This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of a book review of Clare Rose, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in Late-Victorian England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010) accepted for publication in *Enterprise and Society* 13: 2 June 2012, following editorial review.

The final review was published as:

Annebella Pollen, *Making, Selling and Wearing Boys' Clothes in Late-Victorian England* (review), *Enterprise and Society* 13: 2, 2012, pp. 423-435.

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=9484461&fulltextType=BR&fileId=S1467222700011319>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1467222700011319>

The study of children's culture, after many years of scholarly neglect, has become the subject of increasing academic interest, not least in the area of children's clothing. Key publications by sociologist Daniel Cook and anthropologist Alison J. Clarke, as just two examples, have persuasively examined the making, selling and wearing of children's clothing in the 20th and 21st century as a means of engaging with larger issues about consumer culture, the social construction of childhood, and the complexities of the shifting moral debates therein. Similarly, Clare Rose's text, with its meticulous focus on boys' wear in the nineteenth century, seeks to use this case study as a lens through which to explore changing practices of production, distribution and retailing practices, the social constitution of gendered and classed identity, and the conceptualisation and experience of social change more broadly.

Concerned to establish "the *habitus* of nineteenth-century boys' clothing practice" (p. 246), Rose is frustrated by surviving garments preserved by museums, with their emphasis on special occasion and elite wear rather than everyday clothes. Her quest for alternative sources leads her, instead, to an impressively comprehensive and innovative range of research material including photographs emerging from children's charitable institutions, design registers, advertising archives, trade journals, dress patterns, needlework guides and autobiographies. Due to the vast scale of some of these datasets, Rose largely applies quantitative analytical approaches, where the material is typologised, tabulated and then organised in the form of percentages. While this approach is defended by Rose as providing "a firm evidential base" (p. 227), and can certainly prove illuminating for establishing patterns of clothing styles across data, as an interpretive tool for assessing nuances of social significance and cultural meaning, however, it can prove rather limited.

For example, in the first chapter Rose discusses the way that 'raggedness' as a metaphor for child poverty in the 19th century was positioned against the desired quality of

'respectability', particularly in the transformational effects of charity visualised in the 'before' and 'after' photographs of children entering and exiting Dr. Barnardo's children's homes. In order to account for "the reality of raggedness" (p.46), Rose counts instances where the clothing worn in these photographs could be understood as ragged (in the form of holes, tears, missing buttons and bare feet) against that which could be seen as respectable (most commonly interpreted in the form of a white collar). This quantification leads Rose to conclude that the difference, in practice, between poverty and improvement is not as marked as one might expect. However, in order for this assertion to carry authority, Rose acknowledges that it is necessary to first refute the charge of such images as "artistic fictions" and to claim their validity as a source that may be counted as "evidence". Given what has been argued both in 19th century court cases and in recent photographic analysis about the staged and rhetorical purposes of these particular prints, this is a tricky ambition.

In a short paragraph in the introduction, as part of a longer, rather list-like literature review, Rose briefly notes that various theorists have critiqued the use of photographs as historical sources. Rose is also aware of the literature that problematises the Barnardo's photographs in particular, as this is deferred to in footnotes. It is rather frustrating, then, that these debates are not explored and integrated into the argument, where photographs seem oversimplified as windows on the world. There is also an emerging and sophisticated body of work on visual methodologies that is wholly sidestepped in analysis. I am thinking, in particular, of the work of Gillian Rose and Elizabeth Edwards, whose debates about the material, emotional and performative role of photographs in social and historical research moves beyond considering them merely as documents that may or may not be trusted evidentially. Some engagement with these debates would have considerably thickened reflections. Additionally, the particular conditions of the photographs' production - including institutional agendas, the imperatives of the studio, contemporary conventions of the presentation of self and the well-known phenomenon of dressing for the photographer - all contribute to creating rich and complex meanings for the material that may not be satisfactorily reduced to generalised, numerical content. On a related issue, image reproductions in the book are of rather varied quality, and some photographs are too faint, grainy or small to demonstrate arguments effectively.

Numerical reduction and interpretive brevity are not just issues for debates about photography: the extraordinary range, quality and cross-referencing of archival research across large datasets in Rose's book is rarely matched by the same depth of theoretical enquiry. Rose's great strengths lie in locating, describing and managing her extensive material rather than moving it towards conclusions. While there are some very useful observations that challenge existing knowledge - including that the quantity of archival examples of decoration on boy's clothes suggest an interest in novelty closer to women's fashion than to traditional concerns about fit and function in the supposedly monotonous styling of menswear - the consequences of her findings for furthering wider understandings of fashion, mass-production and consumption, and the formation of class and sexuality are

frequently considered in a sentence and are conspicuously underplayed until the very final pages. Chapter 7 marks a change of aim in this regard, as it considers the contribution of the Highland kilt and the sailor suit specifically to political and gendered identity. Yet, instead of considering, say, contemporary ideas about masculinity and military rhetoric alongside garment representations, Rose focuses on evidence readable in the material alone, looking for direct stylistic references to uniforms or for practical evidence of gender differentiation. As there are few of these visible in the clothes, and little explicit reference to masculinity in any of the supporting material examined, this inevitably leads to rather reserved outcomes.

As a dress historian, Rose's research methods are firmly object-focused. Such an approach has been championed by Lou Taylor in *The Study of Dress History* (2002) as being appropriately grounded in the "minute detail" of garments and their representations, but it has also been critiqued by social and economic historians such as Ben Fine and Ellen Leopold in *The World of Consumption* (1992) as a "wholly descriptive 'catalogue' tradition" of accounting for change through the close reading of alternations in buttons and bows over time. The approach of Rose's book is so loyal to traditional disciplinary dress historical research methods that larger social and cultural context in the form of, say, theories of childrearing or ideas about 19th century manhood, are not fully brought to bear on the object of study despite their obvious and direct relevance. Keeping her evidence very close to the ground provides empirical security for Rose's findings, but a more ethnographic approach to her fine-grained case studies might help realise the promise that the making, selling and wearing of late nineteenth century boys' wear can provide productive material to think with and through larger cultural issues.