



**Reading Boyishly: Roland Barthes, J. M. Barrie,
Jacques Henri Lartigue, Marcel Proust, and D. W.
Winnicott**

Carol Mavor

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An intricate text filled to the brim with connotations of desire, home, and childhood—nests, food, beds, birds, fairies, bits of string, ribbon, goodnight kisses, appetites sated and denied—*Reading Boyishly* is a story of mothers and sons, loss and longing, writing and photography. In this homage to four boyish men and one boy—J. M. Barrie, Roland Barthes, Marcel Proust, D. W. Winnicott, and the young photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue—Carol Mavor embraces what some have anxiously labeled an over-attachment to the mother. Here, the maternal is a cord (unsevered) to the night-light of boyish reading.

To “read boyishly” is to covet the mother’s body as a home both lost and never lost, to desire her as only a son can, as only a body that longs for, but will never become Mother, can. Nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos* = return to native land, and *algos* = suffering or grief) is at the heart of the labor of boyish reading, which suffers in its love affair with the mother. The writers and the photographer that Mavor lovingly considers are boyish readers *par excellence*: Barrie, creator of Peter Pan, the boy who refused to grow up; Barthes, the “professor of desire” who lived with or near his mother until her death; Proust, the modernist master of nostalgia; Winnicott, therapist to “good enough” mothers; and Lartigue, the child photographer whose images invoke ghostlike memories of a past that is at once comforting and painful.

Drawing attention to the interplay between writing and vision, *Reading Boyishly* is stuffed full with more than 200 images. At once delicate and powerful, the book is a meditation on the threads that unite mothers and sons and on the writers and artists who create from those threads art that captures an irretrievable past.

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