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Children's Literature

Jean Webb

George MacDonald's major novels for children reveal shifts in the development of English children's literature from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century perspectives in relation to the approaches to moral education, the genre of fantasy and awareness of social realities. Unlike his predecessors' creations, MacDonald's protagonists acquire agency: they engage with emotional and practical problems emanating from the immediacy of their society. The sophistication of the construction of his child characters and their interaction with their worlds, either real or imagined, created the literary pathways for children's writers to come, such as E. Nesbit, C.S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, as well as contemporary writers of fiction for children. Rather than engaging in debate about MacDonald's philosophical beliefs, the focus of this discussion will be on signifying how his work relates to the history of English fiction for children through consideration of his book-length novels for children: *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), *Gutta-Percha Willie* (1873), and *The Princess and Curdie* (1883).

Early moral fiction for children

Prior to George MacDonald the mode of writing for children was firmly based in the intention to educate children morally. The following brief outline of this context forms the basis for considering how MacDonald's texts developed writing fiction for children. As Margaret Nancy Cutt observes: 'Approved reading matter for children up to about 1815 was still dominated by the extensive eighteenth-century literature of morality and instruction.'¹

Added to this context of moral education was: ‘The revival of Evangelicalism which occurred in the later decades of the eighteenth century’.² The work of Mrs Mary Martha Sherwood (1755 – 1851) typifies this trend in fiction, with her popularity being maintained through to the end of the Victorian period. As Charlotte Yonge (1823 – 1901), a leading writer for children in the nineteenth century commented: ‘All the little Sunday books on those days were Mrs Sherwood’s’.³ Yonge’s reference here is to the books distributed by The Sunday School Movement.⁴ Founded by Robert Raikes (1736 – 1811) in Gloucester in 1780, the Sunday School Movement provided basic literacy for working class children on Sundays when they were not at work. A high percentage of children were in paid employment without any educational provision so the Sunday Schools filled this gap. There were no fees charged. Their teaching enabled children to read the Bible and thus improve their behaviour. ‘By 1831, 1.25 million British children were being taught weekly in these Sunday schools. That constituted approximately one-quarter of the population. Free, compulsory education was not passed into law in England until 1880.’⁵ Sunday Schools were highly influential, as was the moral drive of Mrs Sherwood’s books adopted by them. She was convinced that the nature of the child was ‘thoroughly depraved by original sin’.⁶ She said explicitly that

All children are by nature evil, and while they have none but the natural evil principle to guide them, pious and prudent parents must check their naughty passions in any way that they have in their power, and force them into decent and proper behaviour and into what are called good habits.⁷

An example designed to shock parents and children to adhere to such advice appears in Mrs Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818). The consequence of the lack of parental guidance is the death of the young Augusta Noble. The incident is quoted here in detail to highlight the subtle criticism implicit in the text:

Miss Augusta had a custom of playing with fire, and carrying candles about, though Lady Noble had often warned her of the danger of this habit, and strictly charged her governess to prevent it. But it seems that the governess, being afraid of offending, had suffered her very often to be guilty of this piece of disobedience, without telling Lady Noble. And the night before last, when Lady Noble was playing at cards in the drawing-room with some visitors, Miss Augusta took a candle off the hall table, and carried it upstairs to the governess's room. No one was there, and it is supposed that Miss Augusta was looking in the glass with a candle in her hand, when the flame caught her dress; but this is not known. Lady Noble's maid, who was in the next room, was alarmed by her dreadful screams, and, hastening to discover the cause, found poor Augusta in a blaze from head to foot. The unhappy young lady was so dreadfully burnt that she never spoke afterwards, but died in agonies last night.⁸

There are a number of instances embedded here which carry a moral warning to the Fairchild children who greatly admire the wealthy and aristocratic Noble family. Firstly, there is the disobedience of Augusta in playing with fire, despite being warned of the dangers by her mother, and consequently dying, as it were in a fiery hell. The second moral failure is when Lady Noble passes on her maternal responsibility to a governess. The third occurs in the lack of duty of care shown by the governess because of moral weakness in preferring to be non-confrontational and safe-guarding her own feelings rather than being responsible and firm with Augusta about her behaviour. This opens the opportunity for Augusta to act in an ill-disciplined manner and continue with her dangerous play unattended, for her mother is otherwise engaged in socialising and card playing, which potentially raises the question of immoral gambling activities. The whole series of moral failures is compounded by Augusta

admiring herself in a mirror, which is very probably a direct reference to Abraham Chæar's (d.1668) poem 'A Looking Glass for Children' (published posthumously 1670) which warns of the dangers of vanity:

When by spectators I am told
What beauty doth adorn me,
Or in a glass when I behold
How sweetly God did form me –
Hath God such comeliness bestowed
And on me made to dwell
What pity such a pretty maid
As I should go to Hell.⁹

Augusta's disobedience and the consequences provide a frightening warning focussing on moral behaviour, disobedience, and punishment, which is in stark contrast to mid nineteenth-century writers such as Hesba Stretton (1832 – 1911) and George MacDonald whose child characters develop through a variety of experiences simultaneously learning about themselves and society.

Mid nineteenth-century movements: fantasy and social realism

Like MacDonald, Hesba Stretton was intent on raising awareness of the experiences of the poverty and cruel conditions which existed in the lives of working class children.¹⁰ She did so through her activism in founding the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1884), and through her social realist fiction for children. MacDonald's work differs from that of Stretton in that it combines fantasy with social realism as in *At the Back of the*

North Wind. Here the figure of North Wind, a powerful embodiment of nature, becomes young Diamond's mentor, whereas in Stretton's *Pilgrim Street* (1867)¹¹ it is a policeman who is the guide and very much of the real world of crime and poverty in nineteenth-century Manchester. Stretton's characters come up against the realities of the law while Diamond learns about life and himself in a different way. He journeys with North Wind when she carries him in her hair as she flies over the very poor areas of London to teach him about where children are badly treated and life is harsh. He is then returned to his real world where his actions for social change can make a difference.

MacDonald's novel differs from the great fantasy works of Charles Kingsley in *The Water-Babies* (1863) and Lewis Carroll in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), in that Diamond is being directed to relate to the real world so that he can make changes in his community. He therefore has repeated journeys between the worlds to put into being what he has learned, while in Kingsley and Carroll's texts there is a singular experience with Tom and Alice entering the fantasy world at the beginning of their narrative and emerging at the end.

In *The Water-Babies*, Tom the chimney sweep's boy leaves the harshness of the reality of child labour and enters the underwater world transformed into a water-baby. Overseen by three moral guardians, the Irish fairy, Mrs. Doasyouwouldbedoneby, and Mrs. Bedonebyasyoudid, Tom learns to appreciate the wonders of nature, such as seeing a dragon fly emerge from a chrysalis, deeply regretting his previously cruel and destructive behaviour in killing the caddis-fly larva. His journey is one of education, of understanding the natural world which was alien to him, which continues during his quest set by the fairies to find Mr. Grimes his old chimney sweep master. Tom travels through various scenarios which are models of creation visiting societies where their behaviour has led to moral and degenerative collapse as with the Doasyoulikes, a satirical enactment of Darwinian regressive evolution.¹² On completion of his tasks, he emerges from being a water-baby into 'a great man of science'

who can effect practical change for good in the real world of industry and science in nineteenth-century Britain.¹³

In contrast, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* does not engage with concerns such as poverty or child labour, but is a satirical critique of the Victorian upper classes. Alice, like Tom, is set on a journey, principally to discover who she is. On falling down the rabbit hole she enters a strange world where animals speak and characters from nursery rhymes and popular culture, such as the Queen of Hearts and the Mad Hatter, are in somewhat manic control. In this underworld she loses her sense of identity. The caterpillar confronts her with the question: 'Who are you?'¹⁴, and then the pigeon declares her, through the impeccable logic of a syllogism, to be a serpent, not a little girl.¹⁵ She escapes from Wonderland when she asserts her own identity and returns to her normal child size in the challenging confrontation with the Red Queen and declaring her difference and superiority as a human:

'Hold your tongue!' said the Queen, turning purple.

'I won't!' said Alice.

'Off with her head!' the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

'Who cares for you?' said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time).

'You're nothing but a pack of cards!'¹⁶

Alice returns to her own world. Her experience is one of wonder which will remain within her memory throughout her life, but it does not change anything in the real world around her, which is the opposition to what happens with Diamond thanks to his time with North Wind.

Change in himself and the world around him is the key for Diamond. Paradoxically the fantasy figure of North Wind and his adventures with her are the means of Diamond accessing and learning about the reality of the nineteenth century which he visits, re-visits, and is educated into by his fantasy mentor. Each journey with her teaches him more about

himself and his own society until he is suitably prepared to enable change for the better in his local community. The first lesson Diamond has to learn in order for this educative process to work is to trust both North Wind and himself. As Roderick McGillis notes, MacDonald's characters have to learn to 'live with doubts and uncertainty'.¹⁷ North Wind gently leads Diamond through a process of learning to trust her and himself. She gradually builds up his confidence which is tested when North Wind takes him to a cathedral:

‘Oh! What’s that?’ cried Diamond, struck with a kind of terror, for he had never seen a cathedral, and it rose before him with an awful reality in the midst of the wide spaces, conquering emptiness with grandeur.

‘A very good place for you to wait in,’ said North Wind. ‘But we shall go in, and you shall judge for yourself.’ (NORTH WIND, 98)

North Wind guides him along a spiral stair and then onto a narrow gallery ‘which went twisting away down into the darkness’ (98). Understandably he is frightened, and when she lets go of his hand he screams in terror. However, ‘She left the words, “Come after me,” sounding in his ears’, and then he feels a faint breeze upon his hands (100). Courage returns to him, and he has learned the most important lesson which is to trust himself and those who take care of him. The scenario is reminiscent of Jesus calling to his disciples to have faith and to follow him. This lesson in self-belief is crucial to Diamond's progression through life for he must trust himself in order to make a difference to his community when the family are forced by financial circumstances to move to London. His father finds employment as a cab driver. Diamond takes over the position when his father falls ill. He is fearless and honest in the tough world of commerce and is brave in the face of drunkenness and violence about him, for he has gained self-confidence from his experiences with North Wind. So admired is he by the cabbies that they accept him and rectify their behaviour. The courage and self-belief he

has learned from North Wind is carried into everyday reality and has a positive impact upon the community. The above is one small example in a novel which revolves around recognizing the need for social change and how one person, albeit a young boy, can instigate the movement towards a more just and a kinder world. For instance, Diamond confronts a drunken cabbie who is beating his wife; he saves Nanny, a street sweeper, from her alcoholic and violent old grannie, and he makes friends with a middle-class philanthropist who takes Nanny into care when she falls ill: in so many ways his influence is a change for the better.

In addition to his critique of society which runs throughout this text, MacDonald includes another fantasy world at the back of the north wind, a world which is a Romantic poetic experience between dream and nature. Diamond is a sickly child, very probably suffering from tuberculosis which was rife amongst the working classes due to poor living conditions. MacDonald was all too familiar with the disease, for 'Three siblings, four children, and a granddaughter all died of tubercular illnesses before him.'¹⁸ Diamond's journeying to the back of the north wind is representative of near death. When he returns, his memory is of poetry and music depicting a world devoid of commerce, industry and human occupation; it is a return to the essence of nature, a Romantic ideal in the mode of Wordsworth whom MacDonald greatly admired. Diamond has had a heaven-like experience, however, the actions in Diamond's life are very much about the realities around him, for, as Roderick McGillis succinctly states: 'MacDonald's children's books are as much about growing up in this world as they are about preparing ourselves for heaven.'¹⁹ Like Wordsworth, MacDonald believed that the 'child was father to the man'²⁰, and thus childhood shaped the adult who would shape his world.

MacDonald: Realist fiction and the process of growing up.

At the Back of the North Wind shifts between worlds, whilst *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* and *Gutta-Percha Willie* are realist domestic adventure stories about the process of growing up. The detailed narratives of the protagonists' childhoods exemplify how they negotiate the practical and emotional challenges which shape their characters in positive and constructive ways as opposed to the didactic approaches of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood, written in the first-person, covers the time from early childhood to when Ranald leaves home for university referencing MacDonald's own boyhood in Scotland.²¹ The omniscient narrator of *Gutta-Percha Willie* recounts the story of a boy living in a fictitious small village in a remote part of northern Scotland.

In each, there is a strong sense of close family connection, as opposed to the children being ignored in Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family* or isolated from family as Tom in *The Water-Babies*, or Alice when in Wonderland. Ranald's father is a widowed clergyman, dedicatedly looking after his parishioners and caring for his children. Willie's father is a doctor tending to his patients in a rural area. Asked if he would have been glad to have an easier location in which to work he replies:

What's to become of my little flock if I go away, for there are very few doctors of my experience who would feel inclined to come and undertake my work. I know every man, woman, and child in the whole country-side, and that makes all the difference.

(GUTTA, 2)

The doctor's language reflects his sense of care and responsibility as he refers to his patients as a 'flock' and has echoes of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Caring for his patients is more important to him than earning high fees. In both *Ranald Bannerman's Boyhood* and *Gutta-Percha Willie* the parents provide strong role models and guidance, as it were a moral

compass to help their children through life. Duty and a sense of community, like those of their parents, are embedded in the boys' childhood experiences, attitudes which become part of their approach as they grow and learn. Whilst Mrs. Sherwood's Augusta Noble was a construct to communicate the dire consequences of disobedience, MacDonald's characters show depth in a range of feelings and sensitivity as they work through life's challenges.

For Ranald, school is one such challenge. He is taken to his first school by the stern and unsympathetic housekeeper, Mrs. Mitchell, a person who thought that 'boys ought never to have been made' (BANNERMAN, 18). Unsurprisingly she is not sympathetic toward Ranald. Neither is the school child-friendly, for it is an example of a small dame school where the education is poor.²² In Scotland, where the story is set, there was no regulated state education system until 1872. Before this dame schools were run in the homes of women, often ill-educated themselves, who acted as teachers.²³ They provided some basic elementary education in areas of poverty but they principally concentrated on obedience which was reinforced with harsh physical punishment which MacDonald picks up on his story. On seeing a boy beaten with a leather strap for not being able to read, Ranald runs away and is hunted down pursued by the dame's dog. He cannot face having to return to school on the morrow and, pursued by his fears, runs away from home. Matters are positively resolved by Ranald's father who demonstrates his love and understanding for his boy and allows Ranald to be schooled at home by the maid whom Ranald really likes. The importance of this episode is the exposure of the inadequacy of education in the mid nineteenth century. MacDonald is likely drawing on his own childhood experiences and evoking Scottish schooling from around the 1830s, forty years or so before the Education Act in Scotland (1872).

The inclusion of this incident reflects a mid-nineteenth-century shift in children's literature towards exposing the cruel realities of childhood, and it shows how MacDonald,

like contemporaries such as Hesba Stretton, was aware of trends in writing for children. Anna Davin explains the context of this change:

As reformers pressured for state interest in the condition of childhood amongst the poor, legislation was pushed through limiting children's employment, providing for their education and attempting to protect them from cruelty and neglect. Publishers took the opportunity of a developing market, both for textbooks (especially after the 1870 Education Act) and for leisure reading. Some of the new books for children themselves reflected prevalent concerns concerning childhood, especially in relation to poverty, the family and religion.²⁴

Hesba Stretton's work typifies the focus on social realism. She was a prolific writer for children and was principally published by the Evangelical tract society, confirming her Christian commitment which is evident in her stories. Her intention in her fiction for children and her activism was to raise awareness through her depiction of the terrible conditions of the poor, for instance, those whose lives were altered by the Acts of Enclosure as in *Fern's Hollow* (1864)²⁵ and the children in the city slums of the nineteenth century in *Pilgrim Street*.²⁶

In both of Stretton's texts, learning to read the Bible is a crucial factor in the lives of the young protagonists. In *Fern's Hollow* Stephen, a twelve-year-old boy has the sole care of his sisters and his grandfather. He works in a coal mine to give them a subsistence living in their cottage threatened to be enclosed by a large estate. He believes that if he could learn to read the Bible the whole way through that this would provide him with the solution to his problems. His situation is saved when he is overheard reading from the Bible by a middle-class woman who consequently takes the family on as a charitable mission.²⁷ She has the

connections to help Stephen reclaim the ownership of their property. The key to salvation, both in this world and the next, is literacy.

Literacy is also an important factor in MacDonald's *Gutta-Percha Willie*, but for him the application is in the practical rather than the spiritual world as he wants to learn about how to make things and engineering through his reading. Instead of focusing on the negative social circumstances, like Stretton's stories, in *Gutta-Percha Willie* MacDonald addresses social problems by providing a wholly positive model of childhood, where, like Diamond, the child makes a difference.

Willie's education stems from his relationship with his parents for: 'his father and mother used to talk very freely before him' (GUTTA, 8). Although he does not understand all of their conversation, he learns that they had little money and that food and livelihood had to be earned. 'He learned, too, that there was a great deal of suffering in the world, and that his father's business was to make it less' (8). That sense of a moral code and duty to the community is naturally being embedded in the child's consciousness by example and lived experience, as was the case in a different way with Diamond in *At the Back of the North Wind*. In addition to his family, another element of his education is the relationship he has with an old woman, a neighbour, who works at her wheel spinning flax and talking with Willie. Here there are links with MacDonald's later works of *The Princess and the Goblin*, published in 1872 just before *Gutta-Percha Willie*, and the later *Princess and Curdie*. Both *Princess* texts feature a wise old woman who spins and makes a link for the child across the generations. In *Gutta Percha Willie* the old woman is grounded in reality rather than a figure who can undergo transformation in terms of age as in the fairy tale *Princess* books. Willie is fascinated by her stories but he does have a critical perspective, for on hearing her story about a fairy wand with the power to conjure up anything that could be desired, Willie reacts angrily, saying that this is a cheat. Magic and fantasy and make-believe are not enough: for

him it is important to learn how to make things, to be the maker and to take responsibility as he has learned from his parents that what we have has to be earned by effort. There is a point of tension here between fantasy and reality, and Willie opts for reality and knowledge through application and hard work. From this point, the narrative recounts the various ways that Willie learns skills from the local crafts people and tradesmen and builds his knowledge incrementally, one experience building on the other resulting in a combination of imagination and practical reality to problem solve and benefit his family and community.

Interestingly, there is a cross-over in the time that MacDonald would have been writing *Gutta-Percha Willie* and his engagement with the charitable activities in London of his friend Octavia Hill, whom he had met in London in 1860.²⁸ As David L. Neuhouser records, he worked with her on support for the poor in the London slums where Hill's charitable activities provided housing in an holistic system which encompassed 'physical, social, educational and spiritual needs.'²⁹ Hill's conditions were that the beneficiaries should keep the properties in good repair and to lead lawful and orderly lives. To comply with these regulations, they had to learn the practical skills required to maintain the property. *Gutta-Percha Willie* is a fictional example of this way of thinking. Hill's housing project started from the basis that individuals needed to learn practical skills. Such knowledge had been lost through industrialisation, for factory workers performed an individual task as part of a process and did not learn the once everyday skills employed in life outside the factory. MacDonald has produced a character in Willie which addresses this problem. He learns by watching, asking about how things are made, and being willing to put in the effort. He also learns perseverance as with his first hard-fought accomplishment of knitting wrist warmers for his mother or making leather shoes for his sister's doll (GUTTA, 28-36).

As said, the range of skills Willie acquires is underpinned by his learning to read. Literacy was a common trope in the fiction for children at the time which was approached in

different ways by both MacDonald and Hesba Stretton. In *Ranald Bannerman* MacDonald provides a critique of the provision and process of schooling, whilst in the work of Stretton the focus was on the outcomes of being able to read the Bible and thus be saved from damnation. What makes MacDonald's *Gutta-Percha Willie* exceptional is the approach taken to the importance of literacy. MacDonald goes further than Stretton, whose focus is the outcome, *i.e.* being able to read the Bible, and the need for someone to intervene as the teacher. As a young boy, Willie had not been interested in learning to read, his parents taking the approach that he would do so when it was important to him. His moment of revelation comes when he finds out that he can help his shoemaker friend by reading to him. Willie is spurred on to learn to read because he can see a purpose beyond his own need. MacDonald's most unusual approach is to describe in detail the actual process Willie engages in to learn to read, for instance:

He opened the little book at the Busy Bee, and knowing already enough to be able to divide the words one from the other, he said to himself –

‘The first word must be *How*. There it is, with a gap between it and the next word. I will look and see if I can find another *How* anywhere.’ [...]

Next he took a hymn he had not learned, and applied to his mother when he came to a word he did not know. [...]

At length he began to compare words that were like each other, and by discovering wherein they looked the same, and wherein they looked different, he learned something of the sound of letters. (GUTTA, 59-60)

Most pertinently, the poem chosen by Willie is ‘How doth the little busy bee’ from Isaac Watts's (1674 – 1748) *Divine Songs for Children: attempted in easy language for the use of children* (1715), a poem which exhorts the importance of the work ethic. MacDonald takes

the reader through the practical way that Willie approaches the problem and builds on each piece of acquired knowledge formulating him as an intrinsically motivated learner.

MacDonald's development of his protagonist is producing an active independent figure who has a strong sense of community, engaging with life with a sense of agency, the desire to make positive change. Unlike early characters in English fiction for children, where the intention was the subject of passive didactic moral teaching, or even Stretton's characters who make change within the immediacy of their family, MacDonald's Willie's actions are far more expansive, affecting the whole community. His greatest achievement is when he makes a working water wheel, irrigates their family garden with it and discovers the healing properties of the waters which flow from the spring he has activated which benefit the village. Willie's work has emerged from imagining what might be done to turning this into a reality.

The subject of work is a recurrent theme in MacDonald's texts for children and arises in his two goblin stories, *The Princess and the Goblin* and *The Princess and Curdie*. The goblins work underground, living 'away from the sun, in cold and wet and dark places' (GOBLIN, 5). Here, as in *The Water-Babies*, is a recurrence of Darwinian concepts of evolution where the physical and social environments affect change in physicality and character. MacDonald embeds this as a theme in *The Princess and Curdie*, for Lina, the goblin's grotesque dog-like creature changes with Curdie's kindness and helps him as they work their way out of the mine.

Like the goblins, Curdie is a miner, and his skills are central to the mechanisms of the plot. The community is saved because of his knowledge of mines and through his efforts to defeat the goblins. Whereas previous writers such as Hesba Stretton raised the plight of working children, MacDonald's critique of industrialisation was aimed at the morality of capitalism. As Colin Manlove explains: 'The evil involved here is that of acquisitiveness,

whether for gold or a kingdom.’³⁰ The conclusion of *The Princess and Curdie* is one of the destruction of industrialisation and capitalism. The kingdom where Curdie and the Princess Irene restored order with the help of the princess’s great-great-grandmother has fallen under the rule of a wicked king only interested in wealth through gold and taxation. ‘And so greedy was the king after gold, that when at last the ore began to fail, he caused the miners to reduce the pillars’ which Curdie’s father and the miners had built to hold up the city (CURDIE, 254). So weakened is the mountain that it collapses and with it the destruction of the kingdom which then returns to a wilderness of wild deer. The wealth which is important is not that mined from the earth and turned into wealth and misery, but the thread of connection woven by the princess’s great-great-grandmother, the thread which connects family and community. She is a mystical figure who stands out, in Manlove’s phrase, as ‘imagination against the world.’³¹ Her thread guides the young protagonists through the threats of goblin domination, and to their escape. It connects the generations, so long as the Princess Irene and Curdie sustain faith in her—and in themselves—as they move into the future.

Into the future

MacDonald’s work helped shape the form of English children’s literature. Before Carroll, Kingsley, and MacDonald, there is no evidence of the device that combines fantasy and realism, moving between worlds to critique society. Equally significant is MacDonald’s distinctive understanding of childhood which enables his protagonists to develop confidence, agency and a determination to enact change for the better. They are the precursor models for modern child protagonists with a social conscience in, for example, Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) or C.S. Lewis’ protagonists in the *Narnia* series. In *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) the children are taken into a quasi-present, a Fabian depiction

of what an idealised present should be like in terms of humanity, equality and behaviour, reflecting Nesbit's political vision. In order to make such change the protagonists have to realise their own abilities, as does Diamond. In Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the children shift between worlds learning what they are capable of and that they can change the world for the better through agency, reasoning, and the desire to improve society. Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1997 – 2000) employs a similar technique. Pullman moves his protagonists between multiple worlds seeking answers to the problems of society.

Whether or not writers acknowledge MacDonald as an influence he broke boundaries and created new models leaving a valuable legacy in the history of English children's literature.

¹ Margaret Nancy Cutt, *Ministering Angels: A Study of Nineteenth-century Evangelical Writing for Children* (Wormley: Five Owls Press, 1979), p. 1.

² Brendan A. Rapple, 'The Evangelical Image of the Child in Mrs. Sherwood's *The History of the Fairchild Family*', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (1991) Issue 1, p. 251.

³ Peter Hunt, ed., *Children's Literature: an Illustrated History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.), p. 48.

⁴ John Carroll Power *The Rise and Progress of Sunday Schools: a Biography of Robert A. Raikes and William Fox* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1863).

⁵ 'The Sunday School Movement', <https://vanessariley.com/blog/tag/sunday-school-movement/> [accessed August 16th, 2025].

⁶ Rapple, 251.

⁷ Rapple, 251.

⁸ Mary Martha Sherwood, *The History of the Fairchild Family* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1818) <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/29725/29725-h/29725-h.htm> [accessed August 2nd 2025].

⁹ John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children: an Outline of English-Language Children's Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 20.

¹⁰ Elaine Lomax, *The Writings of Hesba Stretton: Reclaiming the Outcast* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009).

¹¹ Hesba Stretton, *Pilgrim Street* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1867).

¹² Charles Kingsley, *The Water-Babies: A Fair Tale for a Land-Baby* (London & Cambridge: Macmillan and Co, 1863), pp. 240-8.

¹³ Kingsley, *Water-Babies*, p. 346.

¹⁴ Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland* Donald J. Gray ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) p.36.

¹⁵ Carroll, *Alice*, p. 43

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- ¹⁶ Carroll, *Alice*, p. 97.
- ¹⁷ Roderick McGillis, 'Introduction', in *The Princess and the Goblin, The Princess and Curdie*, by George MacDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. x.
- ¹⁸ George MacDonald Biographical Introduction.
https://www.george-macdonald.com/resources/biographical_introduction.html [accessed 16th August 2025].
- ¹⁹ McGillis, 'Introduction', p. xv.
- ²⁰ George MacDonald, 'The Child and the Man', *Good Things* (December 1872), p. 1.
- ²¹ See William Raeper, *George MacDonald* (Tring: Lion Publishing plc, 1987), pp. 24-40.
- ²² The Victorian School
<https://www.victorianschool.co.uk/school%20history%20dame%20school.html>
- ²³ The Education (Scotland) Act 1982 <https://www.highlifehighland.com/archives-service/the-education-scotland-act-1872-the-act/> [accessed 29th July 2025].
- ²⁴ Anna Davin, 'Waif Stories in Late Nineteenth-Century England', *History Workshop Journal* 52 (2001), p. 57.
- ²⁵ See for example: Briony McDonagh and Stephen Daniels 'Enclosure stories: narratives from Northamptonshire' *Cultural Geographies*, 19.1 (2012).
- ²⁶ See Lomax, pp. 165-202.
- ²⁷ Hesba Stretton, *Fern's Hollow* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1864) chapter V.
- ²⁸ Raeper, p.166
- ²⁹ David L. Neuhouser, 'George MacDonald and Social Issues' in Jean Webb, ed., '*A Noble Unrest*': *Contemporary Essays on the Work of George MacDonald* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), p. 8.
- ³⁰ Colin Manlove, *George MacDonald's Children's Fantasies and the Divine Imagination*. (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2020), p. 99.
- ³¹ Manlove, *Children's Fantasies*, p. 99.