doing so means they are not appropriately 'girly' (so positioning education in tension with 'normal' girlhood and belittling girls). This appears in the narratives of Florence Nightingale (Varah & Haylock, 1957) and Marie Curie (Varah and Haylock, 1959). In the former the adult begins as a child who struggles with social norms, finding interaction hugely problematic, but enjoys study (see Figure 5).

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<sup>9</sup> This is an informal British term of disapproval for a girl who does their homework or prepares for something. Sometimes used to denigrate any professional or academic woman.



(Figure 5. Varah & Haylock, 15 May 1957, p.16)

The story later shows that she was given an education in line with her father's beliefs about girls and learning (including studying mathematics, leading to her later interest in and use of statistics). It is forward looking in indicating that education is a good thing, yet it also suggests how difficult it is to succeed in the face of opposition from peers. This assumes that girls will denigrate those amongst them with aspirations, giving a sense of a preferred model of girlhood as under attack, as shown in Figure 5. Here education may be allied with faith, and that one might suffer trials in the attaining of it is very akin to the other narratives. This also applies to the Marie Curie narrative, although this shifts in her attendance at university where the text notes that she studied in Paris as in 'Russian-occupied Warsaw' 'women may not attend university' (see Figure 6).



(Figure 6. Varah & Haylock, 29 August 1959, p.16).

In effect, these narratives depict secular saints, positioned as admirable because they embody, with this educational twist, the values epitomized by the earlier narratives. They also maintain the notions of superiority put forward earlier, with the Russians positioned in the Curie narrative, once more, as antagonists, but also inadequate, indicating the text's response to the contemporary Cold War through historical material.

Further, in relation to Nightingale, the narrative shows opposition from other women when she begins to introduce changes in medical care. One episode shows a nun bringing a complaint against her, insisting her work is all about the self and ego (Varah & Haylock, *Girl*, 9 October, 1957). This is suggested as linked with Nightingale's insistence that these nuns, as nurses, are making their patients more ill from a lack of cleanliness in practice and in medical spaces. These tensions are in accord with some of the contrasting views of Nightingale shown in later accounts of her life and work (Hogan, 2022). This idea of other women as oppositional is not as dominant in the earlier narratives, but here early paternal support for the girl is central and women beyond the central character are often denigrated, yet another mode of social control of the girl. This rejection of the frivolous, suggested to be about 'normal' girlhood, can again be

read through the lens of fears about contemporary girls being caught up in popular culture and consumerism rather than playing a major role in the world as representatives of authority chosen British values.

Whilst Nightingale explicitly connects what she is doing with 'God's will', aligning hers with the earlier narratives, the emphasis is on her as someone willing to challenge the norms of her era. This is rather different from the tone of the others where conformity is more valued but suggests a shift in understanding of girlhood in the 1950s as ideas about duty slowly come into tension with ideas of youth, independence and the self.

### **Conclusion.**

All these biographies move on from the Victorian stereotype of womanhood as centered on 'the angel of the hearth' where, located in the domestic sphere, 'women were the homemakers and keepers, with ideals of femininity focused around serenity, compassion and subservience' (Galvin, 2017). However, being in the public domain (and despite the later espousal of the importance of education, both of which the stories imply are desirable) necessitates a continual awareness and conscious adoption of caring, dutiful and compassionate behavior. In other words, performing a decorous femininity remains important, even if one is taking some of the qualities valued in the private sphere into the public domain. This accords with the implication that girl readers should fulfill the performance of white British womanhood on a world stage to help maintain national influence, perhaps as an embodiment of 'soft power' (Nye, 1990).

This publication, like the others Hulton published, were in part intended to act as a response to the American titles imported into Britain (as the ideological drivers discussed above might suggest)<sup>10</sup>. In effect, these titles can be understood as an assertion of a supposed British cultural superiority and morality, linked with notions of whiteness and faith, partly as a response to the end of Empire and shifts in international power (hence the anti-Russian sentiments), but also by growing concerns amongst authority figures about what was seen by some as an alien youth culture, especially the notion of the teenager as rebellious, as expressed in comics, film, music and elsewhere. This meant *Girl* largely avoided engaging with popular culture, even though its format implied it was part of it. This rejection of popular culture can be seen as linked to a denial of the social change emerging in Britain in the post-war period, and an attempt to lay the blame for any societal unrest elsewhere. In addition, this title is indirectly linked to the British anti-comics movement, the British Horror Comics Campaign (BHCC), which began in 1949 and led to the passage of the protectionist *Children and Young Persons Act* (1955). As discussed by Martin Barker (1984), whilst the British campaign became focused similarly to the one in the U.S.A, in fearing for children's morals and behavior and acting as a form of cultural control based in emerging notions around media effects and moral panics, it

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<sup>10</sup> The first title created by the publisher was not *Girl*, but *Eagle* (Hulton Press, 1950-1969) which also largely avoided explicitly Christian material, but made the values of the British Anglican version of that faith implicit in narratives and approach.

began with the British Communist Party (BCP), who saw the importation of American comics as an act of cultural imperialism.

Consequently, whilst the comic is still seen as a problematic medium in general at this time in Britain, creating children's comics which are determined by values identified by the editor and creative team (dominated by white British males) as exemplifying national qualities, was to act as an 'antidote' to American titles, an anti-American as well as nationalistic slant<sup>11</sup>. This complex set of values and cultural assumptions is bound up in *Girl* with the team's engagement in the social construction of girlhood and future womanhood<sup>12</sup>. This meant the narratives created revealed specific perspectives on how girls should behave and what they should aim to be and do as adults, in a form of social control centered on wider cultural fears about girl's behavior, again in the light of the growth of popular culture and in relation to expanding economic opportunities for young women.

In conclusion, there is a background tension in these biographical narratives that seems related to defensiveness, as if there is a fear that the values espoused need shoring up. The stories position girls as part of this maintenance of a value system seen by white male authorities as under threat, through the insistence on possible future selves acting in a supposed national interest to support a status quo. However, simultaneously, these narratives are indicative of fears around girls themselves, with admiration reserved only for those who fulfill traditional moral roles (and so equally attempt to reinforce a specific form of girlhood) with both being enacted through the biographies in the periodical in the face of cultural and social change.

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<sup>11</sup> Whilst most of the creators involved in this publication were male, one notable female contributor was June Medoza, who under the pen name Chris Garvey, illustrated a strip about Joan of Arc.

<sup>12</sup> Social construction of childhood, which is applied to girlhood here was developed by theorists in what was the emerging discipline of Childhood Studies in the 1980s and on. (Kehily, 2004).

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