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Playing with words: child voices in British fantasy literature 1749-1906

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PLAYING WITH WORDS:
CHILD VOICES IN BRITISH FANTASY LITERATURE
1749-1906

by

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To Margaret and Abram

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ABSTRACT

Two children, Dan and Una, sit in the woods and listen to a story of Britain's early history told to them by Sir Richard, a spirit conjured from the past for this instructive purpose. In this tale, Sir Richard gains treasure by defeating the "devils" that terrorize a village of African people. In many ways, this framed narrative sets up the expected hierarchy found in children's literature wherein the adult actively narrates a story and the child silently listens and learns. However, the children of Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* do something else—they question and challenge. At the end of the story, Dan declares, "I don't believe they were Devils" and backs up his disbelief by drawing on other books he has read. While much scholarship on children's literature reads child characters through the lens of adult desire and finds them voiceless and empty, I seek out moments wherein these imagined children, like Dan and Una, challenge adult dissemination of knowledge. Building upon recent scholarship that sees the child less as a straightforward projection of desire and more complexly as a site for conflicting ideologies and tensions, my dissertation enters into the critical conversation concerning the figure of the child and suggests a fresh, new approach to reading adult-child relations in children's literature. Urging readers to focus on the ways in which fantasy literature imagines and represents child characters' relationships to language—as readers, authors, storytellers, and questioners—I argue that, whether deliberately or unselfconsciously, these works imagine a child capable of interacting with language in order to seize power and thus unsettle the force of adult desire. Even as the characters themselves remain the products of adult creation, the relationship to language they model for their implied readers transcends a simple one-to-one correlation of adult authorial

desire and a child reader's internalization. Each of my four chapters focuses on a pair of authors: Sarah Fielding and Mary Martha Sherwood, Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald, Frederika Macdonald and Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Rudyard Kipling and E. Nesbit. Instead of mere escapism and fancy, these portraits of childhood address debates surrounding the emerging genre of the novel, religious censorship, educational legislation, imperial ideology, medical discourses, and textbook publication. By juxtaposing these novels in pairs alongside these significant historical contexts, my project brings the child's voice, which we often ignore, to the surface. Like Dan and his declaration of disbelief, the readers imagined by these important works of fantasy refuse to sit in silence and instead play with words to question, create, and challenge.

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INTRODUCTION

In *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), Lewis Carroll imagines Alice's second encounter with Wonderland as a baffling experience. Alice herself often complains that her conversations and experiences are "nonsense." However, not all the characters willingly accept her judgment. When Alice calls the Red Queen's use of the terms *hill* and *valley* nonsense, the Red Queen responds, "You may call it 'nonsense' if you like, [. . .] but *I've* heard nonsense, compared with which that would be as sensible as a dictionary" (125). Similarly, Humpty Dumpty responds to Alice's attempt to challenge his word usage by saying, "When *I* use a word, [. . .] it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less" (163). With this proclamation, Humpty aligns himself with those who believe speakers have full control of language and its meaning, regardless of the listener's ability to understand or accept the words or their speaker's intent. Despite Alice's consternation, one of the enduring joys of Carroll's Wonderland stems from the text's play with language and its ability to take the reader into the realm of nonsense.

The challenge that Wonderland offers both to Alice and to its readers, then, centers on their willingness to accept and even engage in the work of playing with words. In the larger field of children's literature criticism, much has been made of the extent to which children's literature becomes a space for adult authors to engage in this type of play and construct a view of the child that fulfills their own desires. In titling my project "Playing with Words: Child Voices in British Fantasy Literature 1749-1906," I set my gaze not on the adult authors' various and possibly nefarious desires but instead on the child voices these texts imagine and the invitation they offer to the reader. When

Humpty declares his sense of agency in language play, making his choices the defining factor in how language can and should be used, he also implicitly and perhaps unintentionally offers the same possibility to Alice and in turn to readers. Where didactic children's texts use the trappings of fiction as an enticement for the reader to learn rules and lessons, Carroll's foray into fantasy does the opposite. It is this possibility—the possibility that texts written for children can encourage readers to take up a relationship to language that goes beyond the bounds of an adult's desire to control and inhabit the role of the child—that my project takes up.

Adult and Child in the Field of Children's Literature

The majority of scholarly works written over the last two decades that deal with the subject of children's literature begin with the following observation: children's literature is a paradox in that it is written, produced, and purchased by adults rather than by children. To readers and writers in the nineteenth century, this observation would have been unnecessary. Indeed, because children's literature—even fantasy and fairy tale—grew out of a body of literature understood to have explicitly didactic aims, nineteenth-century authors and publishers were self-conscious about literature's formative powers and the role of the adult in providing this literature for the child's formation.

That current scholarship still raises this point demonstrates the extent to which scholars, particularly those who were writing in the early 1990s, find it necessary to legitimize children's literature as an area for serious intellectual inquiry. Formerly dismissed by literary scholars as the province of elementary school teachers and children's librarians, the study of children's literature has emerged as a field of literary

study in its own right over the course of the past two decades.[1] This legitimization occurred in part because of efforts to show that children's literature is not all fun, fantasy, and nonsense; instead, as the works of many scholars attempt to reveal, children's literature has a dark side created, at least in part, by the inherent adult-child relationship the literature is based on and engenders. Accordingly, the relationship between adult and child, found both within and without the text, forms a focal point for the study of children's literature.

In her often cited study titled *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1993), Jacqueline Rose examines the classic children's text *Peter Pan* in order to argue that the implicit claim of children's fiction is impossible, namely "that it represents the child, speaks to and for children, addresses them as a group which is knowable and exists for the book, much as the book (so the claim runs) exists for them" (1). Her work draws heavily upon Freud's theories of the child in order to demonstrate that the child as innocent also functions as a site of desire: "The child is sexual, but its sexuality (bisexual, polymorphous, perverse) threatens our own at its very roots. Setting up the child as innocent is not, therefore, repressing its sexuality—it is above all holding off any possible challenge to our own" (4). Rose sees issues of sexuality and desire as at the heart of modern constructions of the child in literature. Rose thus suggests that we understand this relationship as structured by adult desire to such an extent that the child exists as nothing more than the projection of these desires.

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[1] In offering this generalization regarding the tendency of literary scholars to ignore children's literature, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that certain works of children's literature, such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, found their way into the literary canon and thus were the subject of literary criticism prior to the past two decades of work that opened up children's literature as a specific field of study.

Published in the same year as Rose's study, Perry Nodelman's "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature" also focuses on the role of adult desire. Nodelman argues that Edward Said's understanding of Orientalism offers insights when applied to a discussion of childhood and children's literature. Instead of contemplating the power dynamics between Europeans and non-Europeans, Nodelman focuses on the binary relationship between adult and child. Nodelman builds on the observations of other scholars, including Rose's concept of children's literature as an impossibility, but he gives these observations more precision with the application of post-colonial theory. Through a systematic use of Said's arguments, Nodelman attempts to show that children's literature is inherently a colonialist activity. For example, Nodelman draws attention to the presupposition in children's fiction that children cannot speak for themselves and thus adults must speak for them, and he connects this power imbalance to the "inherent inferiority" Said claims structures an Orientalist view of the other (29). After an application of Said's theory to ideas of adults and children in children's literature, Nodelman turns to the question of what scholars should do once they recognize this troubling dynamic. Ultimately, Nodelman claims that critics need to be self-conscious of their own position as adults when examining children's literature and to interrogate the manner in which children's texts function to achieve imperialist ends in their representation of the child.

Nodelman and Rose approach their subject of study through the lenses of two different theoretical frameworks, and yet both studies ultimately portray children's literature as engendered by a monolithic hierarchy of adult and child and motivated by adult desire. Though these theories illuminate the power dynamics of children's

literature, their focus on the adult/child binary may hinder as much as they help such study because both deploy essentialized notions of adult and child in order to demonstrate the potentially dark side of children's literature. While I agree that it is important to acknowledge the foundational role adults play in representing experiences of childhood to the child reader, the binary framework at work in both Rose's psychoanalytic and Nodelman's post-colonial theories assumes a singular notion of adult desire and a limited notion of the possibilities of a child's interaction with a text. Studies that draw on the frameworks Nodelman and Rose offer succeed in pointing out the power imbalances inherent in children's literature and the way in which the figure of the child may function as a repository for adult desire; however, such rigid binaries prevent studies from allowing for any complexity in how a child reader actually encounters the text and the significance of that text for the child. Given the wide acceptance this understanding of adult/child relations has gained in the field, I believe it is time we move past the sometimes oversimplified identification of binaries and consider the relationship between adult and child in children's literature in more complex and nuanced ways.

Because the terms adult and child come laden with a host of hierarchical notions in both connotation and denotation, they seem to make slippage into binary logic both easy and reasonable. However, not all scholars accept the limitations of these terms. In *Signs of Childness in Children's Books*, Peter Hollindale offers "an exercise in definition"—an attempt to clarify the vocabulary scholars use to discuss children and children's literature (7). Like other scholars, Hollindale begins by discussing the innate imbalances of children's literature, which he further complicates by pointing out that a text intended for a child readership may often be read by those who are adults. Though

Hollindale points out this binary, he attends to the layers of desire possible by suggesting that, like adult writers, "[c]hildren also construct childhood as they go along, and that they do so from fictions of various kinds, not merely from social experience" (14). As a result of this assertion, Hollindale sees great positive potential in the imaginative power of not only literature but also children themselves. In order to speak to this imaginative power, Hollindale adopts a transactional theory of reading to allow for what he terms "the event of children's literature" (29). He then offers the term "childness" as neither a pejorative nor an essentializing word to refer to "the distinguishing property of a text in children's literature" and also "the property that the child brings to readings of the text" (47). He reads the given "childness" of a text as part of a shifting and culturally defined understanding rather than a static notion of innocence or clearly defined state of being. Thus, in defining childness as "the central imaginative interest in childhood," Hollindale can speak across the adult/child literary binary and find childness, for example, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as well as in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (62).

One significant aspect of Hollindale's concept of childness is that it allows for a looser yet still coherent concept of children's literature, like the one that Marah Gubar calls for in her recent essay "On Not Defining Children's Literature," wherein she points out the productivity of thinking about children's literature in terms of family resemblances rather than attempting to apply a singular and unwieldy definition to these works. Additionally, in approaching reading as transactional, Hollindale assigns the child an active part of the reading process.

While Hollindale challenges dominant discourses in the field by offering a new terminology for particular aspects of children's literature, David Rudd intervenes directly

into the adult/child binary that underpins many theories of children's literature. In a 2010 article, Rudd argues that a close inspection of Rose's claims reveals the way in which she problematically "hold[s] on to a residual notion of the Romantic child" in the opposition of adult and child which she structures (291). Indeed, Rudd suggests, "To become fixated on the area's impossible status is, in effect, to hold on to remnants of a Romantic child figure: a being that somehow stands apart from the general language community so that it cannot be addressed (unlike a more mature reader) or, if it can, its responses cannot be known" (303). For Rudd, a "Bakhtin-inflected approach" offers a more compelling analysis of children's fiction because it allows for a "border zone" as the space where the reading process happens (291). Thus, though he approaches children's literature from a different theoretical perspective, Rudd, like Hollindale, emphasizes that the child's own interaction with the text cannot be entirely anticipated or controlled by the exertions of adult desire.

Rudd employs Bakhtin to consider child readers as coming to the "reading event" Hollindale coins already shaped by the particulars of their experiences in the world, but recalling Bakhtin's ideas of the way in which voices operate in the novel also opens another avenue for understanding the possible reader and text relationship children's literature may engender. Indeed, Bakhtin draws attention to the way in which a single work manifests different types of speech and how those voices may come into conflict with one another. If we allow for the possibility that works of children's literature, like the adult novel, may also contain within their pages competing voices—voices of both adults and children—then we open the door to a significant challenge to the binary adult-child model found in academic discussions of such literature. Rather than viewing the

text as a unidirectional stream of adult desire made visible on and through the child characters the adult imagines, we can look for moments where the interplay between child voice and adult voice may allow for something more—more flexible, more promising, and more captivating—than the adult's nostalgic longing.

A recent exception to scholars' seeming hesitancy to consider the child—either within the text as a child character or outside the text as a reader—as possessing any agency, Marah Gubar's *Artful Dodgers* counters a dominant paradigm in the field of children's literature, by which scholars read Golden Age works for children with the assumption that these works inscribe the complete Otherness of the child. Instead, Gubar claims that the same works of children's literature said to construct an innocent and Othered child in fact reveal the child as a site of conflicting ideologies and tensions:

> [T]he late Victorian cult of the child is better characterized as a cultural phenomenon that reflected *competing* conceptions of childhood. More specifically, it was the site where the idea of the child as an innocent Other clashed most dramatically with an older vision of the child as a competent collaborator, capable of working and playing alongside adults. (9)

In support of this claim, Gubar focuses on child narrators and argues that these figures offer a site for collaboration between adult and child. In attending to child narrators, Gubar finds evidence of children's literature "as a vehicle to explore how young people enmeshed in ideology might nevertheless deviate from rather than ventriloquize various social, cultural, and literary protocols" (7). Gubar not only demonstrates the applicability of her claims to canonical works in her textual analysis but also reveals how steeped the critical landscape has become in these assumptions about Victorian and Edwardian childhood and how ripe it is for revision on this point.

Additionally, in her attention to the voices of child narrators, Gubar offers a means to theorize agency for the child. Where other scholars of children's literature point to the child as voiceless and lulled into passivity, Gubar finds compelling examples of child narrators and characters that counter these assumptions. For example, Gubar points to the many times Alice says no in response to adult characters' dictums as an example of a child's voice constructively reacting rather than passively acquiescing to adult desire. In this way, Gubar's work opens the door for other scholars to take seriously the possible, if contingent, agency for the child present in nineteenth-century children's literature.

Following the Trail of Child Voices

Indeed, it is this question of what exactly is possible in terms of potential power for the child imagined by adult-authored children's literature that my project takes up. In order to even entertain this question, however, I must mark out certain boundaries for my study. Because my project is a literary one—that is to say, I look at the representation of the child as found in literary works—I am not discussing "real" children and their encounters with children's literature. I focus instead on the way in which authors imagine children through both their child characters and the narrative positioning of their readers. Like Gubar, I search out moments of possible collaboration between adult and child, with particular attention to the way in which these collaborative moments converge with the possibilities of language—reading, recitation, storytelling, and questioning. While such a line of examination does not allow for a discussion of the experiences real child readers had when reading these texts, it does offer a parallel line of investigation into the invitation these texts offered to their readers. Thus, while my project does not

aim to provide a concrete argument for how a contemporary reader reacted to and was shaped by this reading, I do make a case for reading these moments of the child's play with language as offering up a specific set of possible relations to language to the text's imagined reader. Significantly, I suggest that this invitation differs from simply silencing the child in order to cast upon him or her the specter of adult desire, as many of the founding critical texts in the field of children's literature argue. Instead, it is an invitation to do the exact opposite, to take up a relationship to a text that allows the child reader to interpret, respond to, and question the narrative portraits of children they encounter in these and other texts.

The idea that narrative can initiate a specific relationship between reader and text has been addressed in literary fields beyond children's literature. In the larger field of Victorian studies, Garrett Stewart's *Dear Reader* argues that the work of narrative can be to put the reader's reading to work:

> Whether through direct address or structural parallel, at such times you as reader are not simply inscribed by prose fiction. Instead, as member of an audience, your private reading—along with that of every other reader—is actually convoked and restaged, put in service to the text. Either as an identifying notation or as narrative event, this reading in of your reading—or of you reading—is what I mean by the notion of a conscripted response. Implicated by apostrophe or by proxy, by address or by dramatized scenes of reading, you are deliberately drafted by the text, written *with*. (8)

Scholars who read children's literature with an eye for the adult/child binary and its accompanying adult desire may argue that children's literature does exactly this work of conscription, but only to further instantiate this binary and serve the adult's needs. However, my project argues that if we attend carefully to the specific narrative techniques used to "convoke and restage" the reader's interaction with text, we find that this interaction does not always work in a single direction. While a highly didactic text

may stage the reading of child characters within the text in ways that create a hierarchical relationship between the text and the reader standing outside the page, this does not mean that all children's texts can and do operate in such a fashion. In many of the texts I examine, the authors make use of both narrative techniques as well as their portrait of child characters in order to model and even invite a type of reading that exceeds the narrow offerings of many didactic texts. Rather than fearing the child's powers of imagination, experimentation, and interpretation, these texts go out of their way to make room for these very actions within the story worlds they picture. Additionally, the larger critiques of children's culture these stories articulate make clear that the potentialities they allow for within their fantasy worlds go beyond mere whimsy and participate in important discourses contemporary to their publications.

In order to make the case for both how and why these authors imagine children's relationships to language as imbued with potential power, I set my readings of these novels within the context of significant cultural and historical debates contemporary to their publication. Because children's literature, like childhood, is often placed in brackets as though cut off from adult life and influence, the field calls for scholarly work that places these texts within the larger literary, political, and social milieu that shaped their vision of child and adult in the first place. For my project, that means following the trail of child voices and their imagined potential both within and without the text. Though all of the selected texts invest to some degree in the work of fantasy, they often deploy fantasy conventions in order to address very real issues and stretch their portrait of the child beyond that allowed in everyday Victorian culture. By rooting my textual analysis carefully and critically within a variety of debates, including those centering on reading,

education, legislation, and empire, my project suggests the important knowledge we can glean by understanding the work of children's literature as deeply participatory in the broader literary and cultural history.

Chapter One "From One *Governess* to Another: Reading Children in Fielding and Sherwood" digs a foundation for my study of Victorian children's fantasy literature among the didactic roots from which Victorian fantasy literature springs. Many current histories suggest an opposition between works that instruct and works that entertain, positing a linear progression from one to the other. To complicate this narrative, this chapter begins with two versions of the same novel, Sarah Fielding's 1749 *The Governess* and Mary Martha Sherwood's 1820 revision. By grounding my analysis first in contemporary debates surrounding the novel and then in the Calvinist beliefs that shape the later revision, I show that the earlier novel surprisingly offers more possibilities for the child's independence and responsibility as a reader, whereas the later novel's rigid notion of human depravity intensifies the teacher-student (or author-reader) hierarchy and allows all reading only one interpretative end. The reading child, as imagined in Fielding's text, emerges as a reader capable of sorting through multiple interpretations and making sense of fact as well as fancy.

Chapter Two "The Possibilities of the Child Voice in Carroll and MacDonald" shows how two landmark texts—Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin*—use the tools of fantasy to reimagine the boundaries of a child's encounters with language. Though both Carroll and MacDonald take their child protagonists out of the schoolroom and into fantasy landscapes, these imagined children nonetheless offer an implicit critique of

contemporary educational policy. When Alice turns to geographical facts such as latitude and longitude or the recitation of didactic poetry in order to reassure herself, her subsequent failure highlights the incongruity between educational practices and imaginative landscapes found in literary works. Similarly, MacDonald's poet-hero Curdie employs spontaneous verse to defeat the goblins, making a case for the value of a child's creative acts of speech. Set against the backdrop of Britain's 1862 Revised Code, which emphasized the role of memorization and recitation, these novels upend utilitarian notions of reading. Their child "authors" picture words as a site for play, interpretation, and even power for the child who utters them.

Chapter Three "India Imagined: Child Storytellers and the Fantasy of Empire" centers on the child as a storyteller of fantasy literature, disrupting otherwise realist novels of Frances Hodgson Burnett and Frederika Macdonald. Significantly, both authors picture child characters who spend time in India and draw on imperial space and culture for their fantastic stories. For instance, Burnett's Sara Crewe narrates stories from her early childhood in India in order to survive the coldhearted treatment of headmistress Miss Minchin, while Macdonald's Puck absorbs Indian culture and tells fantastic tales in order to make sense of his experiences, including his mother's illness. Such a positive view of child-life in India, however, runs contrary to contemporary medical discourse that held India to be dangerous for the child's physical and mental well being. By placing these novels within this larger historical context, we see how these child characters counter the medical discourses of degeneracy while nonetheless engaging in imperial logic by appropriating Indian stories for their own empowerment.

The final chapter of my dissertation, **"**Shaping the Fantasy of History: Child

Voices in Kipling and Nesbit," turns to novels where a mixture of history and fantasy gives child characters an opportunity to formulate their identities in relation to that history with an unexpected degree of independence. Whereas the novels of Chapters Two and Three figure sharp divisions between reality and fantasy, these novels of Rudyard Kipling and E. Nesbit imagine worlds where fantasy and reality mingle together. Furthermore, these novels take up history as part of the fantasy they conceptualize. As a result, they question the interrelations among childhood, education, and the fantastic as found in turn-of-the century British children's literature. Kipling frames his tales of the history of the British Isles with two children who question and challenge the account they hear. Nesbit's child characters venture across space and time to pursue a magical amulet, exploring their identities as heirs to Britain's current imperial power. Along the way, I draw attention to the fact that these novels were written within the historical context of the changes to British education that began with the 1870 Education Act and resulted in expanded literacy education with a heavy emphasis on historical readers for young children. While some scholars argue that children's literature of empire aims to instill children with confidence in their imperial identity, I argue that these works do not seamlessly support imperial ideology. Instead, I show that looking closely at the placement of child voices within the text and the way in which these voices speak back to the history of empire reveals not only an ambivalent portrait of empire, but also a vision of childhood that challenges assumptions concerning the smooth transmission of ideology to child readers.

My project speaks not only to children's literature studies but also to Victorian studies in that it stakes a claim for the significance of nineteenth-century children's texts

as cultural artifacts because of their participation in broader historical and cultural debates. Additionally, the issues that drive my research also speak to the rhetoric deployed in debates concerning children and education today. For example, terms framing recent debates over textbook publication and censorship reveal an understanding of the child as reader that is not so different from the narrow educational model discussed in Chapter One of this project, where reading's power remains limited to a single interpretive end. While my project does not attempt to provide a clear-cut answer to these debates, I hope to convince readers that we need to rethink our understanding of children's relationships to reading.

CHAPTER I
FROM ONE *GOVERNESS* TO ANOTHER: READING CHILDREN IN FIELDING AND SHERWOOD

When we walk into a bookstore today, we are inevitably met with signs that designate where to browse based on age and interest. Often a whole section of the store is devoted to children's literature. In the mid-1700s, however, such commercial divisions did not exist. Cheap chapbook editions[2] of fantastic tales, such as *Jack the Giant Killer,* hornbooks, and catechisms constituted the spectrum of children's reading, with one end offering entertainment to adult and child alike and the other solely focused on the work of a child's education. Thus, when Sarah Fielding took up her pen to author *The Governess; or the Little Female Academy* (1749), a work often regarded by scholars as the first novel directed at a child audience, the children's publishing industry in Britain was in its early infancy. Because no unitary notion of a child audience for literature existed, the works of Fielding and other early writers both shaped and were shaped by competing understandings of the proper relationship between children and reading. These early works entered into the fray of conflicting views on education, reading, and imagination even as they staked out an age-specific audience for literature.

By starting with a discussion of didactic fiction, this chapter offers a foundation for my study of Victorian children's fantasy literature in following chapters. In order to consider both the trajectory of children's literature from the mid-eighteenth[3] to the early-

[2] Margaret Kinnel writes of this literary form: "The chapbook, a slim pamphlet which was easily packed into bundles for distribution by pedlars throughout the country, was sold as the popular literature of the masses: adults, young people, and children alike" (26-7).

[3] M.O. Grenby discusses this significant development, stating, "Most cultural historians agree that the eighteenth century witnessed the birth in Britain of a separate literature especially for children. Not only were the first recognizably modern children's titles published, but, by the end of the century, children's literature had become securely established as a profitable and sustainable branch of print culture" (181).

nineteenth century and also this literature's important work in defining the figure of the child for later writers, I focus on two novels that share the same title even though they appeared 71 years apart—Sarah Fielding's 1749 *The Governess* and Mary Martha Sherwood's 1820 revision.[4] Though these authors published under the same title and Sherwood describes her work as merely a revised version of the original, a close look at these texts within the larger historical contexts of education, reading, religion, and the child reveals strikingly opposite assumptions about the child's proper interaction with literature.

Because the place and use of reading emerges as the central problem in both novels, they provide parallel sites to trace out the figure of the child reader as imagined by writers from one century to the other. Fielding makes her concern for the relationship between child readers and interpretation explicit in her preface when she implores her reader to consider the "true use of reading" (46). Her focus on the young female reader speaks to the contemporary debate regarding the potential dangers of reading. The title character and most experienced woman reader of the book—the governess—provides the framework for her young pupils, but the form of the novel argues that it is in the community formed by these young girls outside in the garden, rather than inside the schoolroom, where the practice of reading and interpretation takes place. Indeed, I will argue that Fielding's portrayal of this community of readers as well as her use of fairy tales[5] grants an unexpected degree of both freedom and responsibility to the child

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[4] I use the term revision to describe Sherwood's work because she styles her own work in this way in her introduction: "The editor was induced to undertake the revisal of this work by a Parent" (iii).

[5] Fielding and Sherwood use the term fairy tale to describe stories contained within their respective novels; however, the stories are often more allegory than fairy tale. I adopt their vocabulary of fairy tale throughout the chapter and by my usage mean to indicate stories that employ some of the

characters in her text. By contrast, Sherwood's version removes the majority of fairy tale literature and limits the interpretative freedom of her child characters. While Sherwood maintains the girls' school setting, her revision demonstrates a clear shift both in the conception of right reading and in the extent to which gender shapes this view. Because Sherwood conceives the end of all reading to be the recognition of human depravity—a universal human depravity not defined by sexual difference—her novel curtails the freedom found in Fielding's original and replaces it with a much more limited vision of the possibilities literature holds for the child reader.

Unlike later works of children's literature, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, these examples of didactic children's fiction have drawn scant attention from scholars. One of the first scholars to take these early works seriously, Mitzi Myers, writes of this failure to acknowledge their significance: "If exploring storybooks is no longer the literary slumming expedition it once was, Georgian writing for the young still suffers something like the critical equivalent of urban blight. Hopelessly defaced by injunctions to improvement, commentators on children's literature imply, the moral tale excites a merely antiquarian interest, is necessarily devoid of imaginative force" (31). Though Myers made this statement over thirty years ago and her pioneering work did much to draw attention to the women authors who generated these texts, the critical landscape still leaves these writings largely unexamined.

Such critical neglect concerning didactic, and therefore presumably uninteresting, children's literature remains at odds with the contemporary popularity of these works. In her biography of Fielding, April London calls the 1749 *The Governess* "hugely

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conventions of fairy tale or fantasy. Additionally, I find it important that, whether or not these stories fit the mold of fairy tales as George MacDonald and others defined them in the nineteenth-century, both women writers make the conscious choice to identify their writing in this way.

successful" (198), and in her study of women writers, Deidre Raftery notes that Fielding's text was still in print in 1903, some 154 years after its first publication.[6] Similarly, many scholars note Sherwood's prolific output—over four hundred known works—and Colin Manlove testifies to the popularity of her version of *The Governess*, pointing out that it reached its sixth edition in 1840 (168). Thus, the pervasive presence of these novels in the Georgian and Victorian nursery suggests that we reevaluate their contribution to children's literature.

Beyond their sheer popularity, however, the original eighteenth-century *Governess* and its reengineered counterpart provide a unique opportunity to trace the relationship between the narrative choices made by these two authors and the differing visions of the child and childhood they render. Because both versions situate their action within a school setting—an innovative decision on Fielding's part—they make explicit their pedagogic impulse. As a result, learning to interpret—to find the central message of a text regardless of genre or form—emerges as the central drama of these stories. At stake for both authors is not simply the function of learning to read, as we see in works such as Oliver Goldsmith's influential *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), where the author includes copies of the alphabet and the reader follows along as the protagonist practices spelling. Rather, both Fielding and Sherwood show deep concern for how their child characters understand and apply the words they read. While they share this common concern, these two women authors and their respective works imagine the ends of reading in starkly different terms. In her article on these two texts, Mika Suzuki points out that in her revision Sherwood moves away from the communal

[6] For a discussion of the variety of girls' school novels influenced by Fielding's work, see Sylvia Kasey Marks.

friendship found in Fielding's text and toward a hierarchical relationship with the instructor. While I agree with Suzuki's formulations of community and hierarchy, I find that at the heart of this shift lies a change in the way these authors figure their child reader-characters, a change that significantly alters the narrative structure of the text and the way in which it invites its potential child readers to become participants in the work of reading and interpretation.

Little Eves and The Dangers of Reading

Having briefly introduced the principal characters of her text—the widow Mrs. Teachum and the nine girls, ages 8 to 14, in her care—Fielding opens the novel's action with a scene showcasing the girls' bad behavior. Before the children engage in their dispute, the novel creates an idyllic setting—the girls are in "a pleasant Garden" during "a fine Summer's Evening" with "a little Basket of Apples" to enjoy (51). However, the moment the governess is called away to attend to a neighbor, the girls begin arguing over "one Apple something larger than the rest" (51). Miss Jenny, the oldest and most responsible pupil at age 14, attempts to quell their rising passions. Looking on the fruit with "desiring eyes," the girls "had all set their Hearts on that fine Apple, looking upon those she had given them as nothing" (51). As a last resort, Jenny flings the apple away so that no one may have it. Denied their hearts' desire, the girls' dispute takes physical form, until Mrs. Teachum reappears. Seeing all the girls other than Jenny engaged in a tussle, the governess concludes that they all are "equally guilty" (53). On the matter of punishment, the narrator feigns ignorance, claiming, "Mrs. Teachum's method of punishment I never could find out" (53). On the issue of degree, however, the narrator is "certain," terming Mrs. Teachum's response "the most severe Punishment she had ever

inflicted on any Misses, since she had kept a School, was now laid on these wicked Girls, who had thus been fighting, and pulling one another to Pieces, for a sorry Apple" (53). This incident of selfish desire and the violence that follows becomes the impetus for the rest of the story—the girls need to reform their behavior such that they can manage their passions and live in peaceful community with one another.

Beyond providing a motivating force for the rest of this novel, this scene of a pleasant garden evening spoiled by uncontrolled desire mirrors perhaps the most famous garden and fruit scene in Western culture—Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. With no Adam on the premises, Fielding's garden has not just one but eight little Eves all vying for a single piece of fruit. In the Biblical text, the fruit offers Eve the promise of the knowledge of good and evil. John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667)—a text which maintained its influence throughout the eighteenth century and beyond—developed Eve's character further by portraying her as enthralled by her own reflection.[7] Eve's fascination with her own beauty combined with her desire make her a ripe target for Satan's persuasion. Though Fielding frames her little Eves' desires as a response to the beauty and size of the fruit, the larger context of the novel—a school for girls—suggests that we read the significance of the fruit on another level. Just as Eve's choice links knowledge with a price, the contemporary debate concerning women's reading and education figured a tension between the promise and perils of knowledge for women. However, the novel does not remove the children from the garden or suggest that knowledge should be off-limits. Instead, Fielding recuperates the space of the garden as an ideal place for the girls to increase their knowledge and work to manage their passions and desires.

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[7] For example, Joseph Addison writes of *Paradise Lost* in the *Spectator* in 1711 and Richard Bentley publishes an amended version in 1732.

In *The Governess*, Fielding uses the tool of framed narrative in order to explore the place and use of reading for children. Set in a private boarding school for girls, the novel features the widow Mrs. Teachum and her nine pupils. Though set in a school, the girls' formal education does not take center stage; instead, the novel centers on the girls' leisure reading and conversation out in the garden. Led by the oldest and most experienced reader, Jenny, the girls read a variety of literature and tell their own life stories in this time together. Significantly, the framed narratives that speak to the girls' life experiences come to the reader via the first-person voices of the girls themselves rather than the third-person omniscient voice of the narrator. In this way, the text gives authority to these child speakers by letting their voices stand on their own without direct intervention by the narrator. Given Mrs. Teachum's permission and occasional guidance, their reading time in the garden provides the frame for the embedded stories and allows the reader to read alongside these child characters. Within this frame, the reader encounters a total of 15 tales: nine life narratives, two fairy tales, a work of realistic fiction, a letter, a play, and a fable. The narrator refrains from any comment on the framed narratives until the girls reflect and converse upon them after each tale has finished, thus allowing both the child character auditors in the garden and the reader holding the book the opportunity to form opinions and make interpretive judgments prior to any outside (and presumably adult) commentary. Through the sharing and discussion of these stories, the girls learn important lessons concerning how to live with one another in community. The discord seen in the fight over the apple is not repeated. By the close of the novel, marked with the departure of the oldest girl, Mrs. Teachum's school can be termed "an Example of Peace and Harmony" (176).

Because the novel focuses exclusively on the education of girls, critics attend to the proto-feminist sentiments[8] or, conversely, the anti-feminist portrait of the internalization of gender norms found in this representation of education.[9] The fact that such opposed readings can be supported by the same work suggests that Sarah Fielding was writing in, for, and against a culture where the place of women's reading and education had yet to achieve a consensus. Because *The Governess* emerged on a historical scene where writing for children had yet to be codified into a subset of literature, critics often limit their analysis of this work to one of two frames of reference—the novel as a work of writing for children or the novel as authored by a woman writer. While both of these significant contexts inform this chapter, I offer a reading of this novel against the backdrop of a specific literary and cultural phenomenon where the place of reading and the dangers it posed exploded into print culture—the controversy surrounding Samuel Richardson's publication of *Pamela.* Published in 1740, *Pamela* met an audience ready to consume its tale of "virtue rewarded." These readers responded in one of two ways: either by championing it as a story of virtue and morality or by declaring it unfit for consumption and morally dangerous. By reading *The Governess* as not simply an example of didactic literature, but as a work deeply embedded in the larger conversation of just what is at stake in the reading of fiction, I

[8]Sara Gadeken argues that the purpose of the female community Fielding portrays is not marriage (and therefore oppression), but support for the girls who constitute that community. I find Gadeken's claim compelling, particularly given that Fielding herself never married and lived within a community of supportive women—first, her sisters until their death in 1750 and then fellow author Jane Collier. In a similar vein Margaret Hunt suggests, "In reality, the little female academy is less a utopia than a liminal space, a place apart from men, boys, and families, into which girls temporarily withdraw to examine together what life is really about" (77). Taking this argument a bit further, Mary Anne Schofield argues that Fielding, in teaching how to read and perform self-critique, advocates a "gynocentric" perspective with the end goal "to provide women with the proper vision and self-knowledge so that they can combat this sexual takeover" men perform via sexual harassment (108).

[9] For Foucauldian readings that look for patterns of surveillance in the novel see Andrew O'Malley and Judith Burdan.

argue that Fielding's writing overturns many assumptions about didactic fiction as a conservative genre.

Nine years before Fielding's *The Governess* found its first audience, Richardson's *Pamela* changed the face of the literary marketplace and worked to define the novel as a popular form. Though not the first work that could be potentially classified as a novel, "*Pamela* made clear the novel's cultural possibilities and financial rewards, and established the respectability of the form" (Ingrassia 7). Richardson's epistolary novel tells the story of Pamela, a young servant girl, and her attempts to maintain her virtue in the face of her employer Mr. B's aggressive advances. Though Mr. B. presses her to be his mistress, kidnaps her, and attempts to seduce and even rape her, the novel concludes with "virtue rewarded" when the two marry. Because of its epistolary format, reading and writing define both Pamela's character and the shape and progression of the narrative. Words read, written, and even stolen—Mr. B.'s theft of Pamela's letters is a defining moment in the plot— have great power in the world of the novel.

Despite the novel's explicit claims to virtue, seen clearly in the subtitle *or Virtue Rewarded*, not all readers responded by enthusiastically endorsing Pamela's character as a model of morality. Catherine Ingrassia notes that while some critics praised Richardson for his emphasis on virtue and morality, others pointed out that the "didacticism was cloaked by a sexualized almost prurient tone that created narrative tension" (8). Indeed, within a year of the novel's first edition, parodies and criticisms of the novel appeared in print, including *Shamela* (1741) by Henry Fielding, brother to Sarah Fielding. In *Shamela*, Henry Fielding puts the issue of Pamela's intentions and virtue to the question. The novel's full title makes clear the connection to *Pamela*: "An Apology for the Life of

Mrs. Shamela Andrews. In which, the many notorious Falsehoods and Misrepresentations of a Book called PAMELA, Are exposed; and all the matchless arts of that young Politician, set in a true and just Light" (229). Central to Fielding's parody is Pamela's intention to dupe her master Squire Booby into marrying her. Thomas Keymer summarizes the impact of these changes, writing, "Fielding's parody defined the prevailing terms of other hostile interpretations that would follow: Richardson's sexually predatory Mr. B. becomes the tame and malleable Squire Booby, while the true predator becomes Shamela herself, no longer Richardson's pious exemplar but a bogus paragon who schemes and whores her way to rank and wealth" (li). Fielding's parody upends the original novel's claims of virtue and implicitly suggests the danger to a reader's morality inherent in Richardson's writing.

Fielding's parody represents just one of many voices Richardson's novel motivated to speak on the issue of reading and its potential moral dangers. Published shortly after *Shamela*, the anonymous *Pamela Censured* (1741) addresses the novel's failed portrait of virtue. Though the author of the text remains unknown, the dedication to Rev. Dr. Slocock, Chaplain of St. Saviour's Southwark, provides a specific cultural context for its polemical stance beyond the novel itself. Slocock represents the camp of readers to whom *Pamela* offered an admirable model of virtue to be read and imitated. According to Thomas Keymer and Peter Sabor, Slocock used the venue of his pulpit to recommend the novel to his parishioners. Inspired and incensed at such an endorsement of the novel, the author of *Pamela Censured* offers a contrary reading: "[Pamela's] *Virtue* is only founded on *Shame*, and she seems to imply that could she be secure from the Censure of the World she would not hesitate to commit the Sin" (47). Indeed, as Keymer

and Sabor note, "The overriding obsession [of *Pamela Censured*] is with *Pamela* as pornography" (xii). Such responses to *Pamela* highlight the cultural concern for reading. If even tales of virtue and its rewards posed dangers to the reader, all forms of reading could be suspect. In the eighteenth-century, reading took shape as both a social and a solitary event. Within the social space of the family, reading out loud offered the possibility for communal interpretation and critique. When done in silence and in private—Pamela frequently reads and writes letters in a closet[10]—reading and the "virtue" it enabled became a potential gateway to vice.

While the quaint garden setting and argument over apples found in *The Governess* seems a world away from accusations of pornography, its focus on right reading intersects directly with the opposition of sentiments expressed in the *Pamela* controversy. Fielding pictures her child readers as coming into contact with a diverse print culture—including the fairy tale, fable, realistic fiction, letters, and even a play. By framing these individual stories with her child readers, Fielding makes the interpretation of literature the novel's central project. The relation between reading and a reader's relative vice or virtue drives the novel—a relation that the *Pamela* controversy put to the question in a variety of literary forms.[11]

Sarah Fielding's own unique historical position lends credence to this connection. Not only was she the sister of Henry Fielding, but she had direct connections to Samuel Richardson as he published *The Governess.* Recently, Candace Ward has drawn attention

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[10] For a discussion of the significance of this space in Richardson's writing, see J.W. Fisher.

[11] Because *The Governess* forms the chapter's focus, only limited attention to the full variety of *Pamela* responses can be discussed. In addition to Henry Fielding's parody and the anonymous prose criticism, Eliza Haywood authored a novel *Anti-Pamela* (1741) and a number of poets generated verse responses. For a full account, see the multi-volume *The Pamela Controversy 1740-1750*.

to Fielding's role in the development of the novel and the way in which her "writings express the moral and theoretical concerns that fueled debates about the social role of the novel and its potential to influence readers' behaviors" (16). Additionally, Ward argues, "Rather than being tangential to the Richardson/Fielding rivalry, as some literary historians have viewed them, Sarah Fielding's works are central to understanding the origins and development of the English novel" (16). Though Sarah Fielding did not publish directly in response to *Pamela*, she did author *Remarks on Clarissa* (1749) in response to another of Richardson's epistolary novels. In *Remarks on Clarissa*, Fielding provides several fictional readers, each offering a different reading of *Clarissa*. With this approach, Fielding suggests that the negative responses to this novel are the result of misreading or perhaps the difficulties of reading and interpretation rather than a problem inherent to the novel's portrait of virtue.

Published in the same year as *The Governess, Remarks on Clarissa* parallels Fielding's writing for children both in subject—the issue of right reading—and form—interpreting a text via multiple fictional readers.[12] These connections productively remind us of the connections between children's literature and the overarching literary history that often go unconsidered because the label of children's literature, like that of didactic fiction, tends to connote a body of literature cut off from the rest of literary history. When looking specifically at *The Governess*, we see the way in which these historical and cultural connections serve to animate the novel's concern with right reading, demonstrating that the stakes of reading in the imagined and isolated world of Mrs. Teachum's school speak to larger cultural issues in the eighteenth-century.

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[12] For a discussion of *Remarks on Clarissa* in relation to other works by Fielding, see Emily C. Friedman.

In her Preface to *The Governess*, Fielding makes explicit her own view of reading and in the process suggests that in the act of reading, the text does not have full control. Rather than call her readers to seek out only certain kinds of books, she attempts to instruct them on the "how" of reading. Addressing her "young readers," the Preface opens with this injunction: "Before you begin the following Sheets, I beg you will stop a Moment at this Preface, to consider it with me, what is the true Use of Reading; and if you can once fix this Truth in your Minds, namely that the true Use of Books is to make you wiser and better, you will then have both Profit and Pleasure from what you read" (46). According to Fielding, truth lies in how one approaches the "Use of Reading," namely with an understanding that books have a formative effect in that they can make a reader "wise and better" while simultaneously allowing for that same reader's "Profit and Pleasure." Reading, for Fielding, is not a passive experience. That she calls explicit attention to the work of reading in her Preface reveals her own awareness of the debates concerning right reading and serves as an attempt to negotiate the turbulent waters of her cultural moment. In choosing the form of the novel, Fielding places her work—and its representation of female child readers—squarely in an emerging genre that itself sparks tension and concern. Thus, when we read at the opening of Fielding's preface her injunction for readers to recognize the "true Use of Reading," we see not only an attempt to direct the child reader, but also a move to counter those critical adult readers who may perceive such works to be dangerous (46). Poised as a book in two emergent genres—the novel and literature for children—*The Governess* pictures engaged and empowered readers in its child characters who are capable of harnessing the intellectual tools

necessary to maintain a sense of self in the face of an increasingly diverse and evolving print culture.

Reading Children in the Eighteenth Century

If children's literature as a distinct genre had yet to develop, what did children read in 1749? Children who received any degree of education, regardless of economic status, most likely encountered the Bible.[13] The children of affluent families would have also had access to a variety of educational texts and catechisms. Though the publishing industry had yet to target child readers with imaginative works specifically aimed at their desires and abilities, imaginative illustrated literature in the form of chapbooks served as reading entertainment at the time. Unlike children's schoolbooks, which were limited in circulation by the cost of printed material, chapbooks reached a broad audience that included literate members of the laboring classes as well as children from wealthier households. At the cost of a penny, these slim pamphlets organized into 8,12, 16, or 24 pages were a relatively inexpensive form of printed material, though John Simons notes that at such a price they still represented a sizeable investment for an individual living on a laborer's salary (7). Chapbooks found a diverse readership: "[W]hile the labourers read chapbooks in the cottages, the children of the gentry also avidly consumed them in the great houses. Through these children, the many servants who labored to support landowners, rural merchants and industrialists may also have had access to them" (7).[14]

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[13] While no national education system existed, the eighteenth century saw the beginning of efforts to give a basic education to laboring class children. For example, by 1741 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge had founded 2,000 Charity schools in Wales and England. Later in the century, the Sunday School movement took shape and offered basic literacy skills to laboring class children, and Joseph Lancaster developed a method to educate many children for a low cost. Both of these latter developments, however, had yet to occur in 1749.

[14] Simons notes, "Richard Steele, James Boswell, Sir Walter Scott, and George Borrow all read chapbooks as children" (7).

These chapbooks successfully appealed to readers of different stations and ages because they made accessible in word and image stories that had circulated for a considerable amount of time as well as chapbook editions of more recent popular literature. For example, an edition of *Reynard the Fox*, a poem first printed in 1481 that may have been in circulation even earlier, was reprinted as late as 1780. On the other end of the spectrum, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* both appeared as chapbooks during the century. Other popular works included *Guy of Warwick, The Pleasant and Delightful History of Jack and the Giants*, and *The Famous History of Tom Thumb* as well as works religious in nature. While retrospectively some of these narratives, such as the story of Tom Thumb, now fall into the category of children's literature, the varied readership and subject matter of the chapbook industry demonstrates that while children were reading imaginative literature, the publishing industry of the early eighteenth century had yet to envision them as a distinct and lucrative audience.

Compared to this polarized market of texts aimed either at instruction for the child or leisure reading for adults and children alike, Sarah Fielding's *The Governess* demonstrates several important innovations in its approach to literature for young readers.[15] Set in a girls' boarding school, the novel focuses on the leisure reading of several young students. While the girls receive a traditional education under the supervision of their governess, these lessons do not form the novel's focus. Instead, the girls make use of their free time in the garden to share their life stories, read a variety of

[15] Linda Bree contextualizes the publication of *The Governess* in her biography on Sarah Fielding, saying, "In the 50 years following the publication of Locke's treatise, a small number of books for children were produced, but these were mostly religious in nature and gloomy in tone. Meanwhile, children continued to enjoy chapbook stories, such as "Jack the Giant Killer," and they colonized early novels for adults, especially *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)" (58).

works of fiction, and discuss the proper interpretation of these narratives, whether real or imagined. By using this frame narrative approach, Fielding successfully integrates pedagogy and entertainment and finds a balance between the extremes of lesson book and chapbook. Unlike chapbooks, which did not focus specifically on the world as seen through the lens of child characters, Fielding's novel suggests the merit of considering the child's perspective as reader for both learning and entertainment. In her study of eighteenth-century writing for children, Margaret Kinnell suggests that Fielding's *The Governess* was unique in that "children were for the first time offered realistic characters placed in a recognizable setting, children with whom readers could identify" (34). In allowing the lessons to come from the child characters' own experience as readers, Fielding both imagines and models the readership.

Though biographical information on Fielding remains scarce, scholars note that she herself studied at a boarding school similar to that depicted in the novel. Born in 1709, Fielding's early life was marked by domestic battles over money and religion. Her mother died when she was seven years old and her father chose to remarry a Catholic widow, causing a rift in the family at large. Because of this rift, Fielding's grandmother, Lady Gould, removed all the children but Henry[16] from her father's care and enrolled the girls, including Sarah, at Mrs. Mary Rookes's boarding school in Cathedral Close. When *The Governess* went to press, Fielding had reached 40 years old without having married, and her writing provided a means to support herself and her three unmarried sisters. Such a life places Fielding outside the expected trajectory of a woman's life at the time and suggests her own understanding of the place and importance of education for women.

[16] Like Sarah, Henry actively engaged in debates concerning reading and the emerging genre of the novel in his writings, including *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749).

In choosing the setting of an all-girls' boarding school, Fielding both draws on biographical experience and imagines her child readership in the same terms as the child readers pictured in her text—namely, girls of a middling sort background. Such a picture of readership and educational setting also immediately engages with several strands of debate concerning education, reading, and women.[17] Though access to schools, such as the one Fielding attended, widened throughout the century as wealthy tradesmen began to send their daughters away to be educated, the value and necessity of women's education had yet to be established.[18] Writing on the history of female education, Dorothy Kempe Gardiner points out that many of these schools were the subject of criticism because the teachers had received very little formal training themselves: "[I]nefficient as they were, the schools hit the public taste, or perhaps saved trouble in the disposal of daughters, as the nunneries had once done" (335). In addition, these schools often approached women's education with an emphasis on accomplishments rather than learning, such that the intellectual development of graduates was limited, particularly as compared to their male counterparts.[19] A good governess, it seems, was not always easy to find and the

[17] While Fielding's imagined readership likely corresponds to the majority of readers who would have had access to this book, such literary reader figures do not guarantee that only those similar in gender, age, and station read the novel. For example, M.O. Grenby writes in his study of inscription and marginalia in children's books: "Jan Fergus has found evidence that two male tutors at the Daventry Dissenting Academy bought *The Governess; or, Little Female Academy* (in 1765 and 1771)" (*The Child Reader* 55).

[18] In 1687 François Fénelon published *Traité de l'Éducation des Filles* focusing on the education of girls from good families (just as Locke focuses on young gentlemen) and suggests that girlhood faults are the result of upbringing rather than gender. Dr. George Hicks introduced a translated version to the English reader by 1704. In 1725 Isaac Watts writes in *Treatise on the Education of Children and Youth* about the value of educating female children and includes Algebra, Geometry, Geography, and Astronomy as fitting subjects for women's education (Gardiner 376).

[19] Jane Purvis outlines the approach to women's education for girls of a more affluent background (as opposed to lower class girls who attended Charity schools): "The education of girls in wealthy families followed a different pattern since there would be a nursery for the very young children and a school room where more formal education began. A girl would be taught 'accomplishments' such as singing, languages and drawing by a resident or visiting governess and possibly other subjects, such as the classics, arithmetic or science, by a visiting tutor hired on a daily or hourly basis" (66).

model of education offered varied greatly depending on the particular school and instructor. Though Gardiner points out the criticism leveled against such boarding institutions, Fielding negotiates potentially problematic issues by setting her school in the country rather than in the city and by establishing the credibility of her widow governess in the opening pages. At stake in her novel, then, is the potential value of education and reading's formative effects on the child.

How, then, should we read? After the Preface that encourages readers to meditate on their own reading experience, Fielding provides two short stories to demonstrate the necessity of right interpretation. Interestingly, these stories take the form of two different genres—the fable and realistic fiction. In making use of the fable for educational purposes, Fielding's vision of learning accords with that of John Locke, whose 1693 *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* argues for the role of children's pleasure in acquiring knowledge: "When by these gentle ways he begins to read, some early pleasant book, suited to his capacity, should be put into his hands wherein the entertainment that he finds might draw him on, and reward his pains in reading, and yet not such as should fill his head with perfectly useless trumpery, or lay the principles of vice and folly" (226). Because Locke sees learning to read as both the acquisition of literacy skills and also a gateway to enjoyment, he calls for the development of a literature aimed specifically at children with this pedagogical understanding in mind, writing,

> What other books there are in English, of the kind above-mentioned, fit to engage the liking of children, and tempt them to read, I do not know, but am apt think, that children, being generally delivered over to the method of schools, where the fear of the rod is to enforce, and not any pleasure of the employment to invite them to learn, this sort of useful books, amongst the number of silly ones that are of all sorts, have yet had the fate to be neglected; and nothing that I know has been considered of this kind out of

> the ordinary road of the hornbook, primer, psalter, New Testament and Bible. (228)

In his description of an ideal education, Locke focuses specifically on the upbringing of young gentlemen. Despite this difference, Fielding's approach to the relationship between reading and learning, including her use of imaginative literature, bears important connections to Locke's educational philosophies, which would have been circulating throughout the eighteenth century.

Though Fielding uses two different genres as examples, she adopts the same methodology for both texts and models for the work of interpretation by quickly and explicitly offering a reading that makes clear the moral meaning a reader should derive from the two tales. This strategy, which becomes the dominant teaching tool of the novel as a whole, emphasizes that stories are not for passive enjoyment; rather, they have a shaping potential that requires the reader's active participation. Fielding's formulation of participation in interpretation has a clear moral purpose, aiming to inculcate the reader with virtue through right reading. In demonstrating this work across multiple genres, Fielding makes no clear distinction between reading for education and reading for leisure—her portrait of right reading suggests that these two activities are one and the same. Following the two tales, Fielding directly addresses this moral purpose, stating, "The Design of the following Sheets is to prove to you that Pride, Stubbornness, Malice, Envy, and in short all matter of Wickedness, is the greatest Folly we can be possessed of; and constantly turns on the Head of that foolish Person who does not conquer and get the better of all inclinations to such Wickedness" (48). Here, Fielding locates the power of wickedness in that it "turns on the Head of the foolish person" and, in so doing, identifies virtue in the head rather than the heart. She continues, saying, "Certainly, Love and

Affection for each other make the Happiness of all Societies; and therefore Love and Affection (if we would be happy) are what we should chiefly encourage and cherish in our Minds" (48). Again, these affections are said to be rooted in "our Minds" and not the heart, indicating that the virtue she hopes her readers cultivate, though characterized in the emotive terms of "Love and Affection," should be ruled by the child reader's rational faculties, rather than subject to her fluctuating passions.

By setting her novel within the quotidian realm of a small girls' school, Fielding offers up the daily experience of the child as worthy of literary engagement. A key feature of Fielding's text, and many would argue of the whole genre of children's literature, stems from the implicit double address of the text. While the designation of children's literature suggests a literature for a child audience, the presence of the adult—figured in Mrs. Teachum—should not be forgotten. In his study of marginalia and inscription, M.O. Grenby points out the way in which reading often occurred among more parties than a single reader and a book: "[R]eading—if undertaken at all—was often done in collaboration with others, usually adults. The conscripted child reader was the norm—not only in Garrett Stewart's sense of being subtly maneuvered by the text into the properties of readership, but also in the literal sense of being forced to read, to read particular texts, and to read in particular ways" (9). Given this common practice of adults and children reading together, an experience that very well may have been the case for Fielding's contemporary child reader, Fielding's vision of children engaging in this interpretive work without direct adult presence offers a new model in that it focuses on a community of children rather than an adult-child hierarchy.

Fielding also integrates fairy tales into her text, a choice that reveals her novel to take a position on the controversy regarding whether or not this kind of imaginative literature should be provided to children. Because of their association with superstition, fairy tales held a vexed position in enlightenment society. In *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England*, Samuel F. Pickering traces out a historical trajectory of children's books in connection to Locke's writings. He suggests that the larger cultural consensus on fairy tales during the eighteenth-century understood this form of imaginative literature as suspect reading for young children, an opinion he notes would change drastically in the nineteenth century. In *Some Thoughts on Education*, Locke expresses concern regarding the supernatural tales children may be exposed to as they grow up. While it is true that Locke suggests the dangers of "goblins" and "bug-bears," his concern with these tales does not expressly relate to the fairy tale as a genre. Rather, Locke frames his concern in terms of class and expresses concern that "servants, whose usual method is to awe children, and keep them in subjection, by telling them of Raw Head and Bloody-Bones and such other names as carry with them the ideas of something terrible and hurtful, which they have reason to be afraid of alone, especially in the dark" (198).

Because Locke understands childhood to be an extremely formative period in which first experiences determine a child's outlook for the rest of his or her life, he objects to stories told with the aim of frightening children because he believes they will carry this fear of the supernatural with them throughout their lives. As demonstrated by his endorsement of fables, Locke does not object to imaginative literature as long as the reading of it directs the child's upbringing in what he perceives to be a positive manner

by promoting the development of the child's rational faculties. Despite Locke's objections relating more specifically to issues of class and belief, Pickering notes that writers nonetheless drew upon his theories to justify attacks on the dangers of fairy tales. Thus, even as Fielding employs her fairy tales in a manner that accords with Locke's views on reading, her incorporation of the genre in and of itself suggests again the innovative work she achieves with this novel in going against the grain of the common perception of this form of literature. As with her portrayal of female education and form of the novel, Fielding makes the surprising move to manifest this project of right reading for female children in the form and through the very genres that contemporary public opinion found dangerous.

Fielding allows her child characters access to fiction and fairy tale and counters those who caution against the dangers of fictional literature—the novel, in particular—for female readers. While *The Governess* offers a didactic narrative strategy in order to instruct the reader in its right uses, it also implicitly claims that women can exercise such judgment and should be educated accordingly. In attending to the way in which Fielding assists her readers in the cultivation of these faculties of judgment, we may then see the text imagining the child, particularly the female child reader, as capable of exercising a contingent degree of power through the means of interpretation. Here, the power gained through interpretation is contingent, not because it may be exercised in only separatist or oppositional terms as other critics suggest; rather, it is limited in that these acts of interpretive judgment are filtered through the prescriptive terms of right reading the text itself espouses. Additionally, though the didactic overtones of the text initially imply that pleasure should be found only in virtue rather than the fancy of fiction, the text actually

offers the possibility for and even the value of the pleasures of reading itself. In tracing out these moments where pleasure not only becomes possible but acts as an essential component of Fielding's project, I argue not only for the significance of her inclusion of these more controversial genres but their necessity for figuring the child as agent even within the seemingly prescriptive confines of a didactic text.

In order to explore how Fielding deals with this genre, and indeed argue why it should be understood as essential to her project, I make as a case study the first of the fairy tale stories read aloud in the little female academy, titled "The Story of the Cruel Giant Barbarico, the Good Giant Benefico, and the little pretty dwarf Mignon." Jenny selects this story for their mutual enjoyment directly following her own life story, and it acts as the first work of fiction they collectively interpret. Characterizing this as "their First Day's Amusement," the narrator frames this story as read by Jenny, but presents the actual content of the story directly to the reader without any outside mediation (69). The frame reappears at strategic points in the story only to divide it into the amusement of several days, with the leaving off point always at a strategic moment of crisis. This allows the reader direct access to the pleasures and perils of the fairy tale's story world, yet also allows her to remain imaginatively within the larger frame of the "little female academy."

The story details Barbarico's imprisonment of the shepherd Fidus and the latter's separation from his love Amata. Amata, who faints when Barbarico appears and is thus presumed by him to be dead and not taken prisoner, finds her rescuer in the good Benefico. The giants Benefico and Barbarico, as their names imply, respectively represent the extremes of vice and virtue and their large stature dramatizes the great

extent to which they are capable of exercising these extremes through their actions. In addition to the stock fairy tale elements of giants and dwarfs, the story includes a mysterious glimmering light that providentially leads Mignon—Barbarico's dwarf slave—to a statue. This statue, in turn, provides the instruction and means to overpower Barbarico—a magic fillet[20] that when wrapped around the giant's neck will "break his Pow'r" (76). Once he traps the giant and frees Fidus, Mignon sends a message to Benefico. The good giant arrives, slays Barbarico, commends Mignon's bravery, and restores Amata to Fidus. All ends with virtue rewarded and vice suitably punished.

In terms of content, the story overtly envisions the triumph of good over evil and that all manner of vice, embodied in the figure of Barbarico, should and will be punished. However, the powerless young woman does not emerge as the most likely point of identification for the text's child readers; instead, Mignon, the slave turned hero, provides such a site. Though Mignon is a male, his status as "small," "pretty," and initially powerless makes it possible for the young female reader to identify with his position. Critic Deborah Downs-Miers argues this moment, as well as a later tale wherein a tested but virtuous Princess Hebe becomes queen,[21] shows the fairy tales to be unique spaces wherein an even more active life can be imagined and inhabited by the girls. It is notable that in order to make such a claim, Downs-Miers appears to interpret Mignon as a female character, despite the masculine pronouns used throughout the story. This "mistake" emphasizes the feminine markers present in Mignon's characterization and the possibility of identification across gender lines. Additionally, even critics such as Arlene Fish

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[20] Ward clarifies for modern readers that a fillet is a ribbon that was used to bind back hair or adorn it as an ornament.

[21] Princess Hebe gains her father's throne through continued virtue and reigns without mention of a husband.

Wilner, who argues that "[F]ielding's only piece of juvenile fiction is primarily conservative in purpose and effect," admit these tales function as sites for possible subversion (308).[22] Such subversion, in turn, suggests that Fielding uses the genre of fairy tale as an attempt to envision and authorize female roles that cannot, as of yet, take form in realistic fiction.[23]

To read these fairy tales as subversive on the level of content only, however, does not account for their place in the larger project of how to read rightly, nor does it suggest how and why this matters for the novel's broader portrayal of the child reader-characters. In order to consider these questions more fully, the place and interpretation of this fairy tale within the larger didactic framework of the novel bears consideration. Jenny, authorized by Mrs. Teachum to moderate the girls' time together in the arbor, chooses this tale because it is one she herself is familiar with and enjoys. As mentioned before, the occasion of readings in the arbor provides the initial frame, and the story is punctuated into serialization by the girls' various activities—dinner, bedtime, school time—adding additional moments where the novel pulls the reader back from the fairy-

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[22] Arlene Fish Wilner frames her article as an intervention into an ongoing debate regarding whether or not critics should view Sarah Fielding's writing as proto-feminist. Despite her larger claim that Fielding's novel endorses the newly forming middle-class ideology concerning women's education, Wilner does allow that the novel offers three places for possible subversion. First, Wilner suggests that the fairy tales offer moments where dominant gender ideology may be undermined. From these moments she claims, "Fielding's recognition that marriage within her society requires capitulation by both men and women to strictly defined roles that repress the development of individual character or ambitions" (320). Secondly, she notes that the multiplicity of female voices within the text do suggest possible agency for women through the act of story-telling (320). Finally, she allows that Sarah Fielding—herself unmarried and somewhat unconventional—wrote, published, and profited from these stories, and thus lived a life counter to a full endorsement of dominant gender norms.

[23] Elizabeth Gergen Brophy articulates a similar view of *The Governess* as a primarily conservative narrative in regard to the social position of women. However, in discussing Fielding's novels as a body of work, Brophy sees more possibility for agency: "What picture of eighteenth-century women, then, can we say Sarah Fielding's work presents? First, her fiction gives an important place to women who are seen as worthy of interest and concern in their own right. She also approves of intelligence in women, sometimes indicating a critical view of the social attitudes which inhibit development" (245).

tale story world to return to the school setting. No judgment or interpretation interrupts the story, nor does the narrator take the time to make moral guidance explicit throughout the reading as Fielding does in the Preface. Instead, the child reader, along with the girls at the academy, encounters the story first and foremost on his or her own terms, finding pleasure and meaning in the story itself.

The novel curtails this complete freedom of interpretation when Jenny must report how she and the girls have spent their time to the governess. Though the arbor provides a space outside the traditional schoolroom for the girls to share and learn together, it is nonetheless still within the grounds of the female academy. As such, though Jenny acts as leader of this group, she must still give an account to Mrs. Teachum, who may revoke this privilege just as easily as she gave it to the girls. Having looked over the pages of the story, Mrs. Teachum passes judgment on the arbor amusements, saying:

> I have no Objection, Miss Jenny, to your reading any Stories to amuse you, provided you read them with the Disposition of a Mind not to be hurt by them. A very good Moral may indeed be drawn from the Whole, and likewise from almost every Part of it; and as you had this Story from your Mamma, I doubt not but you are very well qualified to make the proper Remarks yourself upon the Moral of it to your Companions. (84)

That Mrs. Teachum allows this use of fairy tale at all is significant given the larger contemporary suspicions circulating about the efficacy of this type of literature.

Additionally, Mrs. Teachum's articulation of how and why such stories should be used emphasizes the relationship among fairy tale, critical judgment, and the formative powers of reading. First, she offers that "any Stories to amuse" should be considered acceptable, as long as the readers possess a certain "Disposition of Mind" (84). In making this statement, the novel suggests that reading material can and should be taken up for the purposes of amusement. The second provision following this allowance for

amusement authorizes it by suggesting that fiction, though it may have seductive and dangerous powers, does not possess ultimate power. Indeed, if a reader is trained to enact a degree of critical distance between her position as reader and the text in order to exercise faculties of judgment, Mrs. Teachum suggests that this reader "will not be hurt" (84). Here, the novel grants freedom to Jenny in her reading practice and, by extension, to the child reader both to read for pleasure and to read for moral worth.[24]

This progressive stance on both the nature of reading and the capacity for young female readers to encounter the fairy tale—or, indeed, the novel—is qualified by the remainder of Mrs. Teachum's speech. She moves directly from her formulation that places the reader in a position of control to a discussion of the moral value of the story. Though Mrs. Teachum expresses her confidence in Miss Jenny's ability to convey this moral to her listeners, she does not offer a full endorsement of fantastical elements in stories. The governess continues her analysis of the story, saying,

> But here let me observe to you (which I would have you communicate to your little Friends) that Giants, Magic, Fairies, and all Sorts of supernatural Assistances in a Story, are introduced only to amuse and divert: For a Giant is called so only to express a Man of great Power; and the magic Fillet round the Statue was intended only to shew you, that in Patience you will overcome all Difficulties. (84)

[24] Karen E. Rowe examines Fielding's text and notes that within the female space of Mrs. Teachum's school, the girls receive permission to tell and discuss fairy tales. From this, Rowe concludes, "Fielding's text itself acts to validate and permit the use of fairy tales in the nursery as well as the polite academy, or in other words, only within the imaginatively fertile 'grove' yet disciplined mental maternity ward where young daughters receive their educations" (47). While Rowe links this use of fairy tale to a decidedly female power, I emphasize here that the model for interpretation of the text advocates a kind of interpretive judgment that, while trained in the female community formed in the arbor, may become a tool for agency once the girls leave the academy.

In this explanation, Mrs. Teachum attempts to strip away any artifice from the story so that the moral mechanisms at work may be made explicit.[25] Further, she cautions, "[G]reat Care is taken to prevent you from being carried away by these high-flown Things, from that Simplicity of Taste and Manners which it is my chief Study to inculcate" (89). Such a concern for the reader "being carried away" speaks directly to contemporary critics who found forms of fiction threatening, particularly for young women. In putting both this analysis of fiction and articulation for caution directly in the text, Fielding anticipates any negative response to her inclusion of fairy tale and defends it on a moral basis. In this moment, the novel speaks to a concern for right reading not only on the level of the child reader, but also implicitly on the level of critical reception. Additionally, the placement of this overly moral interpretation comes not during the course of the story, but well after its conclusion. The novel thus allows readers to indulge in their pleasure of the tale before cautioning of "these high-flown Things' (89).

Mrs. Teachum desires Jenny to "communicate to your little Friends" her observations on the story's fantastical elements, and ever dutiful, Jenny follows these instructions (84). Instead of simply repeating Mrs. Teachum's words, however, Jenny first asks her companions whether or not they liked the fairy tale. In response, the girls "all declared they thought it a very pretty Diverting story" (85). Here, the girls voice a reaction based on pleasure. When questioned further, each girl ventures to share the part of the story which "most pleased" her (85). Miss Sukey finds the story's conclusion "where the good Benefico cuts off the Monster's Head" to be the most satisfying moment

[25] On a similar note, Sarah Wakefield shows how fairytales are made acceptable in the story by distancing them—making their status as story explicit—and also through the use of explicit moralizing in relation to the stories. Overall, Wakefield argues, "Although Mrs. Teachum's admonitions show caution in exploiting magical plots in a girl's proper education, fairytales finally prove acceptable as 'innocent entertainment' and even offer useful morals and lessons" (34).

(85). Miss Lucy states the story offered the "greatest Joy" in the scenes detailing the efficacy of the magic fillet (85). Miss Dolly privileges the story's romance and suggests that she found the reunion between Fidus and Amata as what left her "most pleased" (85). All the girls voice such comments, agreeing and disagreeing as to what exactly they found most diverting in the tale of the giants. In this way, the text authorizes a variety of reactions and suggests that each reader can and will find pleasure in different aspects of a story.

Having been primed by Mrs. Teachum, Jenny attempts to convince them that enjoying a story is not enough, saying, "[M]y Mamma always taught me to understand what I read; otherwise, she said, it was to no manner of Purpose to read ever so many Books, which would only stuff my Brain, without being an Improvement to my Mind" (85). In emphasizing the importance of active reading, Jenny both recalls Mrs. Teachum's words and those Fielding offers in the preface. Additionally, this statement may be read as an implicit argument for the necessity of providing women access to texts and an education that develops their critical faculties. The burgeoning print market, particularly considering the newly forming genre of the novel, made it more and more likely that women (of a certain background and class) would have access to books. Thus, even as Fielding uses Jenny's words as a caution against reading simply for pleasure, she also articulates a defense of female education in general. If the relationship between reading and character, art, and morality is taken seriously, then it becomes imperative that women learn to exercise rational thought when they encounter story.

Where Mrs. Teachum allows Jenny to act as moderator in leading the girls to reflect critically on the moral of many stories told in the context of this small community,

the reading of a play occasions her presence for both its reading and analysis. After Jenny shares with the girls *Funeral*, or, *Grief A-la-mode*, Mrs. Teachum uses this opportunity to test whether or not the girls have learned the ability to think critically and interpret stories with proper care towards their formative moral message. In this instance, Fielding once again uses Mrs. Teachum to articulate the value of such a project that allows girls to read in controversial genres. As with the fairy tale, this supposed danger posed by plays is so great that Fielding acknowledges through the voice of the governess that critics may find her decision to include this form within the novel problematic. Speaking of possible moral danger in plays, the governess comments,

> That he has clothed Vice in so beautiful a Dress, that, instead of deterring, it will allure and draw into its Snares the young and tender Mind. And I am sorry to say, that too many of our dramatic Performances are of this latter Cast; which is the reason that wise and prudent parents and Governors in general discourage in very young People the Reading of Plays. (156)

Though Mrs. Teachum acknowledges these dangers and suggests the validity of concern for a play's ability to lure young readers into vice, she nonetheless permits her students to read a play. Of this decision to permit the play, Mrs. Teachum tells her students, "I like that you should know something of all kinds of Writings, where neither Morals nor Manners are offended" (150). Again, Mrs. Teachum does not provide a blanket endorsement of all literature, emphasizing her permission extends only to such literature that does not transgress morality or manners.

If her remarks concluded on this point, they would suggest a view of censorship that seems to locate authority for judgment outside the individual reader and in whatever authority marks some works acceptable and others unacceptable. She continues, however, by offering a formulation of the appropriate use of plays that is more

complicated than a simple prescription for reading only material judged to be safe. She instructs her listeners, which include both the fictional child characters and the reader, saying, "[I]f you read Plays, and consider them as you ought, you will neglect and despise what is light and useless, whilst you'll imprint on your Minds every useful Lesson that is to be drawn from them" (150). By this training in right reading, the girls gain a defense against the possible seduction offered by emerging forms of print culture. The faith Mrs. Teachum expresses in the power of this critical judgment—"to consider them as you ought"—opens up for the girls the possibility to read widely in a variety of genres because they are placed in the active position of judgment rather than the passive position of object for seduction. Though Mrs. Teachum may prescribe certain texts as appropriate within the realm of the academy in order that they may practice this right reading in a protected environment, the personal power they gain opens up the possibility and indeed the imperative for them to read across genres and subjects.

In addition to utilizing the school setting so that readers may cultivate interpretive judgment concerning story, the novel also opens up space to suggest that the critical judgment it envisions extends beyond the realms of school and story. On a trip outside the boundaries of the academy arbor, the girls visit a nobleman's house. Confronted with this luxurious lifestyle, the girls are "struck into a sort of silent Wonder and Admiration at the splendid Appearance of everything around them; nor could they find Words to express the various Reflections that passed in their Minds, on seeing such a Variety of dazzling Gaudy things" (163). As with the novel's structure of story experience, pleasure comes first with "Wonder and Admiration" at all that is "splendid" and "dazzling."

The girls' focus, however, switches quickly from admiring these goods to looking at needlepoint with a reflection on their own desires, not for these symbols of luxury, but for excellence at needlework. The narrator characterizes these sentiments, saying, "But when they came to the Needle-work, Miss Jenny could not help smiling, to see how everyone seemed most fixed in Attention upon that sort of Work, which she herself was employed in; and she saw in the Faces of all a secret Wish, that their own Piece of Work might be finished with equal Neatness and Perfection" (163). Critics who read the novel as essentially about the internalization of middle-class domestic ideology may find this movement toward contemplation of and admiration for a symbol of domesticity further evidence of such internalization. However, if we consider this as an expression of both critical judgment and reciprocal desire, the girls' interest in needlework can be understood as suggesting something different altogether. Instead of pining after the wealth and position that could only be theirs through submission to the ultimate domestic role of wife, the girls focus their desires on the only objects in all that luxury that they can achieve as a matter of their respective skills. Such artistry in needlework does not require a husband, nor does it suggest aspiration to the wealth of the nobleman's house; instead, it is a desire rooted completely in each girl's locus of control. After Polly expresses the desire that they all should live in such a lovely house, Jenny attempts to correct this desire, saying, "Indeed, my little Polly, [. . .] you may be very much mistaken; for you know our good Governess has taught us, that there is not Happiness but in the Content of our own Minds; and perhaps we may have more Pleasure in viewing these fine Things, than the Owners have in the Possession of them" (164). In suggesting that happiness may be found "in the Content of our own Minds" rather than wealth and

luxury, Jenny voices this sense of agency directly. Just as an education in right reading ensures that stories cause the reader no harm, so does this larger project of gaining critical distance provide the means to separate the pleasure offered by material objects and their ability to offer happiness. Thus, the girls' critical judgment and agency, which their exchange and interpretation of stories has given them, extend beyond the borders of the text and into everyday life.

Indeed, the text concludes with just such a movement outward when Jenny leaves the academy and returns to her family. As the oldest of the girls present, Jenny goes out to meet her future—wifehood, domesticity, and the fulfillment of expected social roles—shaped by her time at the academy. Instead of taking the reader with Jenny as she meets these new situations, the text focuses on the academy and turns Jenny's story into one full of formative moral power:

> All Quarrels and Contentions were banished her House [sic]; and if ever any such Thing was likely to arise, the Story of Miss Jenny Peace's reconciling all her little Companions was told them; so that Miss Jenny, tho' absent, still seemed (by the bright Example which she left behind her) to be the Cement of Union and Harmony in this well-regulated Society. And if any Girl was found to harbor in her Breast a rising Passion, which was difficult to conquer, the Name and Story of Miss Jenny Peace soon gained her Attention, and left her without any other Desire than to emulate Miss Jenny's Virtues. (176)

In this way, Jenny moves from a person within the story-world of the academy to a character in a story. As such, she becomes an exemplar and her story serves as a means to stabilize the community. Discussing the cumulative and "palimsestic" effect of the novel's stories, Rowe suggests, "What's remarkable is the degree to which fairy tales partner with self-confessed autobiographies, the realm of the fantastical imaginary existing side-by-side with the 'real' of personal experience" (46). In taking this

approach, Fielding's novel not only argues that her child readers can read and interpret fantasy but that it can speak to their real lives in meaningful ways. Thus, the novel authorizes its own value by demonstrating this moral formation while at the same time imagining child readers capable of exercising the power of interpretation.

When situated within context of the *Pamela* controversy, the attitude toward reading presented in Fielding's *The Governess* takes on new meaning. Fielding's choices regarding genre—specifically imaginative literature—and form—narratives framed by children reading together without an adult—are not arbitrary choices. Instead, these choices demonstrate Fielding's engagement with a major literary debate regarding the relationship between reading and virtue, and reveal her position to be far more radical than the label of didactic literature for children might convey. Instead of portraying imaginative literature as a danger to the child reader, Fielding creates a space wherein her child characters can learn to read and make sense of a diverse body of texts without endangering their rightness of self, defined in the novel's cultural moment as their virtue. While Fielding does not present her girls—and in turn the reader outside the text—with morally compromising material, her approach to reading makes the significant move to picture reading as an active, rather than passive, experience and thus places the child reader in a position of control.

Not-so-light Revisions: Re-writing Reading in *The Governess*

The 71 years between Fielding's optimistic vision of the child reader and Sherwood's Calvinist revision saw a growth in publications for children, and like Fielding's successor, these texts wrestle with the push and pull of pleasure and instruction and the proper relationship of fantasy and realism. Sarah Trimmer recommends

Fielding's *The Governess* as acceptable reading material 34 years after the author's death in an 1802 publication of her magazine titled *Guardian of Education* (Hilton 48). Trimmer herself authored a work for children in 1786, titled *Fabulous Histories Designed for the Instruction of Children, Respecting their Treatment of Animals*, which focuses on the proper treatment of animals by children. She defines her project "as a series of FABLES, intended to convey moral instruction applicable to themselves, at the same time that they excite compassion and tenderness for those interesting and delightful creatures, on which such wanton cruelties are frequently inflicted" (viii). Thus, though Trimmer's stories feature animals that can talk, she takes pains in both the title and introduction to clarify that these stories are fables and only use these talking animals in order to make a larger moral point. Like Fielding's novel, Trimmer's writing demonstrates an awareness and conviction of the seductive powers of reading, and makes an attempt to clearly demarcate fact from fantasy, even as fantastic elements operate throughout her stories.

Writing in the same historical moment, Mary Wollstonecraft addressed the issue of what and how a child should read in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflections on Female Conduct, in The More Important Duties of Life* (1787), and then dramatized the process of a child's education the following year in *Original Stories from Real Life with Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections, and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness* (1788).[26] Wollstonecraft takes a progressive stance in *Thoughts*

[26] These tales feature the sisters Mary and Caroline whose parents have neglected their education and who therefore have been put in the care of Mrs. Mason. Lessons begin with the importance of kindness to animals as an example of how the girls should do good and be kind to all creatures. Told by a third-person narrator, the conversations between Mrs. Mason and her charges provide the larger frame for a series of stories. For example, Mrs. Mason tells the girls the tale of Jane Fretful who "hastened her mother's death, by her want of duty and many other faults" and then follows her to the grave leaving "ample fortune behind her to those who did not regret her loss" (30-31). Like Sherwood's deathbed scenes,

on the Education of Daughters and argues that girls need an education constitutive of more than surface accomplishments; and as part of that education, she acknowledges the formative role of reading on the child. On the subject of what children should read, Wollstonecraft argues that the child's "passions should be engaged," yet articulates a cautionary view of just what should properly engage these passions: "They are mostly fond of stories, and proper ones would improve them even while they are amused. Instead of these, their heads are filled with improbable tales, and superstitious accounts of invisible beings, which breed strange prejudices and vain fears in their minds" (18). Here, Wollstonecraft holds forth the idea that what children read shapes their understanding of the world, and as in Fielding's preface, she connects the work of reading not to just to the question of virtue or the heart but to the rational faculties of the mind. Later in her chapter on reading, Wollstonecraft suggests a more nuanced view of such reading prohibitions when she writes, "Reason strikes most forcibly when illustrated by the brilliancy of fancy. The sentiments which are scattered may be observed and when they are relished, and the mind let to work, it may be allowed to choose books for itself, for every thing will then instruct" (51-2). Despite her more conservative statements concerning the kinds of books young children should be offered, Wollstonecraft echoes Mrs. Teachum in suggesting that when properly educated, girls should have free choice in reading material. Additionally, Wollstonecraft's title *Original Stories from Real Life* emphasizes the realistic nature of her stories, and yet, her

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Wollstonecraft's examples often involve the loss of life of a character or characters. When the time comes for Mrs. Mason to leave the two girls, she gives them a present of a book that records their conversations. She entreats them, "Recur frequently to it, for the stories illustrating the instruction it contains, you will not feel in such a great degree the want of my personal advice. Some of the reasoning you may not thoroughly comprehend, but, as your understandings ripen, you will feel its full force" (154). In this way, the text valorizes the use of such a text for education and suggests that it bears rereading.

governess figure Mrs. Mason repeatedly recommends Sarah Trimmer's work featuring talking animals, all of which suggests a moderate approach to fantastical elements in children's works.

These writings by Wollstonecraft and Trimmer demonstrate that the didactic impulse –that is, the desire to intentionally instruct and improve the child through reading—continued to motivate authors of children's literature after the publication of Sarah Fielding's *The Governess.* Given that the end of the nineteenth century results in the "Golden Age" of children's literature, one might expect that literature from the eighteenth century onward would become less didactic and more concerned with the pleasures of reading. A look at Mary Martha Sherwood's revisions to Fielding's *The Governess*, however, interrupts any simple narrative of unidirectional progression. Indeed, though Sherwood's preface claims to remove the fairy tales but take "fewer liberties" within "the body of the work," a reading of these two texts side by side reveals a serious and intentional alteration of the principles of how and what to read that had undergirded the earlier text (iv). Some critics react to this increased didacticism with a degree of derision, such as F.J. Harvey Darton's 1932 analysis, wherein he terms Sherwood's version a "monstrous recension" (157).[27] However, a careful examination of the views of education and the ends of reading that motivate these "monstrous" editorial decisions provide both an important site to picture the changing conception of the child as reader and also an impetus for the flowering of fantasy literature later in the century.[28]

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[27] Darton makes this observation in *Children's Books in England: Five Centuries of Social Life* (1932) and his study remains influential. It is still in print and the most recent edition was published in 2011.

[28] By using the original *The Governess* and its 1820 revision as markers of larger changes in the cultural understanding of reading and the child, I do not mean to suggest that all literature moved in the direction of Evangelicalism. Just as we find more didactic literature at the time of Fielding's original, so,

When compared to the child reader of 1749, the child reader of 1820 had the potential to come from a more diverse socioeconomic background and to encounter a wider variety of literature aimed at a child audience than his or her peers of the previous century. The spread of literacy combined with the growth of children's literature as a segment of the publishing industry meant more texts for children were available to a growing number of child readers. While the Charity schools continued to grow in the early nineteenth century,[29] other schools, such as Sunday Schools, aided in the spread of literacy among children who did not have access to the endowed elementary schools of the wealthy.[30] Founded by Robert Raikes in 1780, these schools provided an education in spelling and reading for 250,000 young students by 1789.[31] Also in 1789, Hannah More became involved in the Sunday School movement along with her sister and founded several schools. The interrelation between reading and religion at the heart of Protestant faith manifested itself in the twin aims of teaching reading and religious doctrine to children in these schools. Before her marriage, Sherwood taught in a Sunday School, and her books were reprinted as Sunday School materials after her death and into the 1870s.

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too, we will find more fanciful texts at the time Sherwood writes her revision. However, given the significance of Sherwood as an author as well as the endurance of her version of *The Governess*, I do maintain that, if taken as markers of influence rather than absolute standards, a comparison of the two texts provides a revelatory window into the broader ideas of the child that shaped the development of children's literature across the century.

[29] Richard Altick's study puts the number at 1329 Charity schools by 1799.

[30] In 1798 Joseph Lancaster developed a different model for the elementary schools that allowed a single instructor to educate a large number of pupils. In his history of British education, Thomas Lloyd Humberstone notes that Joseph Lancaster made education more cost effective such that "he was able to teach a thousand children at a cost of a few shillings per child per annum with himself as the only teacher" (11). Some examples of the changes he made include using reading sheets in place of books and slates for writing instead of paper. While Lancaster's educational model impacted the spread of literacy among children, his "undemoninational" approach to education did not impact Sherwood in the manner of the Sunday School movement.

[31] For a detailed, though masculine, history of the Sunday School movement, see *The development of the Sunday-school, 1780-1905*, a report made by the International Sunday-school Convention in 1905.

Though *The Governess's* setting and educational model picture a middle-class readership of female children attending a boarding school, the audience addressed by Mrs. Sherwood's 1820 revision had grown substantially larger than that imagined by the original text.

Sherwood's revision of *The Governess* is best understood within the context of the forces that motivated her to take up the pen and author works for children in the first place. Her husband, Captain Henry Sherwood, became paymaster of the 53rd regiment and was ordered to India. Sherwood followed him, leaving her baby in England "so to save her health from the effects of other climes" (Sherwood *The Life* 249). Sherwood found this parting from her daughter, who was then 11 months old, both difficult and necessary. On leaving her child with her mother, she writes, "My babe will be brought up amongst lambs and flowers, among sweet woods and hills, near where her mother, who will then be far away was brought up. She will be educated in the fear of God, if she lives; if not, she will be taken to her heavenly Father's bosom" (252-3). While such a grim formulation of the hopes for a child may strike current readers as rather morbid, it nonetheless represents Sherwood's awareness of the realities of life as a mother. During her time in India, she gave birth to and buried two children and also went through what biographer Nancy Cutt terms her "strongly Calvinistic period" (42). Additionally, Sherwood began educating the children of the barracks on her veranda and witnessed first hand what became of neglected children.[32] Taken together, these experiences with

[32] In this endeavor, her concern for the plight of half-caste children emerges as particularly significant, given the way in which current critics focus on her imperial ideology. While her works reveal her to echo some of the ill-informed imperial logic of her day, her biographical works also suggest a deep abiding concern for the well-being of the half-caste and Indian children she encountered. For example, when she learns that the duties of Indian wet nurses often result in the neglect and death of their own babies, she suggests that these women should be allowed to bring their babies with them to the homes of the English whom they serve.

personal loss, read through the lens of Calvinist doctrine alongside her first-hand work teaching neglected children, suggest much of the impetus behind her revision of *The Governess* and the kind of children's literature such a revision exemplifies. At stake for Sherwood in her writing is not just the behavioral reformation of the child, but rather the formation of the child's soul as accomplished by right reading.

While Fielding and Sherwood certainly share a concern for how children read, a look at Sherwood's original writing for children demonstrates the extent to which her concern for a particular kind of religious reading drives her presentation of even secular works. Sherwood formulates an explicit connection between the work of learning to read and the work of conversion in her children's literature, a theme that emerges explicitly in one of her most popular works *Little Henry and His Bearer* (1814).[33] Sherwood's protagonist is a young orphan named Henry, who is born in India while his father is in the service of the East India Company. Early in the work, Henry becomes an orphan; he is adopted and then neglected by a rich woman. Boosy, an Indian servant who has been with his father's family for years, takes care of the child from birth with the result that Henry does not know the language or religious traditions of his birth. Henry finally learns to speak English and read the Bible when a young English lady takes him under her wing. A key point of this education comes not only from Henry's learning Evangelical doctrine but the way in which the lady provides him with a Bible and motivates his independent reading, such that in a year and a half he moves from "the grossest state of heathen darkness and ignorance to a competent knowledge of these

[33] Joyce Grossman writes, "Comparable in its popularity to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin, Little Henry* was widely distributed among an international audience. Published in Hindustani and English (1814), it went through 30 editions by 1840; translated into multiple languages and reprinted by secular as well as religious presses, *Little Henry* circulated in far-flung locations from Rangoon to Germany" (16).

doctrines of the Christian religion which are chiefly necessary to salvation" (40). Henry then embarks on this mission, first by praying for Boosy, and then by sharing with him what the young lady had taught him in the same manner. Literacy acts as the gateway to religious conversion. Eventually, Henry becomes ill and in the end it is Boosy who reads to him by his sickbed. The story ends with Henry's passing and the narrator's reflection on having visited Henry's grave with an update on Boosy's situation, specifically that he had since renounced caste and been baptized.

Published before the revised version of *The Governess, Henry and His Bearer* makes clear that Sherwood conceptualizes reading on a spiritual rather than a social plane. In this way, Sherwood's understanding of the role of reading in the salvation of souls and her work in India echoes Hannah More and the Sunday School movement in England. According to Anne Stott, " [The] aim was to teach literacy to both children and adults so that their pupils would read the Bible, be converted to Evangelical Christianity and be insulated from subversive politics" (41). From this we see that More's desires to educate the working classes come hand in hand with a firm belief in the capability of the Bible as written word to alter the world view of its readers, if only they have the opportunity to read it in their own language. Though Sherwood teaches half-caste children and writes about life in India, her view of the efficacy of literacy follows the same trajectory, such that a key component of Boosy's conversion is not being read to but being given the opportunity to read in his native language. Thus, reading for Sherwood carries with it the power to alter the reader on a spiritual level.

When put in conversation with *The Governess, Henry and His Bearer* reveals that even as she maintains Fielding's girls' school setting, her revisionary project does not

understand reading or education in gendered terms. As discussed earlier, Fielding's project portrays female education, specifically an education in interpretive judgment, as both important and necessary. Her choice to set her story within the realm of the girls' school was innovative for her time and thus a key component of the overarching message of the novel. In choosing to revise Fielding's edition, Sherwood takes advantage of the text's existing popularity and thereby her choice of the girls' school setting is one of convenience rather than integral to a larger agenda. Cutt writes of Sherwood's approach, noting that"[e]ducation thus becomes preparation for eternity, rational and moral elements are subordinated to lessons of faith, resignation, and implicit obedience to the will of God; and the material concerns of everyday life are thinned out" (38). Because Sherwood connects learning to read—both the skill of literacy detailed in *Henry and His Bearer* as well as the skill of interpretation—to coming to an understanding of one's relational positions to sin and salvation, the focus of her revision does not take shape as an argument for female education but rather as an example of the necessity of right reading for religious salvation. For Sherwood, the relationship between reading and religion does not change depending on the gender of the reader—Henry and the girls of *The Governess* are on equal footing when it comes to the possibilities of eternal salvation. This is significant because it demonstrates that even though Sherwood's story still pictures reading within the girls' school setting, the central message of her revision does not focus on the necessity of female education in the manner of Fielding's original.

As with Fielding's work, the didactic label has kept Sherwood's version of *The Governess* out of the critical spotlight, though recently a few of her other works have gained notice for their imperial content. Critics looking to find evidence of imperial

ideology have pointed out the way in which Sherwood's rendering of India and native people carries out this ideological work. For example, Dara Rossman Regaigonon comments on *Little Henry and his Bearer*: "Sherwood transforms her vulnerable child-protagonists into figures of imperial hegemony and expansion" (84). Other scholars, such as Nandini Bhattacharya and Joyce Grossman, take a more moderate view, pointing out ambiguity and uncertainty in the way in which Sherwood portrays colonial relationships. I find these latter readings more persuasive, as they acknowledge that Sherwood's work and outlook represent the extent to which she was caught up in the common viewpoints of her time and also show the ways in which her attitudes were more complicated than a straightforward ideological reading can reveal.[34]

While *The Governess* escapes the direct influence of Sherwood's Indian opinions, it nonetheless carries forward the same missionary zeal found in her other works, a zeal that puts the importance of right reading above all other training. The stakes of learning to read all texts as signifiers of human depravity reveal that Sherwood must not only demonstrate such reading in the text but also make significant changes to what is read within the setting of the little academy. Like Fielding, Sherwood uses the space of her Preface to prime her readers for the kind of reading they will both witness and perform, though she must also contend with the original text that comes before and the stories that she finds no longer suitable:

> Several Fairy-tales were incidentally introduced into the original work; and as it is not unlikely that such compositions formed, at that period, one of the chief amusements of the infant mind, a single tale of this description is admitted into the present edition. But since fanciful productions of this sort can never be rendered generally useful, it has been thought proper to

[34] For example, Sherwood's work with half-caste children and concern for the children of native wet nurses suggests a more complicated picture than a straightforward ideological reading of her literary representations of native peoples would allow.

> suppress the rest, substituting in their place such appropriate relations as seemed more likely to conduce to juvenile edification. (iv)

In this explanation for her editorial decision to maintain just one fairy tale from *The Governess*, Sherwood reveals her own inability or perhaps unwillingness to comprehend the instructive and indeed didactic work Fielding attempts to accomplish by including these stories. Sherwood believes that these tales may have provided amusement for the "infant mind" 71 years earlier, but she comes down firmly against them when she says they "can never be rendered generally useful" (iv).

Such a pronouncement, however, indicates more than simply a dislike for "fanciful productions;" it also provides a nutshell version of the significant difference in how Sherwood and Fielding understand education, reading, and the "infant mind." Indeed, these few sentences take us directly to the heart of what an analysis of the narrative structures demonstrates—though both texts aim at teaching children and employ the same story to that end, the way in which these two texts position the reader, narrator, and story result in significantly different possibilities for the child's own relationship to story. Both Fielding and Sherwood set clear boundaries between correct and incorrect interpretation. However, Fielding provides a company of peers who engage in communal interpretation, whereas Sherwood constructs a narrator whose adult voice acts as the ultimate arbiter of truth. While Fielding's girls do not offer revolutionary or subversive interpretations, her narrative structure nonetheless places value on that work of communal interpretation as a strategy for education and thus places value on the space between reader and text—the place where the reading event occurs. In doing so, Fielding imagines her readers as capable of making important interpretive moves without explicit explanation from adults. And, because she sees the possibility for education in that space

between—where story and reader meet—"fanciful productions" do not simply provide "enjoyment" in the way Sherwood's analysis would have us believe. Instead, they become key to developing and honing a reader's interpretative powers and, in turn, their moral sense.

For Sherwood, a generic idea of moral sense does not address what she believes to be the most pressing issue of education; therefore, even as she preserves basic plot details, she uses both the voice of the narrator—the implied author—and that of Mrs. Teachum to "correct" the text with the intent of correcting the reader, as well.[35] Such an instance occurs early in the text in the apple of discord scene, which for Fielding's girls demonstrates the necessity of educating minds and controlling passions in order to have harmony in their little community. Sherwood maintains the dispute over the apples; however, she interrupts the flow of the narrative with a direct address by her narrator on the subject of human depravity. Calling the readers her "young friends," the narrator hypothesizes that some of those "who peruse this little book, may not have ever heard the subject of human depravity familiarly explained" (10-11). Having invoked the subject of human depravity, the narrator continues, "In case this should be so, and you should be led to suppose that these little Misses of Mrs. Teachum's school were worse than others by nature, I will endeavour her to make plain to you the important doctrine of the depravity of man's heart" (11). Here, we see Sherwood's concern that her readers fail to make the connection between the bad behavior exhibited by the girls in the story and the sinful state of their own hearts. Though Fielding's text occasionally features a direct address by the narrator, such as in the Preface when the text speaks on the issue of reading, her

[35] According to Cutt's biography, "correct" for Sherwood means for the text to be "brought into conformity with Evangelical belief" (45).

narrative design relies on the readers' ability, like that of the girl characters featured in the text, to make the interpretive leap between the actions of the story and the readers' own experiences. Instead of imagining her readers as capable of performing this important interpretive leap, Sherwood closes the gap between story and meaning with a narrator's direct address, suggesting that the interpretation offered by the text's adult voice should be authoritative and unquestionable.

Additionally, the narrator does not simply point out this connection between the reader and the child characters but also takes the opportunity to convey to them the story of how sin entered the world in order to drive home the point that the portrait offered by the novel is at once both specific and universal. Where Fielding's original implicitly evokes the scene of Adam and Eve's fall without explicit comparison between the girls and the Biblical narrative, Sherwood's novel cannot pass up the chance to make explicit the connection between the girls' dispute and the fall into sin:

> And first, I shall tell you, that God made man in his own image, pure and free from sin, without one depraved appetite or improper feeling, but holy, upright, and glorious, like his Maker, requiring no covering for his beautiful and spotless body, and no imputed righteousness to conceal, as with a garment, the deformity of his soul. But Satan, the enemy of mankind, tempted our first parents to depart from God; by which means they admitted into their nature, in what manner we do not understand, the poison of sin: by which man is become so utterly corrupt, that every feeling and motion of his heart is sinful. (11)

Such an account of the fall into sin once again suggests that the gendered portrait of education found in Sherwood's *The Governess* emerges from her use of the original text rather than an anti-feminist agenda on her part. Where some religious accounts of Adam and Eve may choose to emphasize that Eve took the fruit of the tree and gave it to Adam, Sherwood instead decides to convey that "our first parents" fell into temptation, making

sin equally shared by men and women and thus universal in her account. Moreover, with this insertion of the Biblical account, Sherwood's narrator speaks from a historical position and inserts her readers into a chronological trajectory from Adam and Eve to the Little Academy that fixes not just their interpretations but also their identities within this history.

After this narrative interruption, the narrator returns to the account of what befell the girls after the fight over the apple, and Mrs. Teachum takes over the narrator's work of speaking on the subject of human depravity to her students. So effective are Mrs. Teachum's prayers and words that "all the young ladies came humbly to ask and receive from their governess the pardon for their grievous offence" (16). Though just one incident in the whole novel, the changes Sherwood made in this section exemplify the overarching thrust of her edition—to invite the child reader to contemplate his or her own sinful state by allowing the adult voices of the narrator and the governess to lecture on the subject. Certainly, these changes represent a shift in the theological doctrine of the author, for in her fervent Calvinism Sherwood cannot be content with a discussion of mind and heart that does not reference the position of such a heart and mind in relation to God.

Alongside these theological influences, or perhaps as a result of them, Sherwood offers up a fundamentally different conception of the child's relationship to reading and how the work of reading relates to the formation of identity for that child.[36] Where the

[36] On Sherwood's revisionary viewpoint, Suzuki writes, "The educational principle of amusement and instruction is denigrated as amusement alone because the function of the students' own reason to extract instruction is belittled" (334). While I agree that Sherwood's revision places power in the hands of the adult rather than the child, I tend to be a bit more sympathetic to this revision because, for Sherwood, she sees her child character-readers' souls at stake in how and why they read. To that end, I would rephrase Suzuki's formulation that the student's "own reason" is "belittled" and suggest that as Sherwood

reformative work of Fielding's text occurs when the girls share their stories and work together to interpret a variety of stories taken from the world of real life and the world of fiction, the reformative work of Sherwood's revision requires adult intervention such that the teaching of human depravity should never be far from the young readers' thoughts. Taken comparatively then, Fielding finds positive benefit in the child reader wrestling with the text to arrive at interpretation, whereas Sherwood sees only danger in such work without the guiding influence of a pious and faithful adult reader.

Because Sherwood perceives reading to be a site of possible danger, she must not only incorporate religious teaching into Fielding's existing stories but also entirely replaces some stories included in the original. Sherwood's Preface opens with the suggestion that fairy tales cannot be "generally useful," though she claims to maintain one of the original tales for the sake of amusement; however, a comparison of the two texts reveals that Sherwood's single tale is her own creation and does not come from Fielding (iv). After the girls reconcile following the apple incident, the governess allows them free time in the garden, during which Miss Jenny Peace selects a fairy story for their general consideration. The story focuses on the poor upbringing of the Princess Rosalinda that results from overly indulgent parents and a lack of proper education. To remedy this, the fairy Serena removes Rosalinda from the castle and takes her to be educated by a fairy governess in Fairy-Land.[37] Despite this change in scenery, Rosalinda

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finds all reason to be subject to a single teaching, she sees no need for children to engage in the work of "extract[ion]."

[37] Though Serena presumably has powerful magic at her disposal, her authority within the story derives from her position as a mother. Indeed, she characterizes herself as focused on the "constant endeavor. . .to make [her many children] humble and teach them the duty of self-command" (57). In this speech Serena speaks to the queen as a fellow mother and offers her this advice concerning her child's future: "[I]f she should be brought up in self-indulgence, and in a high opinion of herself, she will not only become a torment to herself, but the cause of great trouble to her people" (57).

proves so difficult to manage such that Serena grants her wish to "direct and govern" herself by bringing a second version of Rosalinda for the girl to look after (76). Confronted with this second self's bad behavior, Rosalinda soon asks to return to the care of the governess and becomes "meek and submissive" in the face of authority (84).

While Sherwood claims this is a fairy tale included for amusement, even the briefest summary of the work makes clear that, like her larger revision, the primacy of submitting to the authority of adults, particularly one's governess, is the story's true message. The work does include some fantasy elements, such as a flying chariot, toys that do not break, and the appearance of Rosalinda's second self; however, these few elements do not disguise the fact that the story simply mirrors the girls' own experience in the little academy, where other students perform the function of Rosalinda's second self. The very function of this second self serves to externalize and dramatize Rosalinda's own sin—a sinful second self, Sherwood's novel suggests, common to all readers.

Additionally, the inclusion of just a single "fairy tale" serves the purpose of allowing Mrs. Teachum to go on at length concerning what is and is not appropriate reading material. When Jenny tells her governess of their reading, she responds by allowing that the story's "tendency is extremely good" but nonetheless expresses her desire to "lead [the girls] from these trifles to better things" (87). Fielding's text pictures a similar moment in which Mrs. Teachum speaks to Jenny on the subject of her story selection, but the original governess focuses on the importance of the reader's capability to "read them with the Disposition of a Mind not to be hurt by them" (84). When Sherwood's governess addresses the material at hand, she does not speak of Jenny's

interpretive judgment but rather allows that the girl has been "strongly impressed with the doctrine of the depravity of human nature, the need of a Saviour, and many other important truths taught in Scripture" (87). Despite this praise, the governess does not go on to suggest, as does Fielding's, that with proper education the girls should make their own reading choices. Instead, she emphasizes, "how necessary it is not to lose any opportunity of inculcating these doctrines on the minds of young people" (87). For Sherwood's governess, reading serves the single function of revealing important religious truths to the reader, and if reading does not fulfill this role, she believes it could interfere with proper spiritual development. As she tells Jenny, "Children, my dear, should be perpetually reminded of this important truth, that no human being can so much think a good thought without divine help: all stories therefore in which persons are described as acting well without this help have almost exceedingly evil tendency" (88).

From this we see that at stake for Sherwood in the choice between fairy tale and fact is whether or not the reader will gain a sense of his or her place in the narrative of salvation history, a history which for Sherwood exists very much in the world of facts. According to Sherwood's vision of the child reader, conveyed through her narrative strategy and modeled by the child reader-characters, the space between text and reader poses real dangers such that one and only one interpretative strategy should be taught and permitted—reading the sinful self's relation to the divine.

From Instruction to Delight? Not Quite

A dominant metanarrative in the study of children's literature charts a progression from instruction—primarily didactic works—to delight—the fun and fancy of nonsense

and imagination. Recently in his study of children's book inscriptions and marginalia, Grenby challenges the instruction to delight metanarrative and notes,

> [F]or many young people, the content of a book was irrelevant, or at least only one element of a book's appeal. Their enjoyment of books was frequently material rather than textual. [. . .]. These consumers were not cowed by a book's didacticism, but enjoyed their books despite it. Or they subverted it, making the book an object of fun by mischievous annotation or incorporation into a game. If children were just as likely to gain pleasure from 'instructive' as 'delightful' books, the binary collapses, and with it the history of children's literature that is based upon it. (286-7)

In this way, Grenby helpfully states that this common account of the development of children's literature does not necessarily speak to the way in which readers experienced the texts. Additionally, though he finds many fine and persuasive examples in his research, in taking us to the "real" reader, Grenby reminds us of the limitations of our understanding of these readers. Such an acknowledgement can and should force critics and scholars to question the generalizations we make regarding works, such as didactic children's literature, which we find hard to imagine as pleasing reads.

The popularity and longevity of these works, if nothing else, should give scholars pause when they dismiss these texts in favor of those deemed more interesting. Not only prolific in number, Sherwood's texts most likely found their way into the nurseries of children who grew up to be authors and writers themselves. As Cutt speculates, "Can it be only coincidence that Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot, and Charles Kingsley were all children of Evangelical families who must have known Mrs. Sherwood's tales well?" (75). While Sherwood's version of *The Governess* initially eclipsed its originator, Charlotte Yonge brought Fielding's version back into print in 1870, suggesting this text had purchase even after the force of instruction in writing for children shifted to one of delight (39).

One strand of this chapter's argument has centered on the way in which attention to conceptions of the child as reader at work in these novels challenges our assumptions about didactic literature. Many histories of children's literature suggest an opposition between works aimed at instruction and those that promote entertainment and then posit a linear progression from one to the other. My analysis of the way in which these texts conceptualize the child's relationship to reading reveals a more complicated narrative and illuminates both the motivation for later fantasy texts and their connections with the early origins of children's literature. Fielding's version values the space between text and reader wherein interpretation may be practiced and judgment developed, whereas Sherwood fears this space to the extent that all reading for the child must point to a single interpretive end. If we take these two texts—given their prominence and endurance in the nursery—as markers in the seemingly stagnant instruction portion of the children's literature metanarrative, a challenge to the common narrative emerges from the texts themselves. While both versions share the motivation of using writing addressed at children as a means of education, they also reveal a significant shift in the way they figure the child as reader, such that two very different portraits of didactic children's reading emerge. Not only does this suggest that noting the variations in didactic work can offer a fuller picture of children's literature as it developed across the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it also provides one potential motivation for the flowering of fantasy literature in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Given that the child reader becomes more and more circumscribed by a narrowed vision of the reading process as well as a hierarchical relationship in which the adult acts as mediator between child and text, we may read later works as using the tools of fantasy to imagine and model a

relationship between reader and text that both echoes back to Fielding's figuration and reacts against that offered by Sherwood. Indeed, as Chapter Two will argue, not only does fantasy provide a landscape for the exercise of a child's interpretative judgment; it allows for an exploration what it means to be a reader and an author, as well.

CHAPTER II
THE POSSIBLITIES OF THE CHILD VOICE IN CAROLL AND MACDONALD

Writing on the subject of "Children's Literature of the Last Century" for *Macmillian* magazine in 1869, Charlotte Yonge pondered a growing publication phenomenon: "'Books for children,'—the press groans with their multitude" (229). If Sarah Fielding's 1749 *The Governess* emerged when the publishing industry of literature for children was in its infancy, Yonge's observation suggests that by 1869 this industry had grown into maturity. Indeed, many of the books now considered "classics" of children's literature appeared in print from the 1860s onward, including two defining works of the fantasy genre—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll and George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872).[38]

When compared to the imaginative adventures detailed by Carroll and MacDonald, Fielding's school story and the didactic texts that follow in its wake seem a world away.[39] And yet, it is in this same historical moment that Fielding's *The Governess* makes a return as part of Charlotte Yonge's *A Storehouse of Stories* (1870). In the Preface to this volume, Yonge suggests that these stories of a previous generation deserve a second look and calls previous criticism "unmerited contempt" (v). Yonge writes scathingly of overly didactic works in her history of children's literature a year before *Storehouse*'s publication: "To be overdone with moral is a fatal thing. To force events, even imaginary to illustrate some maxim is ruinous" (450). That Yonge holds this

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[38] In addition to authoring foundational texts for the genre of fantasy literature, MacDonald and Carroll shared a friendship, which John Docherty investigates in *The Literary Products of the Lewis Carroll – George MacDonald Friendship*. According to Docherty, the two men most likely met in 1858 and Dodgson soon became known as 'Uncle Dodgson' in the MacDonald family (4).

[39] Carroll's photography pursuits connected him with both MacDonald and Yonge. According to Derek Hudson's biography, "[I]n June, 1866, [Carroll] had the pleasure of meeting Charlotte Yonge [. . .] and of getting her likeness into one of his photograph albums" (139).

opinion and still finds value in Fielding's *The Governess* helpfully highlights the fact that not all didactic literature sits comfortably under the same label. Additionally, Yonge's instincts regarding those tales "specially worthy of preservation" proved accurate (v). The success of this volume of recovered tales was sufficient to motivate the publication of a second volume of similar tales in 1872.

The reintroduction of Fielding's *The Governess* in the late nineteenth-century literary marketplace a few years after *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and two years before *The Princess and the Goblin* may appear to be a historical coincidence. To the contrary, Yonge's inclusion of *The Governess* as worthy for her contemporary readers suggests an important connection between this early work of children's literature and its literary heirs. Against this backdrop of didactic literature and the reemergence of Fielding's portrait of the child reader, the fantasies of Carroll and MacDonald intersect with *The Governess* even as they stretch and challenge the boundaries of children's literature. Just as Fielding gives child voices a prominent place in her novel and in so doing suggests the value of their interpretations and conversations, so, too, do these later authors of fantasy invest in representations of the child's voice. No longer relegated to the schoolroom, the child characters pictured by Carroll and MacDonald journey into worlds where language becomes a tool of both play and power.

In this chapter, I follow the trail of child voices through the pages of Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin.* Because these novels figure prominently in the development of both children's literature and the genre of fantasy as a whole, they have garnered much critical attention from their original publication to our current moment. By reading the protagonists in these two

works—Carroll's Alice and MacDonald's Curdie and Irene—in terms of the relationship they figure between the child and language, this chapter counters a basic assumption that underwrites many critical readings of children's literature: that texts for child readers necessarily picture the child as an innocent Other destined to be the site of adult desire. Instead, set within the larger context of nineteenth-century didactic literature and emerging educational practices, the tools of fantasy allow these two authors to imagine child characters whose relationship to language both critiques and challenges contemporary understandings of the child voice. In other words, while adult readers may use these texts to fulfill their particular fantasies, the real power in these novels resides in the child characters' embodiment of children's learning and creative abilities.

A key approach through which this chapter assesses the imagined child voice of fantasy literature stems from the way in which both texts engage with voices of cultural authority. Though Carroll and MacDonald chart out different trajectories for their child protagonists in their respective fantasy landscapes—Alice eventually wakes to find her confusing experiences have simply been a dream while Curdie concludes the text as a triumphant hero in his world—they both invest much of the narrative energy in their child characters' potential to play with language. For Alice, this language play centers on experimenting with different voices of cultural authority, including the judgment of educational practices, the black and white framework of children's didactic fiction, and finally the unintentional nonsense creations rendered by her own voice. In reading Alice's seemingly ineffective responses to Wonderland as an unconscious parody that ventriloquizes the different tenors of these forms of cultural authority, we find it is not Alice but the prescriptive nature of education and didactic fiction that the text finds at

fault. Indeed, other scholars have noted that Carroll mocks traditional education throughout the text. However, I suggest that not only does he parody educational practices and didactic fiction; he offers in Alice's seeming naiveté a strategic challenge to the cultural mores of his day. In many ways, Curdie takes up the question of the potential authority of child voices with which Carroll's Wonderland critique culminates. Unhampered by the weight of Victorian educational practices, Curdie exercises the authority of his own voice via spontaneous poetry in order to defeat the goblins. In figuring original and self-generated poetry as a tool with the power to not only assist the child character but allow him to help others within the story world of the novel, MacDonald uses the freedom of a fantasy landscape to imagine what contemporary education authorities failed to realize—the validity of the child's imaginative creations.

Alice's Experimentation with Voices of Cultural Authority

The December 16, 1865 review of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* found in *The Athenaeum* concludes with this swift judgment upon Carroll's novel: "We fancy that any real child might be more puzzled than enchanted by this stiff over-wrought story" (544). Though the review seems to have missed its mark given the novel's success and endurance as a classic of children's literature, its dichotomy of reader response—either "puzzled" or "enchanted"—could be used describe the responses written by most "real" child readers of *Alice* who have grown into adults.[40] Enchanted readers delight in Carroll's wit and delve into the text for its manifold allusions, games, and play. Conversely, puzzled readers—here, I speak specifically of twentieth-century literary critics—find much amiss in Wonderland and read the text for Carroll's repressed

[40] Critical writing on *Alice in Wonderland* is so extensive that it would take a book-length study to survey it in its entirety. Therefore, I engage with those studies that seem most relevant to my discussion or figure most prominently in the larger critical conversation.

sexuality, oral aggression, and other puzzling, shocking, and perhaps downright dangerous desires funneled into this work.[41] Part of this turn in criticism of Carroll's writing stems from his real-life fascination with befriending and photographing young girls. Although no documentation of improper sexual relations with children exist, the photographs have become a critical launching point for arguments that see the representation of the child in his works in dark and troubled terms. However, in her recent analysis of Carroll's photography, Marah Gubar offers a different reading of both text and photo and the adult/child relationship they figure: "His child sitters are scripted—and sometimes, it seems, *con*scripted—partners in the process of producing art; their individuality most often manifests itself through resistance to the unseen stage manager" (109).[42] Taking a similar approach to his writing, Gubar encourages us to read Alice "not as an untouched Other but as a collaborator enmeshed in a complicated relationship with the adults who surround her" (95). Here, Gubar not only offers a viable alternative reading of the tension between adult and child in the novel, she also suggests we see the child as an active participant—in a complex and qualified way—rather than a passive object of desire.

Building upon Gubar's reading, my analysis of Carroll's *Alice* finds its impetus in a puzzling aspect of the work, namely Alice's multiple and ineffective attempts to make

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[41] For example, see James Kincaid's discussion in *Child-loving: the erotic child and Victorian Culture*, Nancy Armstrong's reading of oral aggression, and both Carina Garland and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas's discussions of the female body, among others. On the subject of aggression as manifested in the novel, I agree with Marah Gubar when she writes, "Carroll blames neither Alice nor the creatures for the aggression floating around in Wonderland. Instead, he represents it as a *relational* problem that dogs interaction between two unequal parties" (97). As in other moments, Gubar's challenge to these critics to see a more complicated push and pull between adult and child in the novel provides what I find to be the most encouraging and enlightening direction in recent Carroll criticism.

[42] This does not mean I believe we should ignore Carroll's puzzling interest in staging nude photographs of children. However, I believe that using the photos and child nudity as the only frame by which to read Alice can exclude significant aspects of the text that allow for what it models for the reader (i.e. something other than naked children).

sense of Wonderland. In turning my focus on Alice, I read the text not for the mysterious man behind the pseudonym but for the portrait of the child offered by the novel—all without falling prey to Wonderland's enchanting spell. When teaching this novel in an introductory general education literature class, I found many students responded to Alice's questioning of her own identity and talking to herself by asserting, "Alice must be schizophrenic." Such an anachronistic diagnosis does not go far in terms of interpretative payoff; however, the larger puzzle that motivates some students to make such a statement requires attention. What do we make of Alice's vocalized interior monologue and fluctuating sense of identity? Must we, as many critics do, read these as marks of the adult author's desire for and attempts at mastery over the child? Or can we read Alice's exploration of Wonderland as doing some other work than making her a victim or an empty site of desire?

For my part, I read Alice's fluctuations and confusions as the novel's attempt to imagine and dramatize the child's encounter with imaginative literature, an attempt that figures potential power for the child even as this dramatization poses challenges and questions. Against the nineteenth-century backdrop of educational conventions and children's reading, Alice becomes not only Wonderland's protagonist but its first reader, as well. That is to say Alice, faced with the confusing world and characters of Wonderland, must make interpretive judgment as she makes her way; readers following her adventure must do the same. Trained in the work of recitation and guided by the limited principles of didactic fiction, Alice asks questions and offers a multi-voiced response to the text of Wonderland. Indeed, Alice experiments with different voices of cultural authority in her responses to Wonderland, essentially trying them on for size just

as she experiments with alterations in physical size. Alice's speech can be understood as what Mikhail Bakhtin terms heteroglossia,[43] and I argue that these experiments with different authoritative voices drawn from Victorian culture allow the novel to picture a child whose reading has been shaped by the narrow forces of Victorian educational practice and didactic literature. By dramatizing the disjunction between these limited views of reading and the chaotic fantasy of Wonderland as focalized through Alice's experience, the novel creates a space for another voice to break through the otherwise dominating voices of cultural authority in Alice's speech, a child voice that figures the act of "reading" Wonderland with new creative potential.

The novel frames Alice's experimentations via the voice of a third-person omniscient narrator who speaks from a more experienced, adult perspective. This does not mean that Alice and her experiences come to the reader only through this narrator. Instead, the novel makes space for Alice to voice her interpretations and externally process her experience through a vocalized interior monologue. Thus, the novel does not describe to the reader what Alice thinks; it provides an opening for Alice to speak these thoughts aloud, directly to the reader. In other words, the novel gives Alice the opportunity to narrate and to interpret her own experiences by voicing her thought process, even as her words ultimately remain bounded by the commentary of the third-person narrator.

From its very opening, the novel self-consciously draws attention to its status as

[43] Here I draw on this term as Bakhtin outlines it in "Discourse in the Novel:" "[A]t any moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth given a bodily form" (291).

book and Alice's position as reader.[44] Unlike the tradition of didactic literature that would use these opening pages to call the reader to attention and study, Carroll's novel focuses on a child's own desires in the work of reading: "Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, 'and what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversations?'" (11).[45] The language of Alice's question parallels the language found in the larger debate concerning the "use of reading," particularly as manifest in didactic children's literature. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sarah Fielding tells her readers that they must ponder the proper use of reading as they enter into her novel. Though Alice's query about the use of reading echoes writers of didactic fiction, her question singles out quite a different set of priorities. Her observations about the insufficiency of her sister's reading material, devoid of "pictures and conversations," marks our child-reader protagonist as a spokesperson for a different kind of literature, one that facilitates the reader's enjoyment.[46]

Though Alice soon abandons her sister's wearisome book and slips down the rabbit hole, she does not abandon the work of reading altogether. One manifestation of Alice as reader emerges as Carroll repeatedly juxtaposes Alice's knowledge as gleaned

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[44] Beverly Lyon Clark points out that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a self-conscious book in that "it reminds the reader that he or she is reading a book" (38).

[45] All quotations are taken from Martin Gardner's *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition*.

[46] As discussed in the first chapter, child audiences may have encountered fantastical reading in their leisure time regardless of whether or not that reading material was intentionally aimed at a child audience. For example, chapbooks provided entertainment to a variety of different ages and classes. While many scholars consider *Alice* a foundational text in turning the tide from didactic children's literature to a literature more invested in whimsy and play, he was not the only author to employ fantasy in the middle of the century. Other fantasy works for children include John Ruskin's *The King of the Golden River* (1851), W.M. Thackery's *The Rose and the Ring*, and Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863).

from educational reading with the fantastical world of Wonderland—a juxtaposition that highlights the incompatibility of fact and fantasy. Alice's fall down the rabbit hole provides Carroll such an opportunity to highlight this disjunction, as the narrative details Alice's thought process when she is confronted with new and unexplained phenomena. For example, as Alice contemplates the depth of the hole and the number of miles to the center of the earth, Carroll's distinctive narrating voice offers a parenthetical comment that makes clear the sources of these remarks: "(for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the school-room, and though this was not a *very* good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over)" (13). Here, the narrator associates Alice's education not with practical knowledge that will help her make sense of her experiences but rather with a means to "show off." If this passage left any question in the reader's mind concerning the utility and benefit of Alice's education, the narrator's final comment, given after Alice begins voicing observations regarding latitude and longitude, makes clear that her education, or her understanding of it, fails her in this moment. Making an additional parenthetical remark, the narrator reveals, "(Alice had not the slightest idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but she thought they were nice grand words to say)" (13). Similarly, Alice attempts to prove her identity by reciting multiplication tables and geography facts, though neither category of knowledge provides her the reinforcement she craves. These early remarks set the stage for continuing conflict in the novel: conflict that results from the inadequacy of an education based on recitation and memorization.

While these asides to the reader create humor in the text, they also provide

important commentary on the educational policies of the novel's contemporary historical moment. Unlike Fielding's vision of conversation and communal learning, the education of the mid-nineteenth century focused on rote learning and examination rather than comprehension and application.[47] Just a few years prior to the novel's publication, standards for evaluating and funding elementary schools supported by government money shifted with the passage of the 1862 Revised Code. Specifically, the code made the amount of subsidy each school received dependent on the number of pupils who passed or failed the examination—an examination that tested a student's ability to memorize text rather than think critically or independently.[48] In a narrative that echoes many discussions of twenty-first century American education, growing government interest and investment in education put pressure on those who called for more funding to produce concrete ways of measuring educational outcomes. For educational authorities, examinations and the rewards offered to those who excelled promised a means both to encourage student attendance and to measure student, teacher, and institutional performance. As Richard Altick notes, "The result was that a new premium was put upon rote memory, for throughout the year every effort was bent toward grinding into the child the sentences or the facts that the inspector might demand of him" (157). Read in this context, Alice's interest in "showing off" and belief that "still it was good practice to

[47] Though Britain did not see the advent of state-funded compulsory education until after 1870, the legislative changes that occurred between Fielding's portrait of a governess and Carroll's child-reader Alice did result in significant changes in that direction. 1833 saw the first government grant for education. The rising costs of the exchequer grants to schools—from 20,000 in 1833 to 837,000 in 1859—prompted the 1858 New Castle Commission. The report given by this commission in 1861, which detailed significant issues in both education and attendance, prompted the passage of the 1862 Revised Code.

[48] David Wardle describes the "payment by results" approach of the 1862 Revised Code: "A basic grant was paid for any child who attended a fixed number of times in a year. Further grants were paid for any children, qualified by attendance, who passed examinations in any of the three 'R's. Pupils were tested in a higher 'standard' each year, a narrowly defined syllabus being laid down by the Education Department for each standard" (69).

say it over" embodies a view of knowledge influenced by a particular pedagogical philosophy that espoused the regurgitation of facts as evidence of learning.

In his study of two centuries of British Education, David Wardle notes that before this legislation some educators had moved toward a "child-centered method"—more akin to Fielding's vision—where education focused on the child as a person rather than on a mechanical view of teaching subjects. However, such small steps in the direction of a child-centered method were halted by the passing of the Revised Code:

> Concentration upon the three 'R's was obtained at the expense of narrowing the elementary school curriculum so that even the tentative experiments in advanced work which had appeared since 1846 were abandoned, while the examination system was based upon a confusion of information with education which rendered the results almost meaningless. (69)

At stake in this "confusion of education with information" was not simply an issue of funding for schools but a larger view of the potentials of education. The legislative decision to elevate rote learning in the hopes of producing empirical data came at a cost. As Dinah Birch persuasively argues in her study of Victorian education, "If knowledge becomes nothing more than a pile of unconnected facts, its liberating potential will be lost" (9-10). This shifting landscape of British education provides one viable context for understanding Alice's attempts to appropriate the cultural authority of memorized facts in her attempts to make sense of Wonderland. It is not Alice who has failed in these moments; rather, education has failed Alice. At stake in the novel's portrait of Alice is how such an education shapes a child's ability to process those aspects of life that cannot be boiled down to a fact or figure.

From this historical context, we see that Alice approaches the gap between her understanding and her surroundings by echoing the view of knowledge popularized by a

particular pedagogical philosophy of the time. When Alice ventriloquizes this pedagogy, she both highlights the limitations of this view of education and figures her relationship to text as something other than a carefree reader indulging in fantasy for pure pleasure. Alice's impulsive leap into the rabbit hole conveys her desire to escape her world, but her success at this escape is limited. As Joanne Nystrom Janssen argues, "Education and learning haunt *Alice in Wonderland*, in spite of the fact that Alice escapes their necessity when she enters the alternate world" (109). Alice's recitation of geographical facts and conversation with the Mock Turtle about "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision" mark the schoolroom and its lessons as one of the novel's key preoccupations (98).

The ideological standpoint of contemporary pedagogical philosophy, however, is not the only voice Alice adopts as she moves throughout Wonderland. She also attempts to read Wonderland through the lens of didactic children's fiction. For example, after falling down the rabbit hole, Alice ponders the proper response to the "DRINK ME" bottle's imperative command. In this moment, Alice reflects on what fictional child characters would do in this situation. She feels pleased with herself because she knows to check for a poison label, having gleaned this cautious approach from "several nice little stories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts, and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them" (17). In terming these tales "nice little stories," the novel's third-person omniscient narrator[49] makes an ironic observation that contemporary writing for children—"nice" writing—focuses on gruesome and disturbing scenes in the name of

[49] In this way, the narrative structure exemplifies a common characteristic found in much of children's literature wherein the child characters' experiences and voices are framed by an adult third-person narrator. For more on these structures, see Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult.*

teaching children "simple rules" (17). Indeed, Alice's preoccupation throughout the text with creating and adopting new rules for behavior—and her frustration when no one she encounters abides by the rules of Victorian society—accords with the overarching world view of nineteenth-century didactic children's literature. Rules must be followed or children receive the ultimate punishment—death.

In the vast sea of Carroll literary criticism, a few scholars have explored the intertextual references to didactic children's literature within *Alice in Wonderland*. Ronald Reichertz notes that even at the early age of 13, Carroll experimented with parodies of morally didactic texts in the Dodgson family magazines (28). Similarly, Donald Rackin focuses on *Alice* as a work of satire and notes that one of its "main targets [. . .] is a prevalent trend in nineteenth century literature," namely "the didactic, moralistic manner of the bulk of nineteenth-century children's literature" (244). Though Carroll does not explicitly integrate Mary Martha Sherwood's work into his parodies, Rackin calls her works "part of the standard fare for children in middle-class homes throughout England" and connects Alice's gruesome portrait of "simple rules" to the kind of writing for children that Sherwood exemplified (251). Catherine Robson echoes this point in her study of poetry within the *Alice* books, writing, "[T]he repeatedly reprinted *Fairchild Family* [by Mary Martha Sherwood] is a particularly appropriate text to place alongside the *Alice* books, for it seems highly likely that Carroll has this story and its tiresome cousins in sight" (99). Taken together, these remarks underline the way in which Carroll's work should be read as in conversation with didactic children's literature

even as it moves away from them through its use of fantastical elements.[50] These studies helpfully illuminate those connections to didactic fiction that may be lost through the passage of time as these didactic works are no longer "standard fare." Indeed, Carroll's threads of didacticism and parody work to portray his protagonist as a reader whose tastes and experiences have been shaped directly by her reading of didactic fiction. In turn, the novel creates a connection between Alice's confusion in her attempts to make sense of Wonderland and the limited body of fictional texts on which she draws to interpret her new situation.

By figuring Alice as a reader whose worldview has been shaped by didactic children's literature, Carroll creates links among reading, interpretation, and self-knowledge. A key feature of Alice's experience in Wonderland stems from the way in which the fantasy landscape forces her to question and explore her own identity. After a second encounter with the white rabbit, Alice meditates on her present experience:

> Dear, dear! How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?' Ah, *that's* the great puzzle! (22-3)

In this passage, Alice demonstrates how the change in her external environment leads her to question her own identity. Taken from a world where her age and status lead to a fixed identity that her external reality continually confirms, she cannot help but wonder whether or not she "changed in the night." While these moments in Alice's adventure disorient her and even bring her to tears, the question she voices here concerning identity reveals an important shift in the way this novel imagines the child's interaction with the

[50] Beverly Lyon Clark briefly speculates on the parodies of education and didactic fiction in *Alice*: "[P]erhaps Carroll's satire of the didacticism of previous children's literature cleared a niche for the new kind of children's literature he wanted to write" ("Lewis" 50).

landscape of fantasy. Where didactic fiction in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century sought not only to tell the child who he or she was but to cultivate a particular kind of improved child as a result of right reading, the fantasy of this novel does the exact opposite. Instead of presenting Alice with a particular identity, the novel opens up the space for her to question and explore. Though these moments of exploration do not necessarily fill Alice with pleasure, the novel presents "the great puzzle" as worthy of a child's time and energy (23).

Because the question of identity figures so prominently in the text, many critics land on identity, particularly as represented by Alice's physical size changes, as the lynchpin of their arguments. Often these arguments center on the adult author's manipulation of the child—specifically, the female child's—body. Carina Garland exemplifies this approach when she writes that the *Alice* books are "all about [. . .] the often spiteful attempts of the male author to suppress and control Alice's agency so that Carroll can desire and own her" (22). Garland connects the eating and drinking in the *Alice* books with Carroll's own controlled approach to food and notes that he expressed disgust regarding women and girls who ate with a lusty appetite. Admittedly, Alice's initial experiences with eating and drinking and rapid size change come as a result of her assent to the imperative labels "Eat me" and "Drink me," but this is not the case for all of her shifts in size within the text. As with her appropriation and vocalization of cultural authority, Alice experiments freely with growing and shrinking in an attempt to reach her own ends. After her encounter with the pigeon wherein the bird accuses her of being a serpent because of her unusually long neck, Alice returns to her normal size and reflects on changes in her physical body: "[She] began talking to herself, as usual, 'Come, there's

half *my plan* done now! How puzzling all these changes are! I'm never sure what I'm going to be, from one minute to another! However, I've got back to my right size, the next is, to get into that beautiful garden" [emphasis added] (48-9). In calling these changes "my plan," Alice takes ownership of both her body and its alterations. As Nina Auerbach notes, "Although her size changes seem arbitrary and terrifying, she in fact directs them; only in the final courtroom scene does she change size without first wishing to, and there, her sudden growth gives her the power to break out of a dream that has become too dangerous" (35). Though Alice's active role in her size changes do not negate the adult author's position as creator of her character, they do provide a point of resistance against reading her solely as an object of desire. Additionally, they provide a parallel to her attempts to channel the authority of educational practice and didactic fiction in that all of the instances show Wonderland as a crucible for the child's experimentation.

In growing and shrinking at will, Alice subverts expectations and definitions of what a child is or should be and suggests that power for such subversion exists in fantasy landscapes. While size is not the sole marker of childhood vs. adulthood, it often provides one way of categorizing and noting difference between the two states. The language play on maturation that surrounds Alice's size changes—conflations of physical largeness and age—creates an opportunity for Alice to unsettle attempts to categorize her as a child and creates a space for the exploration of her own identity. When Alice enters the White Rabbit's home, she finds an unmarked bottle and decides to drink it with the belief that "*something* interesting is sure to happen" (38). Alice's previous changes in size were instigated by the objects' imperative commands to eat or drink—commands

that seem to place her in a passive position. Her drinking in this scene, however, connects explicitly to her own active desires for growth and change. Speaking to herself and thus to the reader, Alice comments, "I do hope it'll make me grow large again, for really I'm quite tired of being such a tiny little thing" (38). Outside Wonderland children must remain "tiny little thing[s]" until the passage of time changes their circumstances and until then their small stature effectively defines their status as a child for all to see. Inside Wonderland, the child may play with size and in so doing evade easy classification—a classification that may be difficult or impossible to evade in the reality of Alice's Victorian moment.

In this particular moment, Alice realizes her desire to "grow large again" on a grand scale, such that the house cannot contain her expanding limbs (38). Her reflection on these changes affords a moment where language play makes for humor and possibility. Rather than a victim of the adult author's cruelty, Alice emerges as a collaborator[51] and active participant:

> I almost wish I hadn't gone down the rabbit-hole—and yet—and yet—it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what *can* have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one! There ought to be a book written about me, that there ought! And when I grow up, I'll write one—but I'm grown up now, [. . .] at least there's no room to grow up any more *here*." (39)

Beyond the word play on growing up/being a grown up, this moment becomes one in which Alice suggests another active role for herself—that of author. Alice's size is so great that she is trapped in a house and soon to be threatened by other characters' plans to pull her out of the window and burn the house down around her. While arguably a

[51] I find Gubar's framing of adult/child or author/character relationships in terms of collaboration helpful here.

moment of crisis for our young protagonist, it is also a moment where crisis pushes her to reconsider her own position. Rather than reading her situation through the lens of didactic children's literature, Alice brings her reading of fairy tales to bear on her current predicament. Where the lens of didacticism prompts Alice to meditate on rules and punishment, the lens of imaginative literature inspires her to make the leap to authorship. So extraordinary are her circumstances that she finds they are worthy of retelling, and she imagines herself, if just for a moment, in the position of author.

Though Alice does not write down her tale while in Wonderland, she does take on a creative and dynamic relationship with existing texts though her recitation. The voices of cultural authority that Alice experiments with in earlier moments—that of educational philosophy and didactic children's literature—are exposed as an inadequate means of understanding and of taking action within Wonderland. In attempting to list geographical terms or devise rules, Alice highlights the shortfall of an education limited to facts and guidelines. A key facet of education as defined both by the 1862 Revised Code and by didactic literature as exemplified by Sherwood and others is the transmission model of reading. Instead of conceptualizing reading as a dynamic process—what Peter Hollindale terms the "reading event" —the transmission model attempts to impress the lesson, be it moral or factual, upon the child. In this model, memorization and recitation become the standard for testing that correct transmission and internalization has taken place. According to Robson, "[m]emorized poetry was important because of its religious and moral aspect: the individual, both in childhood and in later life, would be guided, improved, and comforted by the principles and sentiments stored within" (7). Within Wonderland, Alice's attempts to be "guided, improved, and comforted" fail because she

cannot complete her recitation correctly. However, even as she fails by the standards set up outside of Wonderland, her recitations succeed at voicing a creative and dynamic relationship between the child reader and text.

Alice turns to her mental store of memorized poetry in moments where the external circumstances of Wonderland call into question her very sense of self. Such a scene occurs when the Caterpillar voices the question that has plagued Alice since she fell down the rabbit hole: "Who are *you*?" (47). Where Alice's own discussion of her uncertainty regarding her identity reveals the extent to which she relies on external forces to define her sense of self, the caterpillar's question furthers her uncertainty because it is an external influence that explicitly poses the question to her. It is one thing for Alice to raise the question to herself; it is another to have a fantastical creature confirm the validity of such a question. Alice's shy, stuttering response demonstrates her growing confusion: "I—I hardly know, Sir, just at present—at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then" (47). Unsatisfied by such a response, the Caterpillar demands, in the manner of an adult chastising a child, "Explain yourself!" (41). Here, the novel plays with this common phrase, usually an imperative sentence demanding that the addressee clarify a matter of speech or behavior. However, Alice interprets this as an ontological question, replying, "'I ca'n't explain *myself*, I'm afraid, Sir,' said Alice, 'because I'm not myself, you see'" (47). As in earlier moments, Alice turns to memorization in order to provide evidence as to her character, with the caterpillar assigning the prompt of "You are old, Father William." This attempt at recitation proves yet another failure and her judge, the Caterpillar, informs her that her recitation is incorrect. However, the visual depiction of

the language leads the reader to a different conclusion altogether. Because the novel includes Alice's entire recitation and four illustrations rendering her unique poetic vision in image as well as word, this failure of memorization emerges as a triumph in its creativity. Even as Alice figures her incorrect recitation as passive rather than active—noting "some of the words have got altered" (45)—the novel nonetheless provides us a vision of a child's interaction with language that challenges reading as a simple transmission.

Additionally, in this moment the variety of voices Alice employs throughout the text—pedagogical philosophy, didactic children's writing, and creative child voice—intersect with surprising results. Through the act of recitation, the novel places Alice once more in the schoolroom and subject to the evaluative procedures popularized by the 1862 Revised Code. The Caterpillar's prompt, "You are old, Father William," identifies the text Alice attempts to recite as Robert Southey's "The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them" (1799). Southey's didactic poem pictures a young man's conversation with father William, wherein the young interlocutor seeks to know the secret to the old man's health and happiness. The old man's responses invoke lessons of prudence and religious faith and emphasize that these are lessons the young man must also learn. In choosing such a text for inspiration, the Caterpillar's request builds a clear connection between the narrow view of education offered by the memorization and recitation model and the didactic texts that offer the child little in the way of imagination and creativity. It is in this moment, then, where Alice voices an original, if personally alarming, parody of the poem. Her version, which depicts Southey's wise old man standing on his head and somersaulting around despite his large belly, reveals a flaw in the transmission model.

Reading and even memorization, as shown by Alice in the moment, are unstable processes that leave open the possibility for the reader to respond and to recreate the original text in unsettling and potentially empowering ways. It is this possibility for generative play with language that MacDonald takes up in his portrait of the child a few years later.

Child-Poet as Hero

Published in 1872, George MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* tells the story of a young princess named Irene, a twelve year-old miner named Curdie,[52] and the goblins that threaten to emerge from their underground home and wreak havoc on the kingdom of the humans. Unlike in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, MacDonald eschews framing his fantasy as a dream world and instead imagines a self-contained fantasy world with both a past and a future. The kingdom's past, namely the history of how the goblin creatures found their way underground and devolved into malicious beings devoid of creative instinct, features prominently in the narrative. In the present, the reader follows Irene's journey up a mysterious staircase to meet with her great-great-grandmother, a character whose existence and supernatural abilities place Irene in a vexing position.[53] This wise-woman figure offers Irene council and also provides her a magical thread, which when followed allows Irene to rescue Curdie from the goblins' clutches. Curdie, who first rescues Irene from the goblins in the woods, finds himself requiring this assistance after tunneling into the goblins' home and overhearing their

[52] MacDonald's choice of a miner as a hero suggests a fluid understanding of the dynamics between birth and worth in this novel. For further discussion of social class, see Osama Jarrar's work on MacDonald and middle-class ideology.

[53] In further instances, I will adopt the practice of the novel itself in referring to Irene's great-great-grandmother as simply her grandmother.

plans to capture Irene and wed her to their own prince. Though Irene successfully saves Curdie from the goblins by following her grandmother's magic thread, she cannot convince him of her grandmother's existence. It is only after Curdie learns to believe that he can follow the thread himself. The novel concludes with the goblins foiled in their plot, in large part due to Curdie's heroism, and the goblins' own tunneling exploits result in the destruction of their underground home.

By placing his child characters in a fantasy world set apart from our own, MacDonald creates an economy of magic that allows words new potency and the children who utter them a degree of power. Narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, the novel makes space for the child voice through its integration of poetry and prose. MacDonald endows his hero Curdie with a gift for spontaneous verse and a faith in the efficacy of his poetry. In this fantasy world, verse becomes a potent weapon against the goblins and allows a young boy to take on creatures who would otherwise overpower him. Though Curdie often takes center stage as hero and poet, the young princess Irene also speaks words of power when "telling stories" of her grandmother, stories that have the potential to call the listener out of doubt and into belief (145). Placed alongside *Alice* in the larger context of educational policy and didactic children's literature, we may read MacDonald's faith in the power of children's voices not only as a critique of education but as an alternative vision for what an investment in imagination offers the child.

Because of MacDonald's own historical position as a minister who lasted just a few years in the pulpit before leaving his congregation,[54] his handling of belief and faith

[54] MacDonald served as a Congregationalist minister in Arundel from 1850-53. The Congregationalists were a nonconformist religious group who, according to the 1851 census, were more numerous than Baptists, but less in number than Methodists. Though placed in a Congregationalist pulpit, MacDonald's preaching articulated unorthodox positions, particularly in relation to damnation and the

within a fantasy context leads critics to focus on the role of religion in the novel.[55] MacDonald was raised in the tradition of Scottish Calvinism, a theological tradition with strong ties to Mary Martha Sherwood's religious viewpoint (Pinsent 138). However, as even the briefest comparison between the two authors' writing for children reveals, MacDonald moved away from strong Calvinist convictions in his adulthood. Kerry Dearborn writes of this theological shift: "In contrast to his Calvinist training, he came to see that God's grace in creation and redemption was more determinative ultimately than the fall. Human depravity was no longer the defining reality of life and faith" (18). Human depravity so defines Sherwood's worldview that she cannot offer her child readers any alternative interpretive lens than that which confirms for them their own sinfulness. Though MacDonald's religious beliefs shape how he imagines and represents his child characters' relationships to language, he pictures the children's language abilities as full of potential rather than danger.[56]

When placed alongside MacDonald's nonfiction writing on imagination, the stakes of the child's relationship to language and belief emerge as a significant concern for his authorship, specifically in the context of educational practices that devalue the

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eternal life of animals, and led to division within the congregation. As Elizabeth Sainsbury notes, "A certain section of the congregation had taken exception to George's preaching about the final destiny of unbelievers. He implied that their fate was not irrevocably determined on the day of their death but that they might yet obtain salvation after a sojourn in purgatory" (57).

[55] See Lesley Willis for a discussion of biblical texts in comparison to *The Princess and the Goblin*. For a fuller account of theology in MacDonald's writing see Kerry Dearborn's *Baptized Imagination: The Theology of George MacDonald* and Bonnie Gaarden's *The Christian Goddess: Archetype and Theology in the Fantasies of George MacDonald*.

[56] In his study of MacDonald's *At the Back of the North Wind*, William Gray attends to the combination of theology and Romanticism found in his writing: "MacDonald's veneration of the child is not merely the expression of some generalized Romantic privileging of childhood; rather it is a specific theological point" (40). For MacDonald, "God himself is childlike" and as a result, childlikeness does not only exist in a certain temporal space which adults can access only through the forces of nostalgia and desire (40).

child's own creative output. In "The Imagination: Its Function and Its Culture," MacDonald frames his entire essay in terms of the problems of education:

> There are those in whose notion education would seem to consist in the production of a certain repose through the development of this and that faculty, and the depression, if not eradication, of this and that other faculty. But if mere repose were the end in view, an unsparing depression of all the faculties would be the surest means of approaching it [. . .]. (1)

Instead of the "repose" described above, MacDonald argues that the end of education should be "a noble unrest, an ever renewed awaking from the dead, a ceaseless questioning of the past for the interpretation of the future, an urging on of the motions of life" (1). MacDonald frames his discussion of imagination in terms of a concern that contemporary education stresses passivity over activity. In so doing, he ties his views of proper education directly to the work of the imagination and to his fantasy writing. Later in the essay, MacDonald parrots his objectors' fear that "wild fancies" damage "young people" in order to offer a passionate response: "[Y]ou would rectify the matter by smothering the young monster at once—because he has wings, and, young to use, flutters them about in a way discomposing to your nerves, and destructive to those notions of propriety of which this creature—you stop not to inquire whether angel or pterdoactyle—has not yet learned even of their existence" (26). This passage both speaks to his view on human depravity—implicitly he suggests we see the child as "angel" rather than "pterodactyle"—and his larger conception of the creative potential generated by a child's imagination. MacDonald ardently argues that instead of hampering a child's "wild fancies," educators should be in the business of nourishing and encouraging a child's imaginative potential: "Seek not that your sons and your daughters should not dream dreams; seek that they should see true visions, that they should dream noble dreams"

(30). Put in the context of the educational policies discussed earlier in the chapter that emphasized rote memorization and recitation over understanding, MacDonald's concern for imagination emerges not only as a critique of current educational processes but as a positive model for an education that values the child's creative abilities.

Additionally, MacDonald articulates a view of the relationship between reading and imagination that suggests we read his child figures as more than entertaining characters and instead as important models for the child reader's own relationship to language and imagination. Like didactic authors, MacDonald suggests that reading acts formatively for the child, and because of this formative impact, care must be given to what and how the child reads:

> In books, we not only have store of all results of the imagination, but in them, as in her workshop, we may behold her embodying before our very eyes, in music of speech, in wonder of words, till her work, like a golden dish set with shining jewels, adorned by the hands of the cunning workmen, stands finished before us. In this kind, then, the best must be set before the learner, that he may eat and not be satisfied; for the finest products of the imagination are of the best nourishment for the beginnings of that imagination. (38)

Unlike earlier authors of didactic texts, such as Sherwood, who feared that fantasy would have a negative impact on the child reader's moral formation, MacDonald sees imaginative reading material as key to the child's development.[57] In another essay titled "The Fantastic Imagination"(1893), MacDonald speaks more directly from the perspective of an author of children's fantasy literature and directly counters the didactic emphasis on the importance of a single interpretive end. MacDonald says of reading and

[57] In making the comparison to Sherwood's didactic fiction, I do not mean to suggest that MacDonald's fiction is not at all in the didactic tradition. Like other fantasy writers such as Kingsley and Nesbit, MacDonald's writing for children does imply that lessons can and should be learned from reading. Instead, I set up this distinction between early nineteenth-century didactic writing and MacDonald's fantasy to illustrate the important role imagination (decried by authors like Sherwood) plays in reading and the making of meaning in fantasy texts—texts that may ultimately have an instructional aim.

the making of meaning, "Everyone, however, who feels the story, will read its meaning after his own nature and development: one man will read one meaning in it, another will read another" (316). Meaning, for MacDonald, exists between reader and text, rather than in the text itself, and requires the reader to be an active participant. If we take seriously MacDonald's claims of the reading process as a "workshop" for imagination, then the way in which he figures his child characters' own creative abilities takes on deeper resonance in that he offers child readers models for their own imaginative potential.

Such a positive vision of the capability of children within a fantasy setting has not escaped the criticism leveled at other works for children, including Carroll's *Alice* books, regarding the adult-child relationship they manifest. Recently, Maria Nikolajeva takes a heterological approach to MacDonald's writings for children and argues that his adult narrator works to create the child as Other—"the perfect image of lost and irretrievable purity" (90). While I agree with Nikolajeva in that MacDonald sees in his child characters the possibility of redemptive promise, I disagree that he enshrines childhood as a separate sphere for the play of adult desire. Instead of separation and desire, the adult/child relationship facilitated by the text activates the child reader's participation in the reading process. Roderick McGillis takes this latter view of MacDonald's work: "stories for children are spoken from an adult point of view which demands the child puzzle and think as he or she reads" (Introduction 6). Macdonald imagines Curdie as a collaborator and coconspirator whose language play exists alongside that of the adult voice of the narrator. What's more, unlike the narrator who can only frame and describe,

Curdie's words are not idle. Rather, they have a shaping force within the world of the text.

Additionally, McGillis draws attention to MacDonald's notion of "childlike," a term that signified MacDonald's own understanding of the audience of his writing: "His readership, MacDonald declares, is the childlike of whatever age. 'Childlike' in this context means open to new experience, nonjudgmental, and dispossesive" (14).[58] Where many words for children and childhood operate in terms of a binary—humans who are not adults or the opposite of adulthood—Macdonald's use of childlike attempts to resist the separation between child and adult that such binaries necessitate. Rather than situating childhood as a nostalgic site of desire, MacDonald endows his characters with a generative relationship to language, a relationship that speaks to "childlike" qualities he sees as common to all of humanity. Imaginative writing of the best kind, according to MacDonald, facilitates not escapism but a workshop for the imagination, which he believes is vital to the development of adults and children alike.

Though I argue that MacDonald figures his child characters with special attention to their positive deployment of language, I also recognize that the narrator's adult voice plays an essential role in how the novel frames its child characters, particularly in the original 1872 edition.[59] Unlike the "New Edition" issued by Blackie & Sons in 1888—the edition that subsequent "unabridged" editions draw on (including the most recent Puffin Classics printing)—the 1872 edition includes three sections that use italics to

[58] McGillis draws on "The Fantastic Imagination" to make this claim.

[59] All quotations from *The Princess and the Goblin* are cited from the 1872 edition.

figure a conversation between author and imagined child reader early on in the text.[60] The first italics section, which opens the first chapter, stages a conversation between the author and his reader wherein he explains that the book centers on the figure of a princess because he believes "every little girl is a princess" (5). The second italics section occurs when the novel introduces Irene's grandmother as an old woman sitting at a spinning wheel in a tower. As with the opening remarks of the first chapter, MacDonald does not hesitate to frame this moment as an imagined conversation with the implied reader in which the child questioner's comments interrupt the progress of the narrative: "Oh, Mr. Editor! I know the story you are going to tell: it's The Sleeping Beauty; only you're spinning too, and making it longer" (14). The narrator responds to the reader's comment regarding the story's originality by clarifying, "[T]his is not a fairy story; but a goblin story. [. . .] It is quite a new one, I assure you, and I will try to tell you it as prettily as I can" (15). Though removed from subsequent editions, this conversation provides vital evidence as to the way in which MacDonald imagines, or perhaps hopes, that his child readers will interact with his fantasy writing. By including questions from the child reader, MacDonald figures reading as an active process, one where the reader brings her prior reading experiences as well as narrative desires to bear on the work being read. Secondly, in making a direct connection between the "princess" character and the "princess" reader, MacDonald reveals that despite the fantasy world of the text, he intends for his portrait to speak to the reality of the child reader's lived experience. Thus,

[60] One probable explanation for the deletion of these sections emerges from the incongruity between the female child audience pictured in these reader and author conversations and the hero and heroine combination of Curdie and Irene. By deleting this discussion of princesses and fairy tales, which frames the novel as one for female readers, the novel could presumably target a broader audience of readers, both male and female.

in his child characters we see not only imagined child figures of fantasy but models for the child reader's own relationship to language and power.

As the hero of the novel, Curdie has a special relationship to language that allows him power within the text and offers an implicit critique of educational practices that rely on memorization rather than creation of poetry. Carroll's critique of these educational practices takes shape in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* through explicit enactments of these practices when Alice recites facts and poetry within the novel. Because MacDonald places his characters in a fantasy world cut off from our own, his critique of education operates more implicitly through his portrait of creativity's heroic triumph set against the degeneration and corruption that comes hand in hand with the loss of generative powers of language. It is in the contrast between Curdie's poetic prowess and the goblins' terror of his spontaneous verse that a critique of contemporary education emerges in the novel.

Curdie's creative prowess takes center stage in the first scene when he meets the young princess Irene in a moment of distress as she and her nurse are set upon by goblins. Both the efficacy granted Curdie's poetry by the novel and the narrative conversation that frames it set this single creative act inside a larger narrative that parallels MacDonald's critique of contemporary education. After his song, the goblins flee and Curdie explains the method behind his jolly tune: "They can't bear singing, and they can't sing that song. They can't sing for themselves, for they have no more voice than a crow; and they don't like other people to sing" (35). According to Curdie's analysis, the goblins detest his song because they have no capability for this kind of creativity and thus cannot abide it in others.

Before this encounter, the narrator makes certain to detail the goblins' history to the reader and explain that they are a species whose way of life provides an example of devolution. The narrator details how their underground lives had reshaped them in both physical appearance and mental attitude: "As they grew misshapen in body, they had grown in knowledge and cleverness, and now were able to do things no mortal could see the possibility of. But as they grew in cunning, they grew in mischief" (9). The goblins' lack of voice can be traced back to their decision to live underground and the devolution that follows. MacDonald suggests in his essay "The Imagination" (1883) that through education and suppression adults have lost the capability for imagination, and he provides this as an explanation for their drive to suppress it in young children, a drive he suggests is sorely mistaken. We can see in his portrait of the goblins the representation of the dangers of oppressive education, wherein imagination is buried "underground." Devoid of the ability to imagine and create in this way, the goblins grew intolerant of such capacity in others. Poetry, then, emerges as essential to maintaining one's humanity.

Where Carroll's protagonist experiments with voices of cultural authority in a manner that reveals their inadequacy, MacDonald's protagonist experiments with a sense of voice that comes from an internal authority of self rather than an external authority of culture through poetry. While Curdie's initial explanation to Irene suggests that it is music and song that the goblins fear, the narrator soon clarifies that it is truly "verse" they "despise" (47). In turn, this distinction frames Curdie's abilities as tied to language and links the creative genius of poetry to his ability to achieve heroic deeds:

> [T]he chief defense against them was verse, for they hated verse of every kind, and some kinds they could not endure at all. I suspect they could not make any themselves, and that was why they dislike it so much. At all events, those who were most afraid of them were those who could neither

> make verses themselves, nor remember the verses that other people made for them; while those who were never afraid were those who could make verses for themselves; for although there were certain old rhymes which were very effectual, yet it was well known that a new rhyme, if of the right sort, was even more distasteful to them, and therefore more effectual in putting them to flight. (47)

In framing their true distaste for verse and suggesting that while some old verses have power the most effective verses are an original work of the speaker or singer, the novel reveals that original works of poetry are the most efficacious method to fend off a goblin attack. Furthermore, by viewing Curdie's works as verses (rather than silly songs), the novel figures him as a child bard, a poet possessing a unique imaginative spark.

Given Nikolajeva's critique of child as Other in the novel, this connection between childhood creativity and poetic genius may initially suggest support for her claim. Many scholars of children's literature point to the Romantic poets' use of the child figure as a site to project their own desires concerning innocence and a connection to nature—the same characteristics that the Romantics maintained gave rise to poetic genius.[61] However, a look at the substance of these verses, so lauded in the space of the text for their efficacy in driving away goblins, reveals that they speak less to the ideals of Romantic visions of the child and more to the rhymes of childhood play. For example, Curdie overhears the goblins' plot to capture Irene while in the mine, and he accidentally reveals himself and faces a crowd of angry goblins as a result of trying to learn more. Showing no fear, "Curdie bethought himself and began to rhyme" (121). The rhyme, which alternates counting by tens and offering insults to his foes, disturbs the goblins enough to give Curdie the space he needs to go on the offensive: "The goblins fell back a

[61] Here Wordsworth's use of the child figure comes to mind in *The Prelude* and "We Are Seven." For more on the construction of childhood in Romantic poetry, see Judith Plotz's *Romanticism and the Vocation of Childhood.*

little when he began, and made horrible grimaces all through the rhyme, as if eating something so disagreeable that it set their teeth on edge and gave them the creeps; but whether it was that the rhyming words were most of them no words at all, for a new rhyme being considered more efficacious, Curdie had made it up on the spur of the moment" (122). Not only is the rhyme original to Curdie, he also plays liberally with language and creates new, nonsense words as a result, including "Forty, fifty, sixty---/Beast and man so misty!" and "Eighty, ninety, hundred;/Altogether dundred!" (121-122). Far from meeting any adult ideals of poetic genius, Curdie's rhymes combine observations from his everyday experience with a playful view of language not bound by rules of usage or definition. Instead of locating adult poetic prowess in the figure of the child, MacDonald crafts a child poet of childlike poetry, and in so doing suggests that creative verse can have power in a child's life, even if it would appear rough or silly to the adult ear.

While Irene does not possess Curdie's gift for poetic composition and performance, she takes on a different role that suggests another dimension to the significance of child voices in the novel. Because of her experiences with her grandmother, Irene becomes a herald or messenger, one whom many people will not believe. After having spent the night in her grandmother's tower, Irene returns to her room suddenly via her grandmother's magic, an arrival that causes nurse Lootie to be angry with her. Lootie maintains that Irene intentionally deceived her into thinking she was lost. When Irene denies this, Lootie responds, "Don't tell stories" (166). Though Lootie uses the term stories to signify lying, such a declaration plays on Irene's role as storyteller within the novel. In this moment, the novel places readers on Irene's side and

suggests that adults may be quick to judge and discount a child's words, for readers, unlike Lootie, know the vital import of Irene's account.

Gifted with experiences that seem beyond the comprehension of those around her, Irene walks a difficult line in order to tell her story where she must face accusations of "tell[ing] stories" and doubt of those around her, including the otherwise heroic Curdie (166). In an inversion of their initial meeting, Curdie's path converges again with Irene's when she rescues him as a result of following her grandmother's thread.[62] However, Curdie has difficulty coming to terms with the nature of his rescue: "He could not believe that she was elaborately telling stories, and the only conclusion he could come to was that Lootie had been playing the child tricks, inventing no end of lies to frighten her for her own purposes" (145). Irene cites the thread for evidence and points it out to Curdie once they escape the gloom of the mountain. Curdie remains unable to "see anything" (147). Irene responds to his doubt by declaring, "Then you must believe without seeing, [. . .] for you can't deny that it has brought me out of the mountain" (147). Her grandmother, however, takes a more tempered view in the following chapter: "People must believe what they can, and those who believe more must not be hard upon those who believe less. I doubt if you would have believed it all yourself if you hadn't seen some of it" (149). Furthermore, she instructs Irene that she "must be content, I say, to be misunderstood for

[62] Critics cite this moment as one example where MacDonald offers a challenge to stereotypical gender roles within the novel. For example, Ruth Y. Jenkins writes, "Irene must leave the relative security and familiarity of domesticated space to journey up the mountain and into the mines. Curdie must leave the mines and venture into the domestic space of the castle. Both transgress their 'assigned' spheres, and each does so in order to rescue the other. As active agent of recovery, Irene challenges the increasingly rigid gender roles that Victorian England established for young girls; Curdie enacts behavior associated with the female—swooning and babbling—first in the palace garden, and subsequently when held captive in the palace itself" (331). Similarly, Roderick McGillis suggests, "[T] type of male MacDonald constructs in his fairy tales is one in need not only of the instruction of women, but also of something we might think of as a feminine side, a nurturing side" ("A Fairytale" 97). For more discussions of gender, see Judith Gero John's work on powerful women in MacDonald's writing, Nancy-Lou Patterson on Irene's development, and Joseph Signman's discussion of Curdie as hero.

awhile. We are all very anxious to be understood, and it is very hard not to be" (152). Curdie's mother challenges him in a similar manner and suggests that he work to suspend disbelief: "[Y]ou have no right to say what she told you was not true. She did take you out, and she must have had something to guide her: why not a thread as well as a rope, or anything else? There is something you cannot explain, and her explanation may be the right one" (179). In both of these instances, the adults provide the children a heuristic for understanding each other and making sense of incongruities. For Irene, her grandmother offers her the challenge of patience and understanding in the face of disbelief. For Curdie, his mother offers him the challenge of faith and understanding. In both cases, the adults do not simply preach and moralize or discipline and punish. Instead, they work to expand the children's ability to think with compassion and care for another person, and most significantly, place the children in the role of actors and speakers. Once again we see that MacDonald's novel still engages in the didactic work of teaching his readers, yet the methodology of such teaching aims at children who are active participants in making choices and taking on a leading role in their own lives, rather than just following the hard and fast dictates of an authority figure.

Placed in the context of a culture of education wherein the emphasis remains on memorization and recitation of facts and verses, MacDonald's portrait of child characters that wield words of volition and purpose provides a stark contrast. Though a far cry from adult poetic excellence, Curdie's original rhymes give him a distinct advantage over those who devolved such that they cannot do this creative work—the goblins. Irene's work with story—put pejoratively by her nurse as telling stories—calls Curdie from doubt into belief, and her own ability to go beyond the limits of accepted fact allows her

to take an active role and rescue him. MacDonald, himself, uses the language of imagination to describe his concerns for education. When held up against his writing on the issue of education, these child characters and their use of imagination to the ends of power and belief suggests that MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* speaks of more than idle fantasy. Instead, it models for the child the vital importance of words and the voices that speak them.

Leaving Wonderland: Words in the Real World

When placed side by side, Carroll's critique of education and MacDonald's insistence on the significance of imagination point to a fascinating paradox. Though Alice seems to fail in Wonderland when her words come out all wrong, she in fact achieves a success in breaking past the limitations of her educational experiences and charting new territory with her spontaneous verse rather than the intended recitation. While such spontaneity fails to sit comfortably with Alice because of the rules and boundaries that define her lived experience, her literary heir Curdie embraces his poetic abilities and triumphs as a result. In taking their characters beyond the walls of the schoolyard, these authors gesture towards the important fact that institutional success can often be directly at odds with the nimbleness of a nurtured childhood imagination that may, in fact, make productive adulthood a possibility. Instead of the adult authors projecting their nostalgic desires onto child characters, these novels make a case for identifying and reevaluating the adult desires underlying legislation, educational policy, and didactic fiction that threaten to shape childhood experiences of language and learning in damaging ways.

In order to imagine language as power for the child, however, both Carroll and MacDonald place their child characters in fantasy worlds, for the reality of Victorian culture, perhaps, would not allow for such a vision in realism. Therefore, the division between reality and fantasy both texts manifest must be acknowledged when it comes to the possible power of language for children as imagined in these novels. Because the portraits of children and the potential of their voices found within these novels rely upon the unmooring of social constructions (in Wonderland) and the creation of a unique economy of magic (in Irene's kingdom), they do not directly equal power for their imagined child reader, whose reality remains defined by laws of physics and demands of parents and teachers.

We see these limitations most clearly at the conclusion of *Alice* where Carroll must navigate Alice's return from Wonderland. Alice wakes to reality moments after she has triumphantly "grown to her full size" in Wonderland and declares to her aggressors, "You're nothing but a pack of cards!" (124). Upon waking, Alice shares her dream with her sister who responds, "It *was* a curious dream, dear, certainly; but now run in to your tea: it's getting late" (125). Dismissed to the mundane details of reality, Alice leaves the scene and the novel does not follow her. Instead, we are left with the older sister dreaming Alice's dream in miniature, but with additional imaginings of Alice as a grown woman and "how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple loving heart of her childhood" (127). As critics such as Sarah Gilead and Jennifer Geer have noted, this re-dreaming of Alice offers its own interpretation of the novel as all about a happy path to maturation and offers childhood as a site of adult escape and desire through the sister's reflections. While I agree with these critics' reading of this moment in terms of adult

nostalgia and desire, I do not think the ending successfully neutralizes all of the radical moments within the space of Wonderland wherein education and didacticism become the objects of critique and are held up against a child's creative potential. Instead of taking up Alice's sister's interpretation as the novel's attempt at self-interpretation, I see it as an example of the incongruity between a child's experiences and the adult's understanding of those experiences.[63] For as the novel demonstrates, Wonderland proves to be a place of challenge and difficulty for Alice, far more than just a "curious dream" (125). Indeed, the sister's misty-eyed vision of Alice emerges as one more example of misreading within the text, much like Alice's own difficulty in reading Wonderland through the lenses of didactic literature and her educational experience.

Though MacDonald's fantasy world is self-contained, the original edition does cross the boundary between fantasy and reality with one final conversation between imagined child reader and author. The child reader interrupts "Mr. Author" mid-sentence as he attempts to wrap up the loose ends of what exactly happened to the goblin race after their self-destruction (202). Presumably underwhelmed by such details of the goblins' fate, the imagined child reader demands, "[W]e would rather hear more about the Princess and Curdie. We don't care about goblins and their nasty creatures" (202). The author and reader then exchange words where the reader presses for her desire, implicitly to see these two characters happily off into their ever after, and the author resists these narrative desires. Instead, he concludes by posing the following puzzle to the child's

[63] Gilead writes about the use of framed narratives more generally and suggests this disjunction may be part of the overall narrative strategy: "While officially resolving and fixing meanings (offering, in particular, the 'correct' interpretation of what precedes), the return seems in fact to pose many more questions than it settles. It may legitimize the fantasy narrative as a necessary lapse from structured reality, a lapse that paradoxically supports reality. But often such a reading noticeably simplifies the fantasy's rich and multiple meanings (the misprision tending to give itself away by a patronizing or sentimental tone)" (278).

objection that he leaves the story unfinished: "Not more unfinished than a story ought to be, I hope. If you ever knew a story finished, all I can say is, I *never* did. Somehow, stories won't finish. I think I know why, but I won't say that either, now" (203). On the one hand, this conversation highlights the author's ultimate control of the narrative and serves as a sober reminder of the differences between reality and fantasy in terms of power for the child. On the other hand, it also provides the voice of a resistant child reader, one who questions the author's decisions and asserts her desires repeatedly. Most notably, this conversation presents a very different interaction between adult and child than that seen in earlier didactic fiction while making use of the same model. Here, the adult voice does not suggest the child's desires are wrong and attempt to reform them. Rather, the voice poses a puzzle to the child about the nature of narrative, a puzzle that invites the child further into the world of story as an active participant. By suggesting that stories never finish, the author-figure conveys that narrative exists beyond closure and perhaps beyond the control of the author, as well. Thus, while the power of language remains more contingent for the implied child reader than for the fantasy characters, MacDonald's novel creates space for that reader to challenge, imagine, and take an active rather than passive position.

In their use of fantasy, both Carroll and MacDonald imagine child characters whose relationship to language challenges that advocated by contemporary educational policy and modeled in didactic children's literature. Buoyed by the possibilities of fantasy, these child characters model for their implied child readers that activity, not passivity, can define the child's role as reader and ultimately lead to the generative role of author. With these benefits, however, comes the contingent nature of relationships that

exist only in fantasy worlds, such that both texts picture the child of reality and the child of fantasy in different terms. However, as the novels of the next chapter will demonstrate, some authors conceived of this relationship between fantasy and reality in the reverse. Instead of whisking children into Wonderland, these authors imagined child characters whose feet remain planted firmly in the "real" world but still reach out to the power of fantasy as story.

CHAPTER III
INDIA IMAGINED:
CHILD STORYTELLERS AND THE FANTASY OF EMPIRE

In *Something of Myself,* Rudyard Kipling begins his autobiographical reflections with his earliest memories of childhood, a time spent in Bombay, India and marked by "light and color and golden and purple fruits" (3). Like other children of his class, Kipling was soon sent back to England to receive an education safe on the soil of his forbearers. While such movement between India and England would often be portrayed in literature as a return home, for Kipling it was nothing of the sort: "There was next a dark land, and a darker room full of cold [. . .]. Then came a new small house smelling of aridity and emptiness, and a parting in the dawn with Father and Mother" (5). Given these early experiences and sense of loss associated with movement from India to England, it comes as little surprise that several of Kipling's most enduring texts—*The Jungle Books* (1894) and *Kim* (1901), for example—imagine the child's life in India as a source of pleasure for both child and reader.

Kipling's autobiography and literary fiction exemplify the rich connections authors found among childhood, empire, and imagination. Though perhaps the most well recognized British author of stories featuring Anglo-Indian life, Kipling was one among many authors who placed their child protagonists in the setting of empire. Both Frederika Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl: the Wanderings and Wonderings of Two English Children in India* (1885) and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess* (1905) focus on children whose lives bear the distinct markings of travel between India and England. More significantly for this project, both authors imagine child characters whose

relationship to empire carries out in their childhood what Kipling's did in his writings as an adult—empire as a source of imagination and storytelling power.

This chapter brings together two works that feature British childhood in India and foreground India as an imaginative playground for the child storyteller through Frederika Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*. Though several decades separate the publication of Macdonald's novel and Burnett's 1905 expanded version of her 1888 "Sara Crewe," the original publication dates put these texts and their imagined imperial children much closer together. *Puck and Pearl* appeared in print in time for the Christmas season of 1886, a year after Burnett began writing the short story "Sara Crewe," which would be published in *St. Nicholas Magazine* in 1888 and eventually develop into *A Little Princess*. Thus, even as MacDonald and Burnett conceived of their British children in India in nearly the same moment, the gap between the publications of the two novels allows us to consider the endurance of the child of empire as a popular literary figure.

Additionally, juxtaposing these two texts with attention to their differences as well as their similarities illuminates the complex mix of popular attitudes toward empire, philosophy, religion, and medical discourse that inform and shape literary representations of empire at the end of the nineteenth and opening of the twentieth centuries. Macdonald's representation of India emerged from both scholarship and personal experience. As the child of a man in the employ of the East India Company, Macdonald draws on her own experiences in representing Anglo-Indian child life in an imperial context. As a noted scholar of Indian philosophy and religion, Macdonald offers a portrait of "wondering" children that stems from her own sense of intellectual wonder

regarding Indian beliefs and culture. On the other end of the spectrum, Burnett's childhood was split between the United States and Great Britain, meaning her representation of the child of empire come home emerges more from popular imagination and popular discourses than personal experience. Perhaps owing to this difference in experience, the authors render their children's relationship to empire differently in that for Macdonald's Puck imperial childhood constitutes the narrative's present, while Burrnett's Sara meets the reader with imperial childhood in the rear view mirror.

Scholars of children's literature have long drawn attention to the way in which nineteenth-century British texts inscribe and convey imperial ideology. As one of the first to take seriously these connections between empire and children's literature, Martin Green argues persuasively that the image and rhetoric of imperialism has "infected our imagination" and is now deeply rooted in culture (338). More recently, M. Daphne Kutzer argues in *Empire's Children*: "[C]onsciously or unconsciously, some of the most revered British texts support the culture of imperialism" (xv). The challenge for the present-day reader, then, is to resist the impulse to read all imperialist literature as simple or the same. In reading these two works of children's literature against the backdrop of a significant discourse that informed attitudes toward both empire and children—the threat of racial degeneration—we can see that literature for children paradoxically embraces and rejects popular attitudes toward empire in surprisingly uneven ways. Many scholars point to children's literature as a conservative genre where adults negotiate with their fears and longings, often looking back with nostalgia on a cultural moment that has already passed by. That both Macdonald and Burnett resist fully endorsing the threat of degeneration posed by a childhood spent in India—a threat both imagined in popular

culture and allegedly documented in the medical literature of the time—suggests we must approach reading imperialism in children's literature not as a uniform position, but as a complex relationship with the mores and sentiments of the text's historical moment. In the specific case of these novels, tracing out the child-storytellers' relationship both to the power of story and to the power of empire maps a significant site to explore the relationship they imagine among children, empire, and the power of imagination.

Theories of degeneration emerged across the late-nineteenth century in numerous discourses including medicine, psychiatry, criminal justice, and even literary criticism. Just as earlier notions of social progress suggested the possibility of social evolution, theories of degeneration argued for the opposite possibility. Instead of the fittest members of society mating and bearing an even fitter generation of offspring, the term degeneration signified the dark eventuality that traits—from the less desirable to the criminal—could be passed down and produce a weak or even dangerous offspring. Because degeneration implicated current and future generations, it is not surprising that a deep and pervasive anxiety concerning the potential for the English to regress threads through in discussions of children and child life.

On the surface, the stories of Macdonald and Burnett appear to be safe harbors for children. In their novels, children face the loneliness and peril of transplanted life—one from England to India and the other from India to England—and bravely negotiate challenging experiences with the help of storytelling. When placed alongside degeneration theory, however, we see just how precarious such movement to and from empire was thought to be. Medical discourse on child health in India surfaces as a significant context for these novels featuring child storytellers because that discourse

maintained that India posed both physical and mental dangers to the children who grew up in its tropical environment and culture, essentially infecting them and leading to degeneration. In this context, the portraits of child life found in these novels offer a complex rendering of the discourses of racial degeneration found in both popular literature and medical studies of the time. By identifying the way in which these novels both participate in and resist imperial ideologies that structure a self-other binary between Britain and India, this chapter makes a case for the storytelling child a figure who troubles unitary notions of imperialism in children's literature. Additionally, attention to the figure of the child storytellers' connection to fantasy and empire reveals the possibility efficacy of both fantasy and the child voice, even within the context of a text where the line between real and imaginary appears clearly defined.

Specters of Degeneracy: Fears for the Next Generation

Concern for the degeneration of the English race emerged as a particularly compelling cultural anxiety in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Shaped by Darwinian social theories, degeneration theories coupled enlightenment confidence in progress with an intense fear of the opposite. While the concept of degeneration first appeared in the medico-psychiatric discourse of Bénédict Morel in 1857, it expanded to cover a host of concerns by the end of the century, including those surrounding art and empire. As William Greenslade argues,

> The late Victorian establishment and the propertied classes general harboured anxieties about poverty and crime, about public health and national and imperial fitness, about decadent artists, 'new women,' and homosexuals. The loose assemblage of beliefs which can be marked out as 'degnerationism,' especially when these beliefs claimed the ramification of empirical science, offered a displacement and transference of guilt, and of fear of the uncontrollable and baffling energies of material existence. (2)

Key to Morel's initial theory was the idea that "the degenerate" was "a given individual whose physiognomic contours could be traced out and distinguished from the healthy" (Pick 9). When applied to the realms of physiognomy and phenology, notions of degeneration suggested the possibility of marking out those individuals or groups of individuals who threatened the possibility of social regression.[64] However, as the understanding of degeneration broadened to include a host of fears, such as concerns regarding homosexuality as a form of "degeneration" composed of hidden desire rather than outward markings, so, too, did the cultural realms in which the term appeared.[65]

Published in 1895, Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (translated into English from the original German publication of 1892) demonstrates the way in which the term moved from the realms of medicine and psychiatry into art criticism. Nordau maintains the book serves as "an attempt at a really scientific criticism," even as his work focuses on schools of literature, music, and art (viii). Much like the trials of Oscar Wilde wherein the author's fiction was used in legal proceedings as evidence of his guilt, Nordau's work employs contemporary scientific discourses to unmask the alleged threat found hiding in imaginative and creative works. In his prefatory letter, Noradau asserts, "Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists" (vii). Nordau then frames his project, writing, "Now I have undertaken the work of investigating [. . .] the tendencies of the fashions in art and

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[64] For more on this, see Daniel Pick's *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848-1918.*

[65] The concept of racial degeneration also motivated the study of eugenics, another important scientific idea informing discourse in the latter half of the nineteenth century and beyond. Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, published his ideas in *Hereditary Genius* in 1869. According to Daniel Kevles study, "[Galton] suggested that the state sponsor competitive examinations in hereditary merit, celebrate the blushing winners in public ceremony, foster wedded unions among them at Westminster Abbey, and encourage by postnatal grants the spawning of numerous eugenically golden off-spring" (4).

literature; of proving that they have their source in the degeneracy of their authors, and that the enthusiasm of their admirers is for manifestations of more or less pronounced moral insanity, imbecility, and dementia" (viii). Here, though Nordau claims to begin with "science," in fact he moves from imaginative creation to medical diagnoses.

Because Nordau defines degeneracy as "*a morbid deviation from an original type*" (emphasis original), his supposedly scientific articulations ultimately come down to his own particular definition of what is and is not normal in terms of art and entertainment (16). For example, under the chapter heading "Symptoms," Nordau identifies trends in fashion, such as makeup and hairstyle, which indicate the general prevalence of degeneration. Children are not exempt:

> The children, strolling beside their mothers thus bedecked, are embodiments of one of the most afflicting aberrations into which the imagination of a spinster ever lapsed. They are living copies of the pictures of Kate Greenaway, whose love of children, diverted from its natural outlet, has sought gratification in the most affected style of drawing, wherein the sacredness of childhood is profaned under absurd disguises. (8)

Nordau's description of child fashions pulled from the pages of book illustration nicely demonstrates the overarching belief that structures his study—when art becomes life, it is dangerous. The transience of children's fashion may appear several large steps away from degeneration and hysteria, but for Nordau it serves as a concrete example of the threat posed by much contemporary art, including the literary works of the Pre-Raphaelites, symbolists, and the aesthetes. Here, we may call to mind Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray whose interactions with a yellow book leave him poisoned—or infected—such that he leaves a trail of violence in his wake. Wilde imagines this infection within the context of a gothic text complete with a transforming painting and thus makes evident that "degeneration" is a work of fiction rather than fact. Nordau suggests that infection

via art exists not only in fiction but also in the everyday world, transforming ordinary citizens in the manner of Dorian's portrait.

While Nordau identifies physical markers of degeneracy such as stunted growth or asymmetry of the face, he also lists "emotionalism," "predilection for inane reverie," and "mysticism" as features of mental degeneration—all encouraged and developed, he argues, by art and artists of the time (19, 21, 46). More significantly for this project, Nordau's foray into scanning the art of his time for evidence of degeneration demonstrates the overlap between psychiatry, medicine, and art that also informed much of the discussion regarding the threat empire posed to young children's bodies and minds. Like Nordau's fear of certain schools of art, exposure to Indian people and culture with all of its exotic allure promised to taint those who fell under its spell. More striking, however, is the overlap between these so-called symptoms and the idea of imagination—a key characteristic of the child protagonists offered in the imperial children's literature of MacDonald and Burnett.

Medical Discourse and the Danger of India

While children's literature may picture India as a space for heroic deeds in the novels of G.A. Henty or adventures with exotic animals in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Books*, the larger conversations found in both popular and medical texts concerning actual children growing up in India took a different view. These texts highlighted the dangers such an environment posed to not only the child's well-being but also to their maturation into respectable British citizens. Advancements in hygiene, sanitation, and vaccination throughout the century promised to make India a more livable space for the

British transplants, or Anglo-Indians,[66] who found the heat and threat of disease to be a constant danger. Nevertheless, a foray into the literature of child rearing in India reveals the prevalent belief that growing up in India represented a very real health threat, and that belief continued into the turn of the twentieth century.[67] Additionally, this literature paints a striking portrait of the way in which the medical discussion of the "health" of the child incorporates claims regarding the degenerative effects of being exposed to the native culture and peoples of India.

India posed a host of dangers for the British citizen in terms of physical illness, but the real fear was that changes to appearance and behavior would undermine an individual's very identity as British. In *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1880-1947*, E. M. Collingham discusses these changes:

> Throughout the nineteenth century the medical orthodoxy stated that the heat of the Indian climate over-stimulated the organs of the body resulting in sluggishness and congestion. The altered state of the colonist's metabolism was made physically manifest in a sallow skin and general lassitude, in the decline in fertility among European women, and in the sickly, querulous natures of children born and raised in India. The British body's physical deterioration was complemented by an idiosyncratic appearance. [. . .]. The experience of India was thus perceived to be written on the Anglo-Indian physique, from the boils, mosquito bites, and the altered composition of the fibers and tissues of the body, to the colonist's characteristic clothing and confident demeanour. (2)

From Collingham's discussion we can see the way in which concern for British transplants' physical well-being extended beyond worry over disease to concern for the

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[66] Alison Blunt clarifies the history of this term: "In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the term 'Anglo-India' referred to the British in India, and is still sometimes used this way. But since the Indian Census of 1911, the term has referred to a domiciled community of mixed descent, who were formerly known as Eurasian, country-born, or half-caste" (2). I will be employing this first meaning of the term, contemporary to the works under discussion, throughout this chapter.

[67] In his study of public health in India across the nineteenth century, Mark Harrison cites other scholars who suggest "the threat posed to European colonialism by disease declined considerably from the middle of the century." Harrison argues against this claim: "[M]orbidity rates present a very different picture, and were a major cause of anxiety well into the twentieth century" (2).

formative effects of Indian culture influencing issues of dress and behavior. Elizabeth Buettner crystallizes this convergence of concerns, terming these fears "[p]ervasive anxieties about possible racial mutation" (31). If conventional wisdom held that British adults experienced "a subtle constitutional transformation" from their time spent in India, then the same wisdom conjectured that offspring born in India would suffer an even worse fate (Collingham 1).

Published in 1873, J.P. Fayrer's *European Child Life in Bengal* reveals much about medical views of the imperial child's position in the decade before MacDonald's *Puck and Pearl* and Burnett's *A Little Princess*.[68] Fayrer served as president of the India Officer Medical Board from 1873-95, a position which gave him practical experience with health issues in India as well as authority on the subject of children's well-being in this specific land and climate. Ostensibly a text arguing for the possibility of rearing healthy children within the tropical land of India, the study nonetheless confirms the validity of fears concerning racial mutation:

> The child must be sent to England, or it will deteriorate physically and morally—physically because it will grow up slight, weedy, and delicate, over-precocious it may be, and with a general constitutional feebleness not perhaps so easily defined as recognized, a something expressed not only in appearance, but in the very intonation of the voice, morally, because he learns from his surroundings much that is undesirable, and has a tendency to become deceitful and vain, indisposed to study, and to a great extent unfitted to do so,—in short, with a general tendency to deteriorate, which is much to be deprecated, and can only be avoided by removal to the more bracing and healthy (moral and physical) atmosphere of Europe. (30)

Indeed, the only possible solution Fayrer offers to the problem of raising children in India for those parents who find it too costly to send them back to England for education is "careful and judicious management" in a school on Indian soil (14). As support for this

[68] Here, I refer to the first iteration of *A Little Princess*, published as the short story "Sara Crew: Or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's" in *St. Nicolas Magazine.*

supposition, Fayrer studies the health and general demeanor of pure-blooded English girls entrusted to the care of European Female Asylum, suggesting that an essential aspect required to preserve Englishness is isolation from native influences.[69]

Beyond confirming the already prevalent tendency to read every aspect of India as a threat to British identity, Fayrer's focus on the age at which girls reach menstruation in this study speaks to a concern specific to children growing up in India—the threat of precocity. Like the discourse of disease, precocity occupied a position between medical fact and a perceived moral threat that encompassed concern for the girl's budding sexuality.[70] In the context of the larger discourse surrounding child life in India, precocity takes on specifically imperial valences. Directly after charting out the birthplace of each pupil and the age at which she reached menstruation, Fayrer enters directly into the subject of precocity:

> [T]he impression I have formed is, that they are rather more precocious both in physical and mental development than girls of the same age would be in Europe. They are most carefully educated, and, as the Report shows, their physical as well as moral training is most sedulously guarded from aught that could prejudice or injure either. But *the stimulating effects of a tropic climate assert their influence*;[71] and it is evident that the girl of 16 or 17 is two or three years in advance of a girl of that age in a European climate. (21)

Much in the same way that discussions of adult life in India conflate the threat of physical illness with cultural differences such as dress, Fayrer's study finds the seemingly

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[69] Over the next quarter century, these fears about native influence on children continued to inform medical advice. First published in 1895, *The Care of Infants in India: a Work for Mothers and Nurses in India upon the Feeding and Rearing of Infants* reached its fifth edition by 1900. The text intersperses continually reminds of the unreliability and danger posed by native servants among more general advice regarding the diet and hygiene of infants.

[70] In literature, the precocious child may be characterized as wise beyond years and yet sexually pure, as seen in Burnett's *A Little Princess*. For an in-depth study of these child figures in literature, see Claudia Nelson's *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion in Victorian Literature*.

[71] Emphasis added

insidious effects of the tropical climate to be responsible both for physical change—earlier menstruation—and less quantifiable markers of behavior and development. Fayrer's study makes the case that children could be raised in India safely, with proper management and education. However, as this passage reveals, he maintains that even with all of these safe guards in place "the stimulating effects of a tropic climate assert their influence" (21). Precocity—defined here in both physical, quantifiable terms and unquantifiable concepts of behavior linked to sexual development—emerges as a hallmark of the imperial child.

Though Fayrer's study focuses on his observations of an all-girls' school, the larger claims of the study indicate that his conclusions can be applied to both male and female children. However, his preoccupation with menstruation, along with that found in other medical texts discussing female fertility and ability to nurse a child, does suggest a slanted view of precocity in terms of female sexual development. The onset of menstruation provides a clearly defined marker for the onset of adult sexual development in girls (just as childbirth and nursing provide concrete markers in an adult woman) in a manner not so readily apparent with the male onset of puberty. As degeneration discourses provided an outlet for larger concerns regarding the reproduction of an entire race of people, the female reproductive organs and their functioning provided a home for specific anxieties about future generations.

Frederika Macdonald and Growing up Imperial

Though the name Frederika Macdonald may be unfamiliar to twenty-first century scholars, in her own historical moment she held a unique position for a woman in that she was both a writer and a public intellectual. Macdonald received an honorary D. Litt.

from the University of Geneva in 1909 at a time when the majority of women did not receive a university education ("Current Events" 374). In the course of her lifetime she published a translation of Indian poetry, children's literature, adult fiction, poetry, periodical articles, biographies, and philosophy texts on Voltaire and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Major publishing houses such as Chapman and Hall and John Lane produced many of these works, and reviews of her books appeared in well-established periodicals. Her diverse intellectual interests and publication background were demonstrated in her public lectures on philosophy and religion, including a public debate with Theosophist leader Annie Besant.

Beyond this literary and public presence, Macdonald's life spent traveling to and from the reaches of empire provides a significant context for her portrait of English children in India. While no biography of Macdonald currently exists, research into genealogical records, newspapers, and periodicals situates her lived experiences and familial history firmly in the context of British imperialism in India.[72] Macdonald was born in St. Thomas, Exeter in 1845,[73] several months after her father Frederick Austin Richardson died at age 26 while in service as Assistant Surgeon to the East India Company in Ahmednugger, India.[74] Macdonald's mother Catherine Jane Richardson was born in Bombay, India and was the daughter of a Lieutenant General. Records show her other children's birth places as Poona and Ahmednugger and indicate that Catherine lived

[72] I owe many thanks to Dr. Richard Cochran for generously providing me with genealogical records of the Richardson and Macdonald families as well as other pertinent biographical information gleaned through his own research into John Macdonald.

[73]There remains some mystery over the year of her birth, as existing records offer both 1844 and 1845 as possible birth dates. I've chosen to go with 1845 because it accords with her birthplace in Great Britain after her father's death, rather than in India as was the case with her siblings.

[74] Details revealed by his obituary in *Gentleman's Magazine.*

in India with her husband before his death. Though born on English soil, Macdonald inherited a familial history marked by service to the British Empire that would shape the course of her intellectual pursuits and writing. Because of this biography, Macdonald—the child of a long line of children of empire—and her life exemplify the kind of life that motivated anxiety in the medical writing on degeneration at the time.

In 1873, Frederika married journalist John Macdonald, a choice that would further enmesh her life in British imperialism. An appeal written by friends and included as part of the Macdonalds' 1913 application to the Royal Literary Fund describes his life's work:

> Mr. Macdonald, who is now seventy, had great success, and was most highly esteemed as a War Correspondent. He contributed to the *Daily News* accounts of the Afghan Campaign in 1878, of the Egyptian Campaign in 1882 and of the expedition to the Easter Soudan in 1883, which were equally marked by soundness of critical judgment and brilliance of literary style. The art of the War Correspondent has since greatly developed. Mr. Macdonald was one of the first to give it the impulse which has carried it so far, and his work is recognized as entitling him to a prominent place among those who have undertaken this very difficult enterprise. (Paul 1)

Though he was not a military man, John's position as War Correspondent meant that their livelihood came from travel and writing about Britain's imperial activities. While no detailed account of Frederika's whereabouts during John's time as a correspondent has been uncovered, two of her three children were born in India between 1875 and 1881, demonstrating that she accompanied her husband in his travels.

Macdonald's passion for the poetry of Indian culture and religious tradition appears first in her *Illiad of the East* (1870), a translation of selected episodes from the Hindu epic poem the *Ramayana*.[75] This text, first published when she was in her mid-twenties and illustrated by Lockwood Kipling, established Macdonald as an intellectual

[75] Published in 1870 by Macmillan and Co. under her maiden name, Frederika Richardson.

deeply learned in Southeast Asian culture. In a review of the 1908 edition released by John Lane, the writer describes Macdonald's approach: "[I]t is not possible to enter sympathetically into the customs and sentiments of the modern Hindu population without some knowledge of the sacred poetry that colours the life of the whole nation; much less to appreciate Indian philosophy and religious thought" (493). As this review demonstrates, Macdonald held Hindu philosophy and religious belief in high esteem.

Additionally, her 1893 debate with Annie Besant[76] reveals that her interest in Indian culture also led her to criticize those who appropriated these beliefs and traditions without paying heed to their original cultural contexts. The Theosophist publication *Lucifer* recorded the two objections to Theosophy raised by Macdonald. First, she objected that theosophy, "whilst professing to serve modern spiritual needs, is working against the modern spirit, and for superstition" (443). She followed this charge of superstition with a second criticism that more directly speaks to her sensitivity regarding appropriation of Indian culture and thought: "That Theosophy is doing this under the mask of Indian Philosophy, and especially under the mask of Buddhism, whereas Theosophy represents correctly no system of Indian philosophy, and has its starting-point and goal in aims and principles opposed to Buddhism" (443). Such criticisms reveal that even as Macdonald sought to introduce Europeans to Southeast Asian culture, she rejected the work of British translators who coopt, dilute, and otherwise decontextualize a culture whose religion, philosophy, and art she saw as so deeply intertwined.

[76] Coverage of the debate appeared in *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent, Daily News, Glasgow Herald, The Women's Herald and Lucifer.* The description of the debate given in *The Woman's Herald* inspired debate within the magazine through letters to the editor and Macdonald's written response carried out over several weeks.

Despite this sense of respect, Macdonald's own analysis of Indian culture does not completely escape the Orientalist tendencies that scholars, such as Edward Said, have identified in more canonical texts. In an 1880 article written for *Fraser's Magazine*, Macdonald's praise of Indian poetry deploys the rhetoric of imperial stereotypes:

> And yet beneath these miraculous palms, and sacred peepuls [sic], and love-consecrate acacias, the modern poet, i.e. the poet possessed by modern ideas, would meet a familiar spirit, in fantastic and picturesque disguise no doubt, and in the dreamy East, child like and naïve still, whereas in the cold clear West she has become self-conscious and cynical; but at heart the same, profoundly free, profoundly fearless; familiar and even playful with her gods, with man, divided between compassion and reverence; for the rest untroubled by any supernatural terrors; but always troubled with, or at any rate always mindful of, the world-sorrow, age waiting upon youth, fatigue following after pleasure, love ending in loss, and life vanishing in death. (817)

In this passage, Macdonald identifies the "East" as "a familiar spirit" to that of the "West," and her tone suggests reverence and appreciation for this figure. However, the portrait of this region and its people as "dreamy," "child like," and "naïve" plays into larger discourses that framed India and its people as utterly other—both exotic and inferior. Though she was more educated and experienced regarding Indian culture than many authors writing at the time, her writing nonetheless deploys the same images that render the "East" in problematic and stereotypical terms.

The tension between challenging and embracing stereotypical accounts of Indian culture that Macdonald identifies here provides a fruitful starting point for examining her portrait of the child storyteller in *Puck and Pearl*. Discourse on child life in India documented in medical sources portrays India as a dangerous and debilitating place for the child both mentally and physically. Though surely aware of these perceptions both in medical writings and popular culture, Macdonald resists such a narrow view in her

writing for children. Instead, India becomes a vibrant and inspiring source of story and imagination for her child characters.

Wondering and Resistant: Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl* in India

Frederika Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl* provides a fictional account of British children journeying with their mother to join their father India, and in the process thrusts her child characters into the very place medical discourse warned against. Five year-old Puck, the story's adventurous young protagonist, dives into Indian culture, wandering around the bazaar and the mountains, and even imitating the behavior of jogis. Pearl, his elder by two years, enters the story mainly as a responsible contrast and occasional sidekick to Puck. Playing simultaneously on conventions of fairy tales and travel narratives, the novel is episodic, with most chapters either recounting a story from India's cultural heritage or showing Puck interacting with Indian culture through his own appropriation of these stories. Though structured through third-person omniscient narration, many of these episodes frame Puck's voice as he recounts a tale or legend, most often one he learned from his ayah. The novel ends with the children leaving India in typical British fashion, but it does not suggest they conclude their journey in need of restoration or reeducation. Puck, the child who functions as the novel's child storyteller figure, even declares to the Indian characters peopling his imagination, "I want to tell you I will always love India and the Indian people" (230). As with Macdonald's other writings, her novel communicates affection for rather than fear of India. Moreover, in picturing child life in India in affectionate terms, the novel appropriates Indian fantasy for the English child's play and empowerment, leading to a complex imperial portrait.

Before the novel's action begins, readers encounter a poem signed by Puck, Pearl, and Mama:

> English children [. . .]
> Take these tales of your own times,
> Brought to show you how afar
> Live in distant Eastern climes,
> Just such children as you are. (v)

The poem directly identifies the implied readers of the text as English children before nuancing this with two possibilities—"English children, English born" and "English children, Indian born." Thus, within a few lines of poetry, the text situates the reader in two important relationships—to England and to the imperial space of India. Encouraging the child reader to actively "take these tales" and identify with the characters, figured "children just as you are," the poem models what the novel as a whole suggests—story is a powerful tool for the child. Where degeneration narratives would connect childhood spent in "Eastern climes" with a threat to the child's physical, mental, and even moral well-being, Macdonald's narrative stakes out the opposite relationship from very outset of the novel. She offers not only life in India but also "tales" of that life as a powerful resource for the child to draw upon.

While such a promise of the efficacy of story would be naïve if it relied simply on the child's power as reader and what the text presents, a relationship that is inscribed problematically by adult-child relationships inherent in children's literature, this text as a whole suggests more. The novel is narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, but within that frame it allows for the child character's own creativity. Here, through the child-storyteller Puck, who takes stories given to him by adults and reappropriates them to his own imaginative purposes, the text provides the child reader a model for a potential

relationship to story in which children retain power via their imaginative abilities and exercise that power through the work of telling stories. Puck's stories often take center stage in the novel, and though the narrator's commentary might offer a different explanation for the events Puck observes, the novel allows both explanations to stand so that the reader may decide which to accept. Rather than stagnant accounts passed from adult to child, stories emerges as malleable to the minds and voices of the children who hear and subsequently tell them.

The novel makes significant connections between children and imagination and imagination and the exotic space of India from the moment it introduces the reader to the child characters. Unlike Pearl, whose day of birth was not associated with anything remarkable, Puck was born on Midsummer's Eve and is therefore associated with fairies—the guardians of children—and imagination. Readers first meet these two characters on board a ship heading towards India as "English children, English born" soon to encounter this land for the first time. A discussion of Puck's birth and their destination allows the narrative to make these connections, with the narrator glossing the history of fairies. English fairies, according to the narrator, "came over from India in the first instance, and have their near relations living in that country now" (5). Already this reference frames English imaginative power as dependent upon on the colonial space for full flourishing. Articulating and validating this relationship between Indian fairies and imagination, the author speaks directly to the reader, saying, "So if you will take my advice, you will never be ashamed of believing in fairies: but will always keep to the notion that there is life and beauty and love to you in all that grows and moves and blows and shines: and then nature's fairies will keep your imagination clean and clear from ugly

ghosts and phantoms" (116). Even as the narrator may distinguish between Puck's stories and reality—for example, his belief that giants live in the mountains—this voice of adult authority doesn't negate Puck's contributions. Instead, Puck's more fanciful beliefs and conclusions coexist with the adult's realistic interpretations, underscoring the value of imagination for child readers and thus encouraging them to follow Puck's example in storytelling.

In order for Puck to take on the role of storyteller and, as the earlier review of Macdonald's *Iliad of the East* suggests, "enter sympathetically" into Hindu culture, the narrative fosters a unique relationship between Puck and India (493). The narrator offers Puck's youth as justification for his easy transition: "He was too young when he left England to have very strong prejudices in favour of the customs of his native land, and then it was a part of his happy disposition to take interest in all that went on around him without showing, or perhaps feeling any sort of surprise" (11). Puck takes to India without questioning the difference between the culture of his birth and that of India. The novel frames these matters of difference not in terms of essential self vs. other, but instead as a matter of learned "prejudice." Medical discourses at the time presented Britishness as essential and inborn—here, recall Fayrer's focus on pure-blood girls for his study—such that changes in behavior or appearance correlated to threats to the race. Macdonald implicitly presents the child's identity as malleable and determined by circumstance without the fear of change that accompanied such observations in texts on child rearing. Instead of putting him at risk for degeneration, Puck's willingness to absorb native culture provides him both physical and mental benefits—seemingly preserving him for the illnesses that afflict other children and inspiring his imagination.

The novel follows this welcoming attitude toward cultural difference with a discussion of Puck's perception of racial difference. Speaking directly to the reader, the narrator asserts, "You have to suppose also that after eight or nine months of Indian life Puck's first ideas about the world have been turned quite upside down. Once upon a time most people had white faces and wore black clothes: now they had brown faces" (10). Here, "first ideas about the world" correspond directly to outward markers of racial difference. Significantly, the narrator does not find Puck's interaction with people of "brown faces" as a danger to the child, instead suggesting that these "last sort of men were perhaps most kindly attentive to Puck" (10). As a mother who gave birth in India, Macdonald surely encountered the medical advice for parents to be wary of their children's interactions with servants. Yet, she chooses to foreground these relationships as not only positive but also essential to Puck's experience of India.

Just as the narrative does not seem to suggest any danger to Puck's character because he is a child in India, it similarly portrays him as immune to India's physical dangers: "He never had Indian fever nor even prickly heat; the mosquitoes dealt leniently with him, and he kept a fine appetite" (11). This is not to say, however, that the narrative does not see India as a potential danger to health, for "Poor little Pearl [. . .] grew pale and languid in the hot weather" (11). On one hand, we may read this statement about Pearl as directly tied to the medical discourse on degeneracy that saw India as particularly threatening to the female reproductive system. On the other hand, the novel paints Pearl as resistant to fully taking in Indian culture and story from the very opening of the novel, in large part because she lacks the innate connection to fairies that Puck possesses. Read in terms of the latter, the novel portrays the dangers of India as more tied to an

individual's willingness to participate in life and culture than an innately threatening part of that life and culture. Even before reaching India's shores, Puck narrates imagined stories about "fairy ships" and "fairy fish" (8). By figuring Puck in this way, the text suggests that his open acceptance and participation in what the narrative identifies as a key feature of India—stories and imagination—makes his experiences as a child in this potentially threatening space no longer dangerous. Instead of being infected by India—an infection that, as seen with Nordau, could be read symptomatically through an individual's tendency toward "emotion" and "reverie"—Puck's full participation in Indian culture suggests a kind of inoculation against the physical dangers of tropical life.

Though Macdonald's novel resists degeneracy narratives and instead sees child-life in India in life-enhancing terms, its reviewers did not necessarily share the same attitude. Indeed, a review from *The Academy* speaks to fears of degeneracy directly. While it admires Puck's "childish imaginations," the review ultimately concludes, "[Puck] returns to England safe and well, but dreaming dreams of a complexity and vividness that would endanger the sanity of any ordinary mortal" (409). For this reviewer, the tales that come across as "picturesque" in India threaten the mental wellbeing of those who reside in England (409). Based on the review, one might think that *Puck and Pearl* concludes with a mentally disturbed child whose dreams border on insanity. However, the novel ends with Puck's careful goodbye to the characters that peopled his Indian stories and a declaration of love for India. Given that Macdonald's novel deliberately and explicitly foregrounds Puck's experiences as positive in large part because of his willingness to take in a different culture, the review demonstrates how

ingrained such responses to Indian culture were in the contemporary imagination for such a misreading to occur on the part of the reviewer.

Macdonald's other writings for children demonstrate that, unlike the reviewer from the *Academy,* she values exchange across different cultures for both adults and children. Macdonald brought tales from another land into her writings for the children's magazine *Little Folks*. In "The Story of Rajah Pandu" Macdonald offers the magazine's child readers "one little fairy tale from that great Indian story-world, the Mahabharata" (88).[77] She frames her tale with a description of India that accords with her other writing in that it simultaneously conveys deep regard for the culture while also portraying it as a modern-day fairy world: "For in India the old world of dreams and marvels has not yet passed away; it is the world in which the people still live and breathe; its myths and traditions are not a tale that is told, re-opened, and read again from curiosity or reverence for the past: the tale is still telling" (88). Additionally, Macdonald's description of the Indian teller-of-tales emphasizes the cultural power of story, such that "[t]he story-teller may perhaps be of very low caste; that is to say he would under ordinary circumstances be despised and avoided, but if he can recite Mahabharata or Ramayana, he is raised by this knowledge, and made worth to associate even with the Brahmins" (88). In many ways, this description of the way in which story allows the teller to subvert caste systems, if only for a moment, echoes the view of the child offered in *Puck and Pearl*. While also determined by class and gender, Puck's identity stems from both his nationality as well as his age. In its description of Puck's relatively fluid notions of race and in-flux sense of identification with his homeland, the novel creates a character who because of his age can

[77] The date of this publication, as well as "The Story of Bhima" remains unknown. Given that Macdonald also published a serial story in *Little Folks* in 1889 and *Puck of Pearl*, which focuses on India and children, appeared in 1886, I hypothesize that these articles appeared some time in the 1880s.

navigate and even imbibe the native culture. What's more, by harnessing the power of story, Puck can, like the story-teller of low caste, supersede adult-driven hierarchies, if only briefly.

Unlike the recitation discussed in Chapter 2, the storytelling Macdonald figures in both "The Story of Rajah Pandu" and *Puck and Pearl* pictures retelling tales as a creative, even sacred act. Schoolroom recitation placed emphasis on repeating a poem word for word. To do otherwise was considered a failure, as Alice's distressed reaction to her own creative renderings reveal. Recitation of the Mahabharata or Ramayana, as Macdonald tells us, results in a kind of transcendence for the speaker, and the telling of the tale is of more significant than a one to one correspondence between the recitation and a textual authority. Similarly, Puck's creative reappropriations of stories he hears from his Ayah take on their own power within the text. Retelling the tale the way he heard it is not the point; in fact, the opposite is true. It is only by offering a reimagined version of the story that Puck can successfully negotiate his own experiences within the story space.

Though Macdonald recognizes the important cultural work done by Indian tales, the editor of *Little Folks*, like the *Academy* reviewer, senses danger in these stories. An editorial footnote concludes "The Story of Rajah Pandu" and attempts to make clear the difference between fact and fiction: "My readers must remember that this story is only a legend from the books of a heathen people; but none the less beautiful is the lesson of kindness and love to all living things which is taught herein" (92). A more forceful editorial note marks Macdonald's "The Story of Bhima," another retelling of an Indian tale aimed at children taken from the Hindu epic Mahabharata. In this footnote, the editor emphasizes that these stories are akin to fairy tales, but then takes the commentary

one step further, writing, "We in our happy Christian lands may be thankful that we do not live in the midst of such false superstitions as could alone give rise to these stories" (300). This criticism frames the split between fact and fiction as a matter of geographical difference—"Christian lands" vs. living "in the midst of such false superstitions" (300). Such editorial commentary provides a helpful counterpoint to Macdonald's own view of the relationship between story, place, and a child's well-being in that it articulates the dominant cultural perception of the danger posed by Indian culture. Fear that the child reader might somehow cross the imagined boundaries between her identity as a Christian, British subject and that of the Other who inhabits the exotic and dangerous space of India drives not only this commentary, but professional medical discourse, as well. Just as the editor speaks of these stories from Hindu epics as capable of infecting the otherwise Christian imagination of the child reader without proper warning and adult commentary, medical discourse such as Fayrer's study of girls brought up in India maintained that only strict supervision and management could grant children even partial protection from India's dangers. Given this context, Macdonald's child storyteller Puck emerges even more strikingly as a resistant figure.

In order to uncover the way in which Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl* exhibits a push and pull relationship with contemporary attitudes toward racial otherness and degeneracy in the figure of the child storyteller, we must attend to the layers of narration present in the novel. While the narrator's comments about Puck's healthy appetite or understanding of race seem to qualify Puck's position in relation to India, they do not come to the reader directly from Puck. Instead, these reflections come from a narrator who assumes a tone of authority throughout the text, often speaking from a first-person perspective or

addressing the reader directly. When thinking about the power structures created, both within texts and through them between the text and the reader, the question of what voices have the chance to speak becomes a significant one, particularly with children's literature, given that the adult tells the story and the child receives it. Employing Gerard Genette's concept of "focalization," Perry Nodelman draws attention to the interaction between the child protagonist with whom the implied child reader identifies and the adult voice of the narrator. The tension in this divide may imply "that the focalized child character is not seeing everything there is to see or possibly not understanding events in the various ways they might be understood. The narrator seems to see and know more" (20). While this split is certainly present in *Puck and Pearl*, as evidenced by the narrator's outlining Puck's relationship to India, Puck's storytelling, when he acts not only as narrator but also creator through his imaginative retellings of stories he has been told, makes this relationship between knowledgeable narrator and focalized child more complex.

This narrative complexity is exemplified when, accounting for the "breaking of the monsoon," the narrator first offers a factual account before also giving Puck's story: "Puck would have told you that the Sea Fairy heard from the winds how the poor earth was fainting from thirst; so she sent her children, the clouds, and commanded the winds to carry them right over the thirsty land to the mountains where the river-fairies live" (175). The narrator, whose scientific explanation for the monsoon includes the role that the ocean and mountains play in these seasonal rains, does not discount Puck's more imaginative tale. Instead, the narrator addresses the reader, "So now you have two explanations of the 'breaking of the monsoon,' and as they are different ways of saying

the same thing you may take which you prefer" (175). Here, the narrator not only gives space to Puck's story but validates it, allowing it to coexist with the narrator's presumably more authoritative version. Thus, we see the narrative valuing those stories that Puck produces within the pages of the text and encouraging the reader to do the same.

In addition to narrating the larger story of Puck's time in India, the narrator takes time to tell significant cultural stories, sometimes attributed to Puck's ayah, Chotee Ayah, though often just spoken from the narrator's own unnamed perspective. Even though the text attributes the majority of the stories that so deeply influence Puck's imagination to his ayah, it permits her voice to narrate only a single story. The majority of the tales within tales, then, come to the reader not from the narrator or the native figure of knowledge; instead, these tales are reworked and retold through Puck's own imaginative interactions with them:

> Chotee Ayah's stories were about terrible personages sometimes—rakashasas, or Indian ogres, and tiger-rajahs, and then about ill-natured Brahmans, who punished everyone not sufficiently respectable to them; but they were very exciting stories, and helped to people with new characters the sort of dream world in which Puck always existed. His dreams were quite as real to him as his waking experiences; and although Pearl was not quite as literal a believer in this world of fancy as Puck was, she willingly allowed her little brother to lead her into Fairyland. (30)

Thus, Puck draws upon Indian cultural heritage in order to "people" his "dream world." As the passage points out, this dream world is not a place Puck inhabits while sleeping; rather, it is where he "always exist[s]." Puck appropriates these fictional stories in his every day life, changing them to fit his own needs.

One example of Puck's imagination and appropriation comes early in the narrative when, faced with his mother's illness and the possibility she may pass away,

Puck turns a Bible passage his mother quotes into a story about giants. As he journeys with his mother and sister to the British Hill station so that they may escape the enervating climate, Puck hears his mother quote Psalm 121:1, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help" (37). Faced with the first crisis of his young life—the possible loss of a parent—Puck incorporates this passage into legends of giants that he has heard previously. Thus, the hills referenced in the biblical passage take on new meaning; in Puck's imagination, the hills are not simply landforms, but they are the giants' homes. Puck perceives himself in need of help, and thus ventures out alone into the mountains in search of the giants: "If this dark and terrible thing happened, and his dear mamma died, then he would call to the good giants, and beg them to take him and Pearl to live always with them, in their high castles" (33). Although the plot nicely resolves itself when Puck's father finding him in the midst of his mountain wandering and returns him home to a mother who has recovered from her illness, this episode reveals the power of Puck's own generative story-making within the text. Story provides him not only a means of imaginatively coping with the problem; it is through his own storytelling that he takes action, narrating a purpose and plan for his childish exploits that imbues them with personal significance—even if those personally significant exploits lead him a bit astray.

Not all Puck's moments of story-telling, however, arise out of situations of crisis. More often Puck builds upon Chotee Ayah's tales in order to provide a logical explanation for his interactions with the native culture. Whereas Chotee Ayah's voice narrates a story through dialogue only once in the novel, the narrator often introduces a tale it attributes to the ayah, only to let Puck's voice eventually take control of the

narration. For instance, when recounting a tale that explains the muskrat's origins, Puck picks up the story where the narrator leaves off and narrates in the future tense. In reappropriating the ayah's tales, Puck not only engages in the pleasure of storytelling, but he provides authorization for his actions.

These moments where story and action meet include an attempt to gain merits as a jogi in order to bring back his neighbor's cow, a cow that he imagines to have great significance by figuring it into the narrative of "Sabala, the wonderworking cow" (94). In the latter case, the narrator tells us that "Puck had ideas of his own" about the neighbor and his cow wherein he inserts these everyday figures into a fantastic narrative he has learned from Chottee Ayah (94). Having provided this narrative introduction, the text moves immediately from the narrator's relation of these events to a dialogue between Puck and Pearl that allows Puck's voice to tell his interpretation of the story as applied to the neighbor's livestock. Similarly, his additions to the muskrat story motivate him to trick an Afghan snake charmer out of his mongoose. These stories, in turn, provide him both a chance to retell a native tale but also the opportunity to articulate a rich narrative backdrop that underwrites his future decisions and actions. Because Puck himself generates these narrative that provide him motivation and justification, they become a key source of his sense of agency in this otherwise foreign land by allowing him to situate his individual desires within the broader scope of Indian cultural tales.

Although Puck experiences India as an enchanted place without any of the negative consequences that contemporary discourses on degeneracy present, he, like the typical British child, cannot remain there forever. In the final chapter of the novel, Puck, Pearl, and their mother board a ship returning to England. The narrator suggests this is

both natural and right: "And now their own turn had come. Of course they were proud and glad and full of hope, as English children ought to be, going Home to England" (211). Throughout the chapter, England is synonymous with "Home," even as many of the children Puck and Pearl meet on the ship have to that point lived their whole lives in India. As an older child who previously lived in England, Pearl offers her comparative wisdom between the two places and speaks of England as a paradise: "It is never too hot; and when it rains you can take an umbrella; and you never feel one bit tired, because you get so very, very strong and healthy, and never have fever, that makes us children in India weak" (212). Here, Pearl's language seems to echo and enforce the imperial rhetoric that constructs India as a dangerous place, where the climate results in weak, debilitated children.

For Puck, however, saying farewell to India is not that simple. As the boat approaches the Suez Canal, he hears a gentleman say, "Take your last look east" (218). These words have a profound impact upon Puck, and he wakes "in the middle of the night . . . with the words in his ear, as though someone had repeated them aloud" (219). He then sees and has brief conversations with all of those imaginary characters that framed his experience of India: a jogi, talking vultures, the wondering working cow, and many others, each making their final goodbye. Lastly, he sees Chotee Ayah, the source of these stories. He declares his affection for her in this moment, saying, "I will never, never forget you. And how kind you were; and what heaps and heaps of stories you knew . . . I want to tell you I will always love India and the Indian people for your sake" (230). Chotee Ayah, whose voice rarely speaks within the dialogue of the novel, here is given the last word. She offers "one last salaam" and whispers, "Good-bye, Puckie

Sahib, good-bye; you are going Home" (231). While this moment acts as a touching testament to the relationship between a boy and his ayah, it also problematically reinscribes India's position in relation to that of England—exotic and servile. As he returns to England, Puck bears with him a newly defined sense of self and agency through his appropriations of Indian stories, stories that rely on an exoticizing and othering of the people and place of India.

Bringing Empire Back: Sara Crewe's Imperial Fantasies

Turning to the more familiar *A Little Princess* (1905), we find Burnett's narrative picking up in many ways where Macdonald's novel leaves off. Instead of detailing the experiences of a child in India, the novel opens with Sara Crewe's arrival in London, having spent her whole childhood in India. The narrative alerts us to this change in position from the outset by revealing Sara's thoughts on their journey: "Principally, she was thinking of what a queer thing it was that at one time one was in India in the blazing sun, and then in the middle of the ocean, and then driving in a strange vehicle through strange streets where the day was dark as the night" (5). In detailing Sara's sense of disorientation, the narrator orients the reader to significant ways in which India will frame the narrative—as the familiar landscape for Sara who is, as Mavis Reimer terms her, "a daughter of empire" (115). Sara's father brings her to England that she may receive an English education; he returns to India, supporting both her schooling and luxurious lifestyle with money made there. The rupture to this fantasy of returns is his death. In her position as a child of empire, Sara tells stories in order to negotiate her sense of identity at a time of crisis—the loss of her father and subsequent mistreatment by Miss Minchin. These stories provide an opening for her to gain power through the act

of storytelling while also complicating the relationship the text presents between agency and imperial spaces.

Like its literary ancestor *The Governess*, *A Little Princess* takes place in a school setting but it does not make the girls' classroom education its focus. Instead, the school functions as a backdrop for the drama of Sara's changing social and economic status. Sara begins the story as the daughter of a wealthy and respected captain. When her father's loses his fortune, Sara becomes a servant at the school. Despite this significant change in status, Sara maintains her dignity and sense of identity as a "princess." A neighbor's Indian servant observes her in the attic and his employer—known to Sara as the Indian Gentleman—"magically" bestows gifts upon Sara to make her life more comfortable. Eventually, we learn this benevolent gentleman is in fact her father's former investing partner who has searched for Sara in order to make amends. The investment failures that ruined Ralph Crewe's health regained their value and leave Sara in position of considerable wealth. The novel closes with Sara's plan for generous use of her money and her renewed sense of family and belonging.

Burnett's choice to picture Sara's life in England rather than India reflects the author's own relationship to empire. Though a seasoned traveler who journeyed back and forth between Britain and the U.S. many times throughout her lifetime, she did not possess the intimate knowledge of land and culture that someone, such as Macdonald, gained through time spent in India. Speaking directly to the narrative's construction of Sara's relationship to colonial space, Manisha Mirchandani argues, "By casually informing the reader of her childish innocence and non-recognition of British colonialism in India, Burnett sets up Sara's relationship to colonialism as simply incidental. India, the

only home she has ever known, becomes a space for nostalgic reverie rather than historical analysis" (13). Unlike Puck whose relationship to India is filtered through Macdonald's complex understanding of the place of story and religion in Indian culture, Sara's "nostalgic reverie" synthesizes the representations of India found in popular literature and culture of Burnett's time.

Burnett first published the short version of this tale in 1888 only to follow it with a play production in 1902 and the expanded novel account in 1905. A 1905 review from *The Athenaeum* addresses this repackaging and republishing of the tale, stating, "It is unusual to tell a story three times over, but all three versions are charming, and we accept them with gratitude" (833). Part of the reviewer's willingness to accept *A Little Princess* "with gratitude" perhaps came from Burnett's position as a popular, highly regarded author, particularly known for *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886). More significant for my analysis, the reworking and repackaging of Sara's tale from periodical story to play to novel across nearly two decades suggests enduring popular interest in the child of empire come home.

Because Burnett sets her novel in England instead of India, the imperial logic underlying the text functions more subtly than in Macdonald's text. The text frames Sara in terms of precocity rather than more explicit form of racial transformation. Unlike Burnett's later protagonist Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (1911), Sara does not bear the telltale physical marks of empire, such as sallow skin or lethargy.[78] However, as seen from the earlier discussion of Fayrer's research regarding the "precocious" female body

[78] Burnett's narrator initially describes Mary as "thin, sallow, ugly" (58). Additionally, Burnett's novel focuses on Mary's disagreeable nature that results from being indulged by native servants and neglected by her parents. Thus, *The Secret Garden* more directly suggests the mental and physical dangers to children, rather than the social and economic emphasis given in *A Little Princess.*

in tropic settings, medical discourses maintained that the empire could mark children below the surface. Fayrer put the degree of difference between young women in England and India to several years, writing, "It is evident that the girl of 16 or 17 is two or three years in advance of a girl of that age in a European climate" (21). While Burnett resists figuring Sara's precocity in terms budding sexual maturity, she pictures her as advanced in comparison to her English-raised peers, including her grasp of language and perhaps most importantly her understanding of the power of story as used by adults and deployed by her as a child. In order to formulate this precocity as beneficial rather than dangerous, Burnett casts her maturity in terms of "old-fashioned[ness]" (5). This appellation, as well as the text's multiple invocations of the descriptor "queer," set Sara apart from other children, suggesting that her time in empire has marked her (5). However, the descriptor "old-fashioned" characterizes her as less dangerous and more appealing, as though her character taps into essential qualities that others lack. According to the narrator, Sarah has a sense of this difference: "She felt as if she had lived a long, long time" (5). In the context of the novel, old-fashionedness signifies an unexpected level of adult maturity that the novel holds as a positive rather than negative quality. As Claudia Nelson notes, "[T]hanks to her old-fashioned qualities, [she] has remained unchanged from the first page of the novel, despite the vicissitudes of her shifting financial status, appearance, and effect upon others" (36). In characterizing Sara as both precocious and old-fashioned, Burnett manages to neutralize the threat of the imperial child come home while nonetheless characterizing her as somehow "other" to her peers.

Narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, the novel provides a sense of Sara's character through outward observations, such as noting her "queer" expression

or "large" eyes, as well as by providing the details of her lively inner monologue (5).[79] Even though Sara herself does not take on the official role of narrator, these inner monologue moments and the narrator's accounts of the stories she tells out loud to her peers create space for Sara's voice and perspective within the novel. More importantly, within the novel's story world, the stories Sara derives from those she has read and heard in India prove efficacious—they allow her to redefine her relationship to her world and those who occupy it, especially when she is faced with hardship.

Like other child characters of fantasy I have discussed in previous chapters, Sara's relationship to books and stories written by adults is not limited to transmission and recitation. She, like Puck, takes liberties with the original stories such that her retellings can speak to her specific life circumstances. As Marah Gubar observes, "Like other storytellers from this era, Sara's creativity is portrayed not in Romantic terms—as the original freshness of an untutored mind—but rather as a sign of her impressive ability to work *with* grown-ups and the material they give her" (37). By figuring Sara's storytelling in collaborative and generative terms, the novel models stories—from the fantasy tales of India to the history of the French revolution—as malleable and flexible in the minds and mouths of children, ultimately placing great value in the child storyteller's ability to interpret and reimagine works originally authored by adults.

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[79] Roderick McGillis writes of the novel's narrator: "Burnett's desire to present a controlled world, one in which unambiguous values are clearly evident, manifests itself in certain repeated tags . . . mak[ing] it clear that the narrator has access to the truth" (90). While I agree with McGillis's claim that the narrator's voice comes through as authoritative, I maintain that this narrative structure does not necessarily result in a refutation of any possible agency. In using storytelling to take power in an otherwise powerless situation, Sara's character admittedly subverts neither the voice of the narrator nor the adult author who create her character. Instead, and perhaps more significantly, Sara models agency, including subversion of the adult authority figure Miss Minchin, within the story-world of the text through her own use of story.

While Macdonald's Puck lives in a world where fantasy and reality blend within his interpretation of Indian stories, Burnett constructs Sara's relation to story in terms of both intention and control. Readers see her ability to discern fact from fiction in her first interaction with Miss Minchin, where the latter's suggestion that Sara is a "beautiful and promising child" prompts interior speculation about the truthfulness of such a comment (8). With "her eyes fixed upon Miss Minchin's face," Sara thinks, "I am one of the ugliest children I ever saw. She is beginning by telling a story" (9). Having perceived this difference between the reality of her appearance and the fiction Miss Minchin offers, Sara continues self-reflexively, "'I should be telling a story if I said she was beautiful,' she thought; 'and I should know I was telling a story. I believe I am as ugly as she is—in my way. What did she say that for?'" (9). Here, we see not only Sara's understanding of the difference between story and reality; we also see with her final question the understanding that stories have a power, a power that storytellers appropriate to their own ends, leading her to question Miss Minchin's intentions. This ability to distinguish between truth and story, then, suggests that we see Sara's relationship to story as more complex than childish whimsy. She appropriates story not because she does not understand the truth but because she comprehends story to possess a particular power, one she can harness through her appropriation and deploy to her own ends.

Several scholars have noted Burnett's use of story within story as a distinctive feature of her text, particularly in placing the child as the speaker of these framed stories. In his significant study of the *A Little Princess* as imperial text, Roderick McGillis notes, "[T]he book's insistence on the imagination's power to transform dull reality into the stuff of fairy tale reminds readers of the importance of esthetic experience. Sara's

reading of books results in a transformation of all experience into narrative" (15). Taking McGillis's observations one step further, I suggest that it is not just the power of narrative, but specifically the power of narrative for the child reader, that the novel turns on. While Sara's situation is certainly exceptional, the model the novel endorses—where reading and education shape the child's ability to envision a life beyond the bounds of that offered her by adults—suggests that such a relation to story lies within its reader's grasp. Despite such positioning, McGillis ultimately argues, "Sara, like the characters in fairy tales, simply receives the bounty that comes her way; she does not make any of it happen despite her desire to do so. She is, finally, a passive character" (42). It is true, in her position as a destitute parent-less child, she does not have the power to change her fortune. And yet, to call Sara "finally, a passive character" elides the important work she does via reimagining and retelling stories for both herself and other children. Her storytelling becomes a very real way of resisting the narrative of identity that Miss Minchin tries to force on her. By incorporating other girls into that narrative, she creates a space where they, too, can see the world through a frame other than that offered by the adults in their world. While her activity through story may not change the novel's outcome, it does provide an important outlet for Sara through which she can narrativize and interpret her own experiences in a manner different from that provided by the adult authority figure in her life.

Because Sara understands the efficacy of story, she can mobilize it in order to achieve particular ends. For instance, when Sara comes across Lottie, a younger girl throwing a tantrum about not having a mother, she spins a narrative of life after death that not only calms the child's tantrum but intervenes in her emotional crisis. Sara's already

acknowledged ability to distinguish between fantasy and fiction, however, does not negate a story's potential to work formatively for her as she creates and tells these imaginative narratives. The narrator makes this point, saying,

> Perhaps some people might think that what she said was rather like a fairy story, but it was all so real to her own imagination that Lottie began to listen in spite of herself. She had been told that her mamma had wings and a crown, and she had been shown pictures of ladies in beautiful white nightgowns, who were said to be angels. But Sara seemed to be telling a real story about a lovely country where real people were. (33)

Sara's stories have such power precisely because they are "real to her imagination," both for her, and in this instance, Lottie. Where images of angels had left Lottie unfulfilled, Sara's "real story" about "real people" offers her consolation. Indeed, Sara suggests that in the telling of a story "it doesn't seem as if it was only made up. It seems more real than you are -- more real than the schoolroom. I feel as if I were all the people in the story -- one after the other" (36). In this way, Sara's ability to distinguish fact from fiction does not preclude her participation in a story-world or minimize the effect her stories have on others.

While these early moments of storytelling offer evidence of Sara's potential to harness agency through the work of narrative, the situations that arise after her father's death—poverty, hunger, abuse—serve to do more than simply entertain or comfort. This purpose for story comes across when Ermengarde, seeing the attic where Sara must live, questions, "[D]o you think you can bear living here?" (79). Sara answers her by speaking directly to the way story functions for her throughout the narrative: "'If I pretend it's quite different, I can,' she answered; 'or if I pretend it is a place in a story'" (79). Here, Sara gives two distinct options as to how her use of story can and will intervene. One option is that she may "pretend" that the attic is not as it is by imagining it full of warmth,

light, and happiness. The other option is to insert her misery and the barren, cold attic into a narrative, imbuing it with greater significance. Arguing that Sara's character should be read as exercising a degree of agency, Mary Jeanette Moran suggests that the "destabilized surroundings" that come as a result of Sara's father's death and Miss Minchin's cruel treatment provide her the opportunity "to reinvent herself as princess, political prisoner, mother, and philanthropist. She solves the mystery of parental neglect by turning to her own imaginative resources" (36). Moran argues that stories are not simply a way to distract and escape, but that they provide Sara an outlet in which to actively construct a sense of self that is not limited to the cruelty and sadness inherent to her situation. Thus, we see how Sara uses her stories, not simply to imagine a different life for herself, but to construct a narrative that offers her agency in a circumstance where she would otherwise have no power.

Unlike Puck, whose stories continually draw on the colonial space of India for inspiration, Sara does not base all of her stories on Indian heritage, instead appropriating from whatever resource she has available. This, however, does not free Sara's character and, through her, the text's possible construction of child agency through story from being implicated in imperial logic. As Sara's stories move from fiction to reality when Ram Dass secretly transforms her barren attic into a fairyland, the text reveals the logic of empire and its connection to stories and imagination. Suggesting that Burnett "manages to turn the deeds of Empire into the tropes of fairy story," McGillis reads the novel's use of Ram Dass as a problematic marker of imperial discourse (16). He notes, "Just as the fairy tale often turns to the 'other'—to an animal, a dwarf, or an old crone as the figure of the helper, the one whose magic powers are in the service of the hero—*A Little Princess*

incorporates the 'other' in the form of this colonial Indian servant to perform magic deeds of service" (16). Through the figure of Ram Dass the agency of story is realized, validating Sara's self-narrative in which she constructs herself as a princess. As Reimer argues, this conflated relationship between Ram Dass's "night work" and Sara's perception of "dreamwork makes evident the narrative function of the native servant in the production of the princess as a figure that permits the elision of inner and outer, imagination and reality" (117). In blurring the line between story and reality, the text not only offers its conclusion—Sara returned to status as "princess"—but also cements the relationship between the logic of Sara's story-world and the logic of empire.

Imperial Logic and the Child Storyteller

In reading Macdonald's *Puck and Pearl* alongside Burnett's *A Little Princess*, we find two characters—Puck and Sara—who, through the medium of storytelling, model a relationship to story for the child reader that offers the possibility for the child's power. By not only narrating stories, but also deploying them within the text in order negotiate and explain their position within a world that is not under their control, these child characters suggest that the child reader may have a similar relationship to story. The imagined child reader holds the possibility of agency through this relationship not simply by reading the text but by appropriating new and imaginative versions to his or her own purposes. Storytelling becomes a means by which children both inside and outside of the text may negotiate and form a sense of self.

As models for this generative work, Puck and Sara are not just children; instead, they are children of empire and as such inherit the full weight of a sense of nation and, in turn, of continual self-definition by that which is other. Consequently, constructing this

sense of self—the telos of storytelling for both these children—implicates the possible agency that seems to be offered by both texts. For Puck, it is Chotee Ayah upon whom he draws, turning Indian cultural heritage into the logic and authorization for his actions. Sara's stories—her position as a "princess"— become actualized through the service of Ram Dass. This agency then, if realized by the child reader, carries with it the weight of imperial logic, inscribing his or her possible power with the problematic framework of colonial discourses. In order for imagination to flourish, according to these novels, the child must have at his or her full disposal India's resources—its land, its people, and its stories. India imagined, then, is a source of power, but only for those who call England "Home."

Macdonald and Burnett are not alone in making use of the child voice to model an agency through language that both troubles and employs the logic of British imperialism, where the child's gain is still the "empire's" loss. Indeed, as the next chapter reveals, the development of the genre of children's fantasy—as exemplified in the work of Rudyard Kipling and E. Nesbit—continued to engage with the theme of empire both past and present. In their blending together of history and fantasy, these authors create space for the child voice to participate in constructing and resisting the imperial identities such history would have them take up.

CHAPTER IV
SHAPING THE FANTASY OF HISTORY: CHILD VOICES IN RUDYARD KIPLING AND E. NESBIT

In the January 1906 issue of *The Strand*, the fiction of two noted figures in the history of children's literature—Rudyard Kipling and Edith Nesbit—crossed paths. Nesbit's ninth chapter of *The Amulet: A Story for Children*[80] tells of four British children and a magical amulet that allowed them to travel in both time and space. Kipling's "Weland's Sword," the first installment of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, begins the tale of two British children named Dan and Una who listen to the history of the British Isles as narrated by figures called from the past into the present by magical means. Though these two authors imagine children's interaction with the past flowing in different directions, their stories' placement in *The Strand* suggests that the collision of history and fantasy spoke to the imagination of a popular readership.

Beyond the happy coincidence of these two works appearing simultaneously in the same publication, these stories share a mutual interest in situating child characters in relation to imperial history. Kipling and Nesbit draw on the possibilities of fantasy to delve into the pages of history and to bring their child characters from the present into contact with that history though magical intervention. As discussed in Chapter 3, criticism over the past two decades has called attention to the implicit and explicit imperial ideology that runs throughout literature of this period, with many scholars suggesting works of children's literature allowed indoctrination of this ideology.[81] Because both works facilitate communion between figures of an imperial past and

[80] The stories were retitled *The Story of the Amulet* for their publication in book form.

[81] See Patrick Brantlinger for a discussion of imperial ideology in literature. See M. Daphne Kutzner and Joseph Bristow for discussion of children's literature and imperial ideology.

children of an imperial present, they invite readers to question the novels' investment in or critique of imperial activities. By following the trail of child voices with specific attention to how these voices employ and respond to the language of imperial power, this chapter argues that both novels offer an ambivalent portrayal of the child's imperial position by situating their child characters in a paradoxical relation to the history of empire. On the one hand, by offering the rise of empire—from the Romans in Kipling to the Egyptians in Nesbit—as a narrative of interest for the child reader, these books echo textbooks of their time that position imperial narratives as crucial to the child's understanding of self, nation, and world. On the other hand, the narrative structures through which Kipling and Nesbit choose to convey their historical accounts diverge significantly from textbooks in that they invite the child to comment, question, and critique. Critics tend to read both authors' lives in tandem with their writing and thus seem to conclude their readings with either condemnation or commendation that directly reflects biographical rather than literary reading. However, my reading will focus on making visible the dual impulses to embrace and to resist imperial ideology as they manifest in these texts. In the process, I will attend to how and why this push and pull manifests in the children's relation to language, and through language, their relation to power.

Because of the great changes to both the educational and political landscapes in the historical moment in which both *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *The Story of the Amulet* first found their audiences, they serve as fruitful case studies for scholars considering the convergence of fantasy, history, ideology, educational policy, and children's literature. As I argued in my discussion of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *The Princess and*

the Goblin, fantasy texts for children often take on the issue of education even as they seem to eschew the heavy-handed didacticism found in works that make explicit their aim to instruct the reader. Neither Kipling nor Nesbit place their novels' action within the confines of a school. Yet, in offering their readers a portrait of imperial history, they invoke the genre of the historical reader—a genre that combined literacy education with historical narrative and which took a prominent role in classrooms following the Education Act of 1870. A reading of the novels informed by these important historical contexts reveals both the significance of their representation of empire and also the changing grounds of literacy and history to which these ambivalent visions of empire speak.

Educational Changes and the Reading of History

Historical books aimed specifically at child readers were not a new development at the turn of the century, for the tradition of writing books of history for young readers began as early as the late-eighteenth century. According to Jackie Horne, history appealed to child readers who may have found age-specific literature too limiting because "histories intended for adults" provided narratives of "derring-do plots of murders, battles, political wranglings, and sexual misdeeds in addition to (or instead of) their purportedly exemplary educative messages" (128). Horne conjectures that as adults recognized the appeal and the possible moral danger of such history texts, authors and publishers began to produce children's histories and thus censor the version of history children encountered. Horne writes, "Such histories, biographies, and schoolbooks could easily weed out any material from adult histories deemed inappropriate for children, crafting their narratives to conform to contemporary constructions of childhood, whether

they be grounded in a conception of the child as inherently evil, inherently good, or developmentally progressing" (129). Horne's analysis reveals important links between the publication of children's histories and the construction of childhood. Histories for children combined parents' and teachers' desire to convey historical information to children with their desire to shape children through their reading. As such, the genre of children's history brought together the factual with the moral and gave authors and publishers license to construct a version of history in accord with the contemporary desires for who a child should and could become. From this, we see that the genre first emerged out of adult concern for the influence of history narrative upon the child reader, a concern that continued into the following century.

Connections between history and the construction of childhood became even more significant when these works of children's history entered into the late-nineteenth-century classroom. This was a moment where educational policy, literacy, and imperial ideology converged—the Education Act 1870. In their study of the history of British education, John Lawson and Harold Silver write, "The Elementary Education Act of 1870 was the most workable piece of compromise legislation in English nineteenth-century history. It did not introduce free or compulsory education, but it made both possible. [. . .]. It brought the state into action in education as never before" (314). Though this Act did not itself revolutionize British education overnight, it provided the groundwork necessary to increase access to education and codify the terms of that education. In the years following this initial legislation, a series of Elementary Codes set forth standards for elementary education, a component of which was attention to the instruction in history. The 1875 Elementary Code expanded education from the "three

R's" to encompass a variety of subjects including geography and history. As educational standards continued to become more defined at the legislative level, the necessity of history education as a specific subject took shape. By the Cross Commission in 1886-8, "it was considered essential to include" the subjects of "English history [and] geography 'especially of the British Empire'" in elementary education (Gordon 17). In this move from simply teaching history to requiring a specific focus on British history as well as a focus on the geography of the British Empire, school subjects reflected the expansion of the British Empire and the importance of situating the student's identity in relationship to that empire.

As demonstrated by increased attention to instruction in the history and geography of the British Empire, the ability of literature to promote a certain national identity was a prominent concern at this point in British history. Attempts to address this anxiety were made manifest in educational books for children in a way that reveals an overarching shift in the educational values accorded children's literature during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. In *For Home, Country, and Race: Constructing Gender, Class, and Englishness in the Elementary School, 1880-1914*, Stephen Heathorn argues that concerns for literacy combined with the formation of a particular understanding of nation and self in relation to that nation. He charts this change in terms of the content of schoolbooks, writing, "In short, the ideological subtext about social roles in readers moved from the mid-century dictates of spiritual salvation and political economy to include the far more encompassing scope of the nature of national identity, and the social roles of men and women within this imagined national community" (12).

According to Heathorn, the history reader emerged as the dominant textual form in which this re-envisioning of national identity took place.

Along with his attention to the legislation which made attendance at elementary school compulsory, Heathorn charts the requirements that facilitated this emphasis on history: "Historical readers were mandated by the Education Code to make up at least a third of reading texts after 1880 and, with their geographical and literary counterparts, quickly came to be the most important and widely used of all the texts available in elementary schools" (40). While Heathorn focuses primarily on what these changes meant for newly literate working-class children and the kind of national identity these historical readers offered, he nonetheless provides evidence of the kind of history encountered by the generations of newly literate British citizens who may have read Kipling and Nesbit, whether in book form or in *The Strand.* In the twenty-six years in between the Education Code, which made historical readers such a key component of elementary education, and the first publication of these stories, an entire generation became literate through the use of these historical readers.

Another scholar working with the relationship between national identity and the schoolroom, J.S. Bratton, pushes this claim further. He argues that imperial indoctrination via the apparatus of public education was not enough to ensure that the "ex-schoolboy" had "internalized the appropriate values to the point where the support of the school community was not only unnecessary, but was actually superseded by a more profoundly personal and conscious commitment to the ideology" (73). In this passage, Bratton suggests that fiction filled this gap and facilitated an emotional and imaginative connection that instilled in the child reader imperial notions of England. Bratton attends

specifically to the vision of history offered in Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and argues that through fiction Kipling takes on a portion of British history that would otherwise be difficult to convey in a history reader. He writes, "If the conquests of England by various imperialist powers were impossible to explain satisfactorily to the young in a few simple sentences, they were nevertheless potential vehicles for the lessons of imperialism, if they could be effectively fictionalized for older readers. Few writers accepted that challenge until Kipling did so in *Puck of Pook's Hill*" (80). Here, Bratton not only draws attention to the important historical moment in which this text emerged, but also claims that Kipling could only accomplish such a vision of history through fiction. While my reading suggests we temper Bratton's analysis of imperialism by pointing to the ambivalence toward imperial projects found in the text, his analysis helps us understand both the significant power of these stories within their historical context and also the way in which they interacted with other literature produced at that time.

The history and fantasy offered in both *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *The Story of the Amulet* extends beyond the boundaries of leisure reading and into the changing apparatus of British education. The contextualization of these texts within changes to educational legislation provides a possible way to understand both this portrayal of children with an appetite for history and fantasy and the implications of that appetite for British imperial projects. Scholars of history and literary criticism have noted the significant changes in children's reading material—both inside and outside of the school setting—that occurred concurrent with two important shifts: the move toward publicly funded compulsory schooling after the passage of the 1870 Education Act and the continued growth of the British Empire in the latter portion of the nineteenth century. Unlike history texts,

however, Nesbit and Kipling bring dead historical moments to life and place the child characters and the reader face-to-face with imperial history. In so doing, these authors take history education out of the classroom while confronting the reader with the quest to understand both the past and the contemporary child's place in the present.

Children and Empire in *Puck of Pook's Hill*

At the close of Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Puck condenses the fraught history of the British Isles into just a few phrases: "Weland gave the Sword. The Sword gave the Treasure, and the Treasure gave the Law. It's as natural as oak growing" (273). Dan and Una, the children to whom Puck addresses these words, have encountered a variety of figures that narrate historical events with fantastical overtones, including moments from the Norman Conquest and the Roman conflict with the Picts. While the sword, treasure, and law refer to the trajectory of Britain's history leading up to the signing of the Magna Carta, they nonetheless articulate a rather contemporary understanding of imperial power. Here, the forces of violence (in the figure of the sword) and wealth (in the image of the treasure) come together to produce "the Law"—the self-legitimizing result of this wealth and violence. With the claim that this imperial teleology is "as natural as oak growing," Puck's words not only summarize the view of history offered by the stories and poems, but also work to naturalize this presentation of empire for the reader.

From this, a reader may be tempted to agree wholeheartedly with one of the text's original reviewers in labeling Kipling "the missionary of empire" (404). This review, published in October 1906 in *The Athenaeum*, connects Kipling's blend of fact and fiction to the "cultivation of a healthy patriotism" in children (404). Like Puck's words

the review suggests that the text offers a basis for Britain's imperial claims; however, I argue that this quick closure belies a strong ambivalence regarding Britain's contemporary imperial position. While many of Kipling's works—such as *Kim* or *The Jungle Books*—feature colonial spaces, *Puck of Pook's Hill* exposes Britain's past geographic and cultural boundaries as contested imperial ground. Additionally, this collection of stories provides a model child audience for these tales of empire. Dan and Una not only frame the stories by listening, but they also interpret and undermine the stories of history they hear. These moments where child voices actively challenge the version of history narrated to them contradict the seemingly closed interpretation Puck offers at the close of the text. Read with attention to how and why these voices speak, we may see Kipling's text as an ambivalent engagement with the British imperial present via its imperial past. This view of empire, in turn, ultimately challenges the impulse to read this and other similar texts for children published in the context of empire as straightforward indoctrination of imperial ideology.[82]

By the 1906 publication of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, works like *The Jungle Books* (1894-5) and *Kim* (1901) reinforced Rudyard Kipling's position as a successful and popular author. While in book form *Puck of Pook's Hill* is a collection of ten short stories interspersed with poems or 'songs,' the stories appeared without the poems in their original periodical publication. All the stories feature a brother and sister—Dan and Una—who meet the mysterious Puck, a being possessed with supernatural power. The first story opens with Dan and Una acting out scenes from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the center of an old fairy ring. It is here that Puck first appears in the

[82] For example, see Joseph Bristow's *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World*.

midst of their acting. Beginning with this encounter the children, and therefore the readers, hear stories about Britain's origins as narrated by Puck or the other characters Puck conjures from the past. Though each story begins and ends with third-person narration, the story within the story—the 'history lesson'—comes via the first-person narration of the historical figures that experienced the event. With the introduction of different characters, the historical narratives move through time and paint a picture of the struggle for control of the British Isles long before the nation of Great Britain was born. After each of these stories, Puck uses a collection of magic leaves to make the children forget their fantastical encounter until their next meeting in the following story.

As a whole, *Puck of Pook's Hill* relates several moments in British history where ownership and control of its geographic space result in violent conflict. Here, the opposition between Normans and Saxons along with the conflict between the Romans and Picts demonstrate the fractured beginnings of the imagined community that will eventually form British national identity. In "A Centurion of the Thirtieth" we meet the young Parnesius—a British born Roman Solider—who, though he "[has] never seen Rome except in a picture," considers himself a Roman (128). In the following story "On the Great Wall," Parnesius takes up his post on the utmost fringe of the Roman Empire—the wall that separates Roman controlled land from that of the Picts. Like Parnesius's own complicated sense of identity, the wall is a space of mixing. As he tells the children, "Remember, also, that the Wall was manned by every breed and race in the Empire. No two towers spoke the same tongue, or worshiped the same Gods" (156). Writing on the image of the wall in Kipling's Puck books, Judith Plotz emphasizes the instability of imperial boundaries, saying, "To police a frontier, as empires do by definition, is to be in

constant apprehension of disaster, of the end of the world as we know it. Heroism doomed to fail on the brink of the world gives to the imperial text a note that is noble, self-dramatising and glamorous" (51). More than simply a structure, the wall figures the tenuous grasp of empire and exposes the geographic outer-limits of imperial control. Parnesius, as agent of the empire in this liminal space, manifests this instability in his own actions. Though Parnesius acts on the part of Roman imperial power, he also grows critical of it when he befriends some Picts beyond the wall. He even goes so far as to warn Roman leader Maximus: "Leave the Picts alone. [. . . .] Stop the heather burning at once" (166). In this speech Parnesius argues that Rome should not try to extend its reach and further oppress these people. Though he refers to the Picts as "barbarians," his friendship and experience compel him to speak out against Roman control. While not offering a full-scale critique and rejection of empire, such moments found throughout the text voice skepticism and caution regarding the expansion of imperial power.

Given Kipling's reputation for pro-imperialist sentiments, these moments of possible critique provide a tantalizing opportunity to envision Kipling in a different way. As a result some critics, though aware of the representation of Kipling as "missionary of empire," attempt to leverage the stories of *Puck of Pook's Hill* that counter the conventional interpretation in order to rehabilitate—or at least complicate—this negative view. For example, Peter Hinchcliffe suggests that Kipling's stories contain discrepancies that may be understood productively as "creative paradox" or "imaginative discontinuities" (156). From this premise, Hinchcliffe moves to a reading of *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*[83] in order to suggest that these stories convey a

[83] Published four years after *Puck of Pook's Hill* in 1910, *Rewards and Fairies* adopts the same form of short stories and poems and utilizes the frame of Una, Dan, Puck and characters from Britain's

particular message: "[R]econcile your internal differences so that you may guard yourself from invasion" (160). Corrine McCutchan also works to recuperate Kipling through her approach to this story. In particular, she argues that his "idealism went far beyond mere imperialism and sentimentality" and instead extended to teaching his readers the merit of disinterested compassion (88). Similarly, Lisa Lewis argues that the interlacing of what she terms "references" and "cross-references" contributes to the balanced view of history and empire Kipling depicts within this text. Specifically, she argues that this collection reveals Kipling not as a "glorifier of war" but as an author concerned with the power of history in portraying "how such empires may be ruled or lost" (192). In other words, a desire to offer a new understanding of Kipling acts as the driving force behind much of the critical work that exists on *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

While these critics write in an attempt to prove that Kipling's view, as presented in this text, contains complications and even possibly positive aspects, other critics work to rehabilitate Kipling's image by incorporating biographical details.[84] Jack G. Voller attends to the blending of history and fiction in the text and suggests that myth and magic

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past. Set the summer after the events of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, the opening stories present Dan and Una on the cusp of adolescence. From the authorial voice of the introduction, we learn that they are "older and wiser" and they now wear "boots regularly instead of going barefooted" (xii). Indeed, many of the stories told by the characters they encounter in the woods or by the sea thematize growing up or definitive moments that shape characters' lives. In addition to stories concerning the past in the British homeland (including The People of the Hill and Elizabeth I), "Brother Square-toes" and "A Priest in Spite of Himself" tell of the speaker's adventures while in the colonies around the time of the American Revolution. As with *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Una and Dan focalize the stories through the figure of the child-listener and thus serve as a framing device for the historical and sometimes fantastical stories. From 1909 through 1910 these stories appeared in *The Delineator, Nash's Magazine,* and *Harper's Magazine.*

[84] Kipling does invite such connections between life and writing because of the time he spends discussing the Puck books in his autobiographical writing titled *Something of Myself*. In editing Kipling's autobiographical writings, Thomas Pinney writes of the Puck books, "[Despite] the fact that they are historical fictions, his most personal experience is to be found: the stories belong, many of them, to the small patch of England that he had elected to live in; they are told to his own children, who, he hoped, would inherit not only the place that he had made for them but the special understanding and sympathy that he had for it; a number of them are stories of artists of different kinds and hence fables of his own experience; and they express the living connection between past and present that is, I think, at one of the deepest levels of his imagination" (xxix).

possess a particular power to subvert narratives of history. Like much criticism on the text, Voller's project ultimately turns to a biographical approach and uses it as an attempt to reveal a particular 'Kipling.' Similarly, Patricia Owen begins her article discussing the different meanings of history the text presents for children and adults. Using this frame, Owen then moves to a biographical discussion of the text and argues that we should read the figure of Puck as Kipling himself. Such a reading, for Owen, uncovers resonances between Kipling's own feelings of abandonment as a child and the overwhelming anxiety implicit in the tales—"our fear of being deserted by the strong protective people we admire" (70). This turn to Kipling himself keeps both of these articles within the constraints of the established critical conversation—limited to either absolving or condemning Kipling.[85] Together, these critics convincingly argue that the text offers inherent contradictions that beg the question of its investment in an imperial ideology. Indeed, part of this chapter's work will be to show how and where these stories foster an ambivalent vision of empire. However, my task is not to offer a 'new' portrait of Kipling; instead, I want to pursue provocative questions about the text's status and function as a work of children's literature alongside these questions of imperialism the stories raise.[86]

In this critical landscape, then, Paul March-Russell's recent treatment of the Puck books among a variety of other Edwardian texts written for children presents a stark contrast to these biographical trends. March-Russell attends to this text as a work of literature for children and draws attention both to the children framing the text and to

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[85] Jan Montefiore draws attention to this dichotomy among critics and biographers in her biography titled *Rudyard Kipling.*

[86] Sue Walsh contends that critics who do study Kipling's works often approach them through the narrow lens of biographical criticism and circumscribed by critics' own assumptions concerning childhood.

Puck's magical intervention that gives them access to history. Emphasizing the role myth and magic play in the text, March-Russell argues that this "use of magic reinvests historical narrative, and beyond that an English identity, with passion and imagination mediated through history as a form of storytelling" (31). For Russell, "history becomes a form of child's play" in the text that fosters a "dialogic, an open-ended conversation that extends the principle of nursery games involving both adult and child" (31). While March-Russell only offers a brief examination *Puck of Pook's Hill* in pursuit of a larger argument concerning Edwardian children's literature, his suggestion for reading the text as "an open-ended conversation" that accords with "nursery games" provides a promising means to question the power relations between this text and its readers, particularly in terms of imperial ideology. When read as play, the text seeks not to indoctrinate but instead to create openings for the child to enter into the work of play on his or her own terms.

March-Russell's identification of the relations between adult and child offer a powerful rubric for reading *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Dan and Una listen to stories of conquests and adventures from Britain's past and thus focalize[87] the text, offering a parallel to the implied child readership. However, such focalization did not prohibit adults from reading the text, whether aloud to a child or on their own for personal enjoyment. As an October 1906 review from *The Speaker*— titled "Kipling for the Schoolroom"— explains, the "grown up" individuals who would enjoy this text include those "who would like to take their fun without pause or reflection and return, if only for

[87]Drawing on Perry Nodelman's work in *The Hidden Adult*, I use the term "focalize" or "focalization" to refer to "the characters through whose perspective [readers] view the action" (18). Nodelman identifies focalization through child protagonists as an important characteristic of those works of literature we consider children's literature.

an hour, to the primitive, emotional unmorality [sic] of twelve years old" (87). Thus, the reviewer suggests that the space of children's literature and the narrative of childhood it offers provide an escape for the adult reader because this space remains separate from the weight of adult concerns and responsibilities. Here, a contradiction arises. On the one hand, the review terms this text as one "for the schoolroom" and thus suggests it has implicit educational value. On the other hand, the reviewer offers the text as an imaginary space for "fun without pause or reflection" for adult readers.

This review, though speaking specifically of the dual-readership Kipling's text facilitates, also articulates a central tension in children's literature—adults imagining and constructing a space and identity known as childhood. In her study of children's literature and empire, M. Daphne Kutzer looks at "[t]he presentation of childhood as an ideal, innocent kingdom of its own" (xvi).[88] According to Kutzer, "[A]dults may be aware that a long-accepted cultural code is crumbling, that the world is shifting in unnerving and poorly understood ways, but they want to shield children from these changes and also to encourage them to continue believing in and practicing [these] cultural beliefs" (xvi). Kutzer's claim that children's literature arises not out of an ideal view of the world but instead from an awareness of its dangers is significant for Kipling's text. *Puck of Pook's Hill* deals with themes of empire during a period when the cracks and strain of the British Empire were beginning to show.[89] The dual nature of this text, then, can be understood to arise as much from adult desire to deal with imperial anxieties as from an attempt to engage children in reading and imaginative play.

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[88] Kutzer also reads Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* as an example of imperial ideology at work in children's literature.

[89] See John McBratney for a discussion of Kipling's own shifting fears and desires concerning empire.

Additionally, the songs between the stories included in the book offer poetic musings on the historical events and provide one more opportunity for play. For example, the poem "A British-Roman Song (A.D.406)" accompanies the story wherein Dan and Una meet Parnesius. The poem voices the experience of a speaker who identifies with the imperial center of Rome, even though his life is spent on its periphery: "My father's father saw it not, /And I, belike, shall never come/To look on that so-holy spot – " (145).[90] Though the poem does not explicitly name Parnesius as the speaker, its positioning between stories in which this character narrates his experience as a part of the Roman imperial forces suggests that this is indeed the case. While some poems, such as "Sir Richard's Sword" and "Puck's Song," make clear connections between the stories and songs, others require a bit more interpretive work on the part of the reader (55-56, 1-2). Thus, while the poems may be read as facilitating the transition between stories, they also create gaps that the reader must fill in in order to make these connections. In attending to this aspect of structure, we see the way in which the collection's very form troubles the seemingly closed framework of child figures passively listening to and being formed by these stories of empire. Instead, the text invites readers, like the fictional children, to participate and play in the making of meaning.

The fact that the text facilitates space for both childlike play and adult desire becomes more complicated when we consider the text's genre. Here, the combination of history and fantasy echoes the tradition of medieval romance wherein Britain's past,

[90] While the speaker's praise for the imperial center as "that so-holy spot" suggests a pro-imperial viewpoint, it only offers the perspective of the speaker, not that given by the book as a whole. For example, following on the heels of another story wherein Parnesius recounts his sympathy for the Picts, who are subject to Rome's aggression, readers experience a decidedly different perspective. In "A Pict Song," the collection offers the opposite perspective: "Rome never looks where she treads. /Always her heavy hooves fall" (201). Within the stories, Parnesius remains loyal to Rome even as he grows critical of its actions. The poem, however, allows a voice from among the Picts to speak and share a perspective that does not advocate for the majesty of imperial power.

history, and myth intertwine.[91] Kipling not only speaks of Britain's past, but also brings characters from the past into the text's present via Puck's magical intervention. Fantasy and history, like the dual adult-child readership the text facilitates, exist in tension, termed opposite yet implicated as a result of this opposition. Pointing to the magical means—called "seizin"—by which Puck grants Dan and Una access to the past, Jack G. Voller argues, "What Puck gives the children is not land, but history, or a historical sense of the land, a complex sense of belonging in what we might call 'placetime,' in which the value and meaning of place, and therefore belonging, depend as much on history as geography" (83). This placetime, however, comes by magical means—with Puck first appearing to the children on Midsummer's Eve and acting as conduit to these story-telling ghosts. In this way, the text's presentation of history becomes inescapably entwined with the pervasive power of its fantastical elements. Dan and Una presumably have "seizin" to the full weight of Britain's past heritage and current privilege, and yet, this "seizin" is not enough to give them direct access to the past. Rather, Puck, the "the oldest Old Thing in England," must intervene because as the oldest "Thing," Puck—and the native people he signifies—are the true owners of land.[92] In this way, Puck's role as

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[91] In combining history and myth to tell Britain's history, Kipling draws on a long tradition of literature going back to medieval times. For example, Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth century *History of the Kings of Britain* combines tales of giants with an attempt to trace Britain's origins.

[92] Kutzer points out the shifting and conflicting dynamics that result from Kipling's attempt to tell the history of the invasion of the British Isles while also articulating an Ur notion of the Britishness that Dan and Una inherit. In making this claim, Kutzer suggests that Puck aligns himself with Dan and Una: "That Puck stays in England, rather than leaving with the other foreigners, is suggestive of another lesson of empire Kipling is presenting in these stories: when invaders arrive in England, they are either forced to leave because the 'climate' doesn't suit them, or they are assimilated into English (and ultimately British) national culture and character" (36). Kutzer ultimately argues that Kipling achieves a resolution of these tensions through the figure of the sword, writing, "The sword becomes a symbol not only of authority, but of the very nature of Englishness" (36). The passage of the sword, like Puck's communion with the children, may be seen as the stories' peaceful fantasy of continuity and assimilation, as Kutzer suggests. However, the sword still remains a symbol of violence just as Puck remains a lone member of a people for whom invasion of the British Isles meant giving up their land. In this way, even as the stories may smooth

gatekeeper suggests a clear separation between the English children and their heritage while also facilitating their communion with that heritage. The sense of both proximity to and distance from the children and imperial history, in turn, underscores the ambivalent relationship between Britain's past and present as one that requires mediation because the past, though defined in terms of war and conquest, is "other" to the monolithic imperial present.

The ambivalent vision of empire the text manifests in its juxtaposition of present and past through a mixture of history and fantasy does not exist simply as an adult truth that the text attempts to smooth over for its child readers. In fact, the child voices that frame the stories actively participate in this work. In "The Knights of the Joyous Venture," Sir Richard (a Norman knight who participated in the conquest) tells of his adventures sailing with Danish pirates to the coast of Africa. The story recounts the acquisition of "the treasure," which Puck later refers to in his account of the signing of the Magna Carta.[93] Sir Richard, along with Sir Hugh, bearer of the magical sword Weland, gains this treasure by defeating the "devils" that terrorize a village of African people. According to the tale, the native people willingly "fetched store of gold in bars and in dust from their huts, and some great blackened elephant teeth" and offer these treasures in exchange for the service of dealing with these "devils" who live in the tree tops (77). The magical sword sings out "as a Dane sings before battle," and Richard and Hugh are victorious, winning a whole shipload of gold for their efforts (78). In many

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over these seemingly inevitable consequences of invasion, occupation, and empire; they nonetheless invoke moments of critique with these figures.

[93] The sudden move to the geographic space of Africa in a book focused on the history of the British Isles may seem out of place. However, the character of Sir Richard forges a continuation between this story and those of the Norman Conquest. Additionally, the story offers a history of the treasure, which in the final tale becomes a means of securing the Magna Carta.

ways, this story sets up a predictable colonial relations fantasy: the knights (which we might read as the noble British) come to colonial spaces and receive treasure for their nobility and prowess. While these knights did not attempt to colonize the African space and peoples at this time, they nonetheless carry back the wealth of the natives to Britain's geographic space.

While the children wonder at the tale, particularly the notion of all that gold, they question and unsettle it with their response. Here, Dan challenges the story, saying, "I don't believe they were Devils" (85). This comment parallels an observation Dan makes at the opening of the tale, when he shows Sir Richard his compass and suggests that a character in the story to whom Richard attributes magical power was not so magical. Indeed, Dan backs up his claim of disbelief in "devils" with proof by means of a book he had read called *The Gorilla Hunters*.[94] Sir Richard responds to this claim with the question, "Is there no sorcery left in the world?" and in so doing, inverts the relationship between him and the children (86). The children, though awed by his story, speak as well as listen and in so doing, challenge the worldview that structures Sir Richard's tale. Puck, on hearing Sir Richard's question, responds by saying, "I warned thee they were wise children" (86). As biographer Harry Ricketts notes, "Una and Dan were never merely passive listeners; they actively took part in the stories, asking questions and expressing opinions" (292). As the children listen to these stories, they both act as a frame for the tales and mirror the implied child reader's relationship to the text. If we take this position of mirror seriously, then, the possibility for "wise children" to state

[94] Kipling and Nesbit both frame their child characters as avid readers capable of bring their collected gleanings to bear on their experiences. Written by R.M. Ballantyne, *The Gorilla Hunters* (1861) was likely read by Kipling in his youth, along with Ballantyne's other popular works of juvenile fiction including *Coral Island* (1857) and numerous other titles in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

disbelief and to educate the adult storytellers troubles a hierarchical view of adult-child relations. In giving children a voice, the text suggests child readers should not simply internalize stories but instead should actively question and interpret them.

Marah Gubar's recent work theorizing the possibility of agency for the child provides a means to understand the significance of these child voices. In *The Artful Dodger*, Gubar counters critics who claim that the child in children's literature always takes the shape of an idealized and innocent other, arguing, "[T]he late Victorian cult of the child is better characterized as a cultural phenomenon that reflected *competing* conceptions of childhood. More specifically, it was the site where the idea of the child as an innocent Other clashed most dramatically with an older vision of the child as a competent collaborator, capable of working and playing alongside adults" (9). Within the pages of *Puck of Pook's Hill,* we may read Dan and Una as collaborators who both frame and shape the presentation of history offered. Though Puck's magic and knowledge give him the upper hand in these stories as he orchestrates the children's encounters with the past and controls the process of remembering and forgetting, he does not attempt to silence their voices when they come face to face with 'authorities' on history and want to question what they hear. Writing of the emergence of the child narrator in Golden Age fiction, Gubar claims that this manifestation of the child's voice "provides the Golden Age authors with a vehicle to explore how young people enmeshed in ideology might nevertheless deviate from rather than ventriloquize various social, cultural, and literary protocols" (7). Dan and Una, though not in the role of narrators, do this same work. Instead of receiving their history lesson in silent acceptance, they draw on their own knowledge—for example, knowledge of animals native to the continent of Africa gleaned

from *The Gorilla Hunters*—to reframe their relationship to history and therefore authority.[95] In this way, Dan and Una function as implied marginalia, like the scrawl a student writes when displeased with a passage in a textbook, and in this role they implicitly beckon the child reader to do the same.

Nesbit's Children as Heirs of Empire

Like Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet*—the third book in her *Five Children and It* trilogy—imagines her child characters communing with history through the power of magic. Unlike the focus on the history of the British Isles found in Kipling's text, the imperial history found in the pages of Nesbit's novel includes a global narrative that places her child characters within the history of other empires. The children in Nesbit's novel not only take on the role of observers and commentators found in Kipling, but they also become active participants in the past such that the novel invokes the larger narrative of the rise and fall of empire alongside contemplations of the children's own imperial position. Because this juxtaposition crosses boundaries of space and time, it forcibly draws the readers' attention to both the promise and peril of empire—a nexus that frames the child's voice with the rhetoric of imperial ideology and as well as the rhetoric imperial critique.

As a whole, Nesbit's trilogy thematizes the process of growing up, and she uses fantastical adventures to both expand the scope of the children's agency and also raise the stakes of the children's encounters with magic as the books progress. All three books focus on the siblings Jane, Anthea, Cyril, Robert, and occasionally their baby brother known simply as "The Lamb." In *Five Children and It*, the children have magical

[95] While Dan uses knowledge from *The Gorilla Hunters* to challenge the adult narrator's world view, he draws on a text that itself has a problematic relationship to empire in that it features the transportation of apes from Africa to England for exhibition.

adventures—brought about by the sand-fairy Psammead's ability to grant wishes— that take place within their neighborhood and the nearby town. Though of a more fickle disposition, Psammead parallels Puck in that he represents the last of a race of beings from a time long since past. The title magical beings of the second book, *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904), allow the children to travel to distant lands while riding on the magic carpet. Having already traveled to different geographic spaces, the children's second encounter with Psammead as well as a magical amulet in the final book titled *The Story of the Amulet* (1906) results in travel through both time and space as they visit ancient empires. All of the books are organized episodically, with each chapter dealing with a magical journey. A third-person omniscient narrator frames these adventures in all three novels. However, the narrative style mirrors this expansion of plot across the trilogy, for whereas the narrator actively critiques the children's failure to make prudent wishes in the first book, by the conclusion of the final book the narrator makes more space for the children's own thought process and choice.[96] As Nesbit crafts ever more fantastical adventures for her child characters, the presentation of these characters demonstrates the possibility of growth over time and with experience for the child characters.

While the plots of all three novels conveniently place the children's mother and father at a safe distance, so that the children's magical adventures can go on for the most part unimpeded, the method for removing the adults from the story in the third novel is not all that pleasant. Their mother and "The Lamb" travel away because of her

[96] In a study of Nesbit's work alongside other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writing for children, Elaine Ostry writes, "What I see in Nesbit is the culmination of the development of the child hero as a character responsible for his or her own maturation" (50).

unspecified illness, and their Father leaves for Manchuria to report on the war.[97] Unlike the previous books where the children actively seek adventures away from home, the children's desire to be with their parents motivates their journey, as finding the missing piece of the amulet promises to give them their "heart's desire" and return their parents safe from the threats of illness and war (269). The desire to heal the fractured domestic space that motivates the final novel also marks a significant difference in these adventures from the earlier novels that offer the promise to escape the limitations and boredom of the domestic space. By framing the action in this way, the novel raises the stakes of the adventure from play to serious business with the imperative to preserve the family unit. The children's adventures become weighted with new responsibility, which combined with the expanded global and temporal scope of their travel, offers both purpose and potential power for the child characters not seen in earlier novels. Set within the context of empires both past and present, the children's assumption of power emerges as tied to their imperial position even as the text suggests that such power does not come without cost, resulting in an ambivalent portrait of the children's position as heirs of empire.

Reviews of Nesbit's work reveal that despite the passage of nearly 40 years between the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and the start of her trilogy, adult responses to children's literature still focused on the opposition of didacticism and fantasy. A writer for the *Saturday Review* offers this analysis of children's literature as a genre to frame the review of Nesbit's work that follows: "Formerly when a child

[97] This conflict resulted from British involvement in confrontations between the Russians and the Japanese related to railways and ports. As with many conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in which Britain played a role, issues of balance of power as well as trade routes and alliances resulted in British entanglement in this issue.

invented, it was slapped for untruthfulness, now its little fables and bewildering romances are hailed as the signs of a poetic and romantic genius" (8). While this description certainly seems to indicate a notion of progress, the reviewer refrains from judgment: "Which system produces the best men and women is hard to say, both have their merits" (8). The reviewer notes a shift in the larger construction of childhood, one that emphasizes and elevates the value of a child's imagination, only to undermine this observation by suggesting that "slap[ing] a child's hand" for generating and inhabiting imaginative worlds has its "merits" (8). Such indecision about the positive or negative valuation of children engaging in imaginative play underscores the way the child characters in Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* push boundaries in defining their sense of reality in relation to their reading and pursuing fantastical adventures. The same reviewer notes of *Five Children and It*: "It is refreshing to find a modern writer who has not forgotten what fairyland is really like. Most people think it is a place where the animals and flowers talk lesson-book at you unceasingly" (8). Four years later, the same publication praises *The Story of the Amulet* for its ability to combine fantasy and education: "There is considerable learning conveyed in the pictures of those places miraculously visited by the owners of the Amulet" (8). Taken together, these reviews make clear that the genre of children's literature remained contested ground even at the turn of the century when much of the canon of what we consider today "classic" children's texts had been produced. Such conflicting ideas of what children's literature should be, and perhaps more importantly who the child should be, call us to attend to Nesbit's vision of child readers with particular focus to how reading and fantasy shape the child characters for good or for ill.

As with criticism of Kipling's writing for children, many scholars read Nesbit's portrait of childhood through the lens of her biography with the parallel result of polarized, binary conclusions. Nesbit's fascinating life story provides much in the way of scandal and contradiction, including her marriage to Hubert Bland, in which she lived with one of his mistresses and raised illegitimate offspring alongside her own, as well as her involvement in the Fabian society. Though she attended socialist lectures and gatherings, biographers note that she was known for causing a scene, such as a fainting spell, in these meetings. Despite her personal life choices that seemed to mark her as a "New Woman," Nesbit refrained from actively taking up the issue of a women's suffrage. Drawn in by one or another of these competing view points, scholars who approach Nesbit's work through accounts of her life tend to focus on a few key, yet polarizing questions: Is Nesbit "Victorian" or "Edwardian" in her approach to issues of her time? Is Nesbit's writing conservative or progressive? However, as a discussion of these critical viewpoints reveals, in the process, such binary approaches often eclipse the presence of these competing ideas in her writing.

While her lifestyle and associations may mark her as a fairly progressive woman for her historical moment, many critics read her work in the exact opposite terms and label her conservative or Victorian.[98] Here and throughout the chapter, I use the term conservative in the sense that this literature seems to endorse the worldview or the dominant ideological sentiments found in the contemporary culture at the time the work was written. For example, Humphrey Carpenter draws from Nesbit's biography to argue

[98]Stephen Prickett terms both Nesbit and Kipling as authors of Victorian fantasy, even as many of the works he cites were in fact written and published during the Edwardian period. Prickett covers a wide range of fantasy authors, concluding with these two writers, in *Victorian Fantasy*.

that her writings were not progressive; indeed, he goes so far as to claim, "Nesbit seems to be at least partially responsible for the extraordinarily narrow social compass of English juvenile fiction for the first half of the twentieth century" (128). While Carpenter focuses on Nesbit's appeal to a conservative middle-class audience, U.C. Knoepflmacher focuses on the fairy tale as an essentially maternal form, and he examines Nesbit's appropriation of it. In his reading, Knoepflmacher questions those who read Nesbit as a convention-busting New Woman figure and claims, "Nesbit's fiction for children, therefore, much like Eliot's fiction for adults, neither radically challenges a patriarchal order nor sharply departs from the more pronounced moralism of earlier nineteenth-century women writers" (302). Thus, even as Nesbit's own life choices seem to place her ahead of her time, these critics suggest that her writing itself does not voice radical sentiments and even goes so far as to endorse more traditional views.

More recently, critics have begun to challenge these conservative readings of Nesbit offered by Knoepflmacher and Carpenter, and in so doing, they demonstrate the possibility for creative ambivalence in Nesbit's writing that both invokes convention while also questioning it at the same time. In particular, scholars examine the way in which Nesbit's work portrays female characters, and they attempt to draw out the possibility for subversion of gender norms as well as the representation of alternative roles for women. Focusing on Nesbit's *The Railway Children*, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons draw attention to the way in which Nesbit invites female readers "to adopt a creative subject position in relation to the models of the feminine that [her] texts promote" (147). More specifically, they claim, "[G]irls can thus align themselves with the imaginative and political possibilities that the novels disclose, while gaining

reassurance from the overriding conservatism of their narrative direction" (147). Even as Foster and Simons point out the possibility for an alternative vision of gender roles for the female reader, they also acknowledge the extent to which these alternative visions may be nestled within a more conservative narrative in order to pass muster with readers. Jeanne Lahaie makes a similar move in her study when she reads Nesbit's work as offering other possibilities for girls and women than the roles of wife and mother.[99] Though Lahaie argues that "E. Nesbit's work can be credited as being an important part of the transformation of motherhood that occurred at the turn of the century," she also carefully acknowledges the limitations of this transformation (410). In speaking of the representations of motherhood found in Nesbit's writing for children, Lahaie writes, "While none of these women or their substitutes could necessarily be identified as New Women, they illustrate a complexity of mother images and pointed the way to possibilities for women to the girls and boys who read them" (417). Though Foster and Simons as well as Lahaie demonstrate a degree of caution in their attempts to read Nesbit's work in more progressive terms, they nonetheless highlight the way in which more progressive sentiments may be carefully couched in what appears to be quite conservative children's literature.

The fact that such polarized readings can be argued and supported by the same body of work reveals the complicated portrait of social and political issues possible in works aimed at children, and in particular, in the works of Nesbit. Though all of these

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[99] Lori Campbell's study provides another example of recent scholarship in which a scholar seeks to make a tempered claim concerning the possibly progressive elements in Nesbit's writing. Campbell looks specifically at the use of time travel and argues that Nesbit's "use of portals in both concrete and metaphorical forms carries weight as social and political commentary from a female, if not exactly a feminist, perspective" (65). For a discussion of Nesbit's relationship to the discourse surrounding the Woman Question, see Amelia A. Rutledge's chapter "E. Nesbit and the woman question" found in *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*.

studies demonstrate the potentially rich and complex conclusions to be found by taking a biographical approach to Nesbit's writings, I agree with Sue Walsh's assessment of the larger study of children's literature when she points out the extent to which biographical criticism hinders children's literature critics from asking potentially provocative questions. Caught up in retrospective binaries of conservative or progressive, critics hold authors to one side of a debate or the other when the works themselves, particularly texts of children's literature that simultaneously looks to the past with nostalgia and the future with hope, inhabit a space wherein these ideas are only beginning to be explored. Indeed, a biographical approach to the question of children and empire would call upon readers to champion Nesbit for anti-imperialist sentiments or conversely decry the imperial rhetoric at work in her novels. However, attention to the way in which the texts themselves construct a particular view of childhood in relation to notions of empire reveals the tensions at play in Nesbit's novel that a binary approach would obscure.[100] By asking how empire is represented in tandem with questions of identity and power for the child, we will see the extent to which Nesbit's fantasy story shows the power of the children's imperial identity, even as moments of critique within the novel implicitly criticize the Imperial Britain of the present.

In the context of her other writings, the choice to mount a critique of British imperial society in writing aimed at a child readership appears even more striking given the pressures Nesbit faced to support her family. Her husband lost his business early in their marriage, which meant that Nesbit's choice to write came not from luxury but from necessity. Before authoring the *Five Children and It* trilogy, Nesbit published a

[100] In my research thus far, I have yet to uncover conclusive evidence regarding Nesbit's own position on empire. Critics who point out imperial connections between Nesbit and her writing seem to rely not on biographical or nonfiction sources but primarily on their particular interpretation of her fiction.

collection of poetry *Songs of Love and Empire* (1898) wherein she represents Britain's imperial status in glowing, even triumphant terms. Though only six of the poems deal with empire, a reviewer for *A Review of Reviews* declares, "In the Songs of England and the great Empire she has inherited, Mrs. Bland strikes a note which thrills and rings true" (295). The reviewer even goes so far as to compare her "Song of Trafalgar" to Kipling's "Recessional" and in the process places her on par with the bard of empire. Many of the poems first appeared in periodical venues such as *Daily News*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, and *Daily Chronicle*, suggesting that they were attuned to the readerly desires of a popular audience. In "To the Queen of England," the speaker praises the queen and declares "nations far off your royal colours wear" (l. 20). Such a triumphant portrait of British perfection speaks to contemporary readers desires to joy in their country's prosperity. However, it also runs counter to the numerous critiques offered in *The Story of the Amulet*, wherein imperial prosperity rings hollow when the poor at home remain oppressed.

Even a brief comparison between the portraits of empire offered in these two texts highlights the complexity of placing a writer on a conservative-progressive spectrum. As the author of *Songs of Love and Empire* and a mother whose pen supported not only her children but those of her husband's mistress, her work speaks directly to public taste at the time, perhaps in order to fit the needs of popular publications. Though she aspired to be a "serious" writer, Nesbit's popular writing for children became a viable means to provide financially for her family. That children's literature, also written for a popular audience, emerges as a venue for Nesbit to level critiques of imperial logic should give us pause. A look a *The Story of the Amulet* within the context of increased pressures on

imperial reading for children places binary assumptions—about the genre, the specific novel, and Nesbit's writing—in question precisely because it reveals the vexed position of these children as inheritors of empire.

The possibility for imperial critique emerges at the opening of *The Story of the Amulet*, wherein the children find themselves saying goodbye to their parents—the foundational moment of loss that motivates all of the novel's action. Though their mother's illness does not have any explicit connection to empire, the particularly lonely position the children find themselves in at the start of *The Story of the Amulet* is at least in part a result of the demands of imperial expansion. As previously mentioned, the necessity of reporting the war back home takes their journalist father far from the domestic realm of their London home and into northeast Asia. While the text could take this opportunity to praise the father's bravery for traveling into a distant land, the language used to describe his absence fails to elevate this pursuit in any way: "Father had to go to Manchuria to telegraph news about the war to the tiresome paper he wrote for – the *Daily Bellower*, or something like that was its name" (3). In describing the paper as "tiresome" and giving it the title "*Daily Bellower,* or something like that," the narrator conveys these details with a sense of dismissive imprecision, suggesting that what father does is unimportant other than that it takes him away from the children. The name *Daily Bellower* itself evokes a loud and jingoistic style of reporting and indicates that the narrator does not place much value in this work of trumpeting the news of foreign conflicts back home.

Additionally, the narrator tells us that even the children's extended family—in the form of an aunt and uncle—cannot take care of them as this couple now lives in China,

"which is much too far off for you to expect to be asked to spend the holidays in" (3). As with their father's work as a journalist, the narrator approaches the loss of this aunt and uncle with humor and emphasizes not the possible benefits to the aunt and uncle (or the empire at large), but instead focuses on how this is simply "too far off" for the children to be properly looked after.

While the lack of parental supervision enables adventure in previous books, this novel emphasizes the children's emotional loss as more significant than possible adventure.[101] Instead of living with family members who, however extended, could provide a sense of domestic warmth and familial connection, the children are placed in a lodging house run by a former nurse. Of this situation the narrator writes, "So the children were left in the care of old Nurse, who lived on Fitzroy Street, near the British Museum, and though she was always very kind to them, and indeed spoiled them far more than would be good for the most grown-up of us, the four children felt perfectly wretched" (3). The kindness of "old Nurse" cannot replace the bonds of family, and the promise of reunion compels the children to pursue the amulet across time and space.

However, even as the novel presents leaving the domestic space for empire as the cause of wretchedness for the children, it paradoxically places them close by a repository of imperial memory—the British Museum. The British Museum allows both the child characters and the readers a concrete point of connection between their time traveling adventures and the world of turn-of-the-century London.[102] The children visit the

[101] Mavis Reimer also connects the children's position to empire, writing, "The overall impression is that the adults in the children's world are themselves powerless and debilitated in their relations to the larger world in which the narrative is situated. In the third novel, this powerlessness is linked specifically to an imperial war" (51).

museum throughout the text, accompanied in one instance by the Queen of Babylon, who comes forward in time due to a wish granted by the Psammead.[103] Additionally, the British Museum stands as a catalogue of Britain's imperial might in that the penetration into and colonization of other nations enables British archeologists to bring back artifacts of past empires to London.

The Queen's visit to the British Museum calls attention to this very fact when she attempts to remove all of "her" possessions from the display cases by the means of Psammead's magic. A storm of objects crash through the museum's doors, including "an enormous stone bull" followed by "more stone images, by great slabs of carved stone, bricks, helmets, tools, weapons, fetters, wine-jars, bowls, bottles, vases, jugs, saucers, seals, and the round long things, something like rolling pins, [. . .] necklaces, collars, rings, armlets, earrings—heaps and heaps of things" (145). Because this event follows a string of socially unacceptable behaviors by the Queen, the children do not perceive this moment as a victory against imperial control; their dismay also encourages the reader to feel uncomfortable with the Queen's destructive behavior.[104] Even as the text faults the

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[102] Eitan Bar-Yosef makes a similar point, saying, "The notion that even civilizations that have long been destroyed or lost are still available for cultural appropriation is epitomized here by a specific institution: the British Museum" (12).

[103] While I focus on the British Museum as an imperial institution, I also want to note that Nesbit integrates learning about history into the text through the children's adventures with time travel as well as less fantastical means in the present, such as the museum's collection and the scholarly gentleman who lives upstairs.

[104] Bar-Yosef places *The Story of the Amulet* within the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century narratives wherein the fear of reverse colonization takes center stage. The episode where the Queen of Babylon comes to present-day London by means of the sand-fairy's magic realizes the possibility of reverse colonization that narratives like Rider Haggard's *She* envision but do not fully carryout. However, Bar-Yosef argues that Nesbit's narrative formulates the possibility of reverse colonization in a different manner: "What could easily have been depicted as a spectacle of horror is presented in *The Amulet* as an almost liberating experience; rather than employ the invasion scenario as a stark warning against Britain's imperial decline, Nesbit seems to welcome this shift in fortunes" (6). While I agree that this moment fails to live up to its potential as imperial critique, I think that the "liberating

Queen for flaunting magic and making an undesirable public spectacle of herself and the children, it nonetheless points out that museum holdings do not actually belong to Britain. The museum episode does not act as an explicit critique of British imperialism via the institution of the museum; however, it does successfully draw attention to questions of ownership that imperial institutions often render invisible.[105]

Though Nesbit pictures precious artifacts breaking loose from museum display cases as a work of magic, the very real possibility that Britain should be compelled to return treasures taken from other cultures manifested most pointedly in the debate surrounding the so-called Elgin Marbles, or more accurately, the Parthenon Marbles. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin removed many of the sculptures adorning the Parthenon in Greece to Britain.[106] By 1816, the subject of these sculptures resulted in both public and parliamentary debate, raising questions of the ownership of these artifacts. As parliamentary records from 1816 demonstrate, the argument concerning whether or not Britain should purchase the Elgin Marbles, and if not, what should be done with them ultimately turned on rhetoric of protectionism. The opening remarks by Mr. Banks frame the question thus: "Did this mean that they should be purchased from Lord Elgin, for the purpose of being shipped back to those who sat no value on them? Were not these works in a state of constant dilapidation and danger

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experience" Bar-Yosef identifies is liberating in that it allows for the empire to come home, if just for a moment, and demand reparation of its rightful possessions.

[105] For a discussion of empire in Nesbit's Bastable series for children, see M. Daphne Kutzer's *Empire's Children: Empire and Imperialism in Classic British Children's Books* (2000). In these writings for children, Kutzer identifies Nesbit's interest in the relationship between children, history, and empire: "But in the Bastable stories, history in the generalized sense of the ancient roots of the British present, as well as the ways in the British present might be leading to the future, are Nesbit's concerns—and since British history was imperial in past Roman times and imperial in Nesbit's time, the history the children encounter is shot through with imperial issues and events" (70).

[106] Bruce's status as British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire from 1799 to 1803 made this removal even more questionable.

before their removal" (1028-9). The idea that these statues from antiquity would be in danger should they be returned to their country of origin continued to sway members. Mr. J.W. Ward stated, "[N]o one could be more unwilling than he was that these sacred relics should be taken from that consecrated spot, where they had excited the enthusiasm of ages; no one could have a great respect than himself for the feelings of nations" (1030-1). Despite these strong convictions, he also concluded that to return them to their country of origin without the protection of British museum curators would constitute their destruction.[107] Once purchased from Lord Elgin, the marbles made their home in the British Museum, despite Greece calling for their return in 1832 after achieving independence from the Turks, a call that continued to be revived across the century and into our present historical moment. While Nesbit focuses on artifacts from a different time and place, the prominence of the Elgin Marbles debate across several centuries provides a concrete linking point between the Queen of Babylon's magical attempts to regain her property and the reality that many of the revered holdings in the British Museum came from without the nation's borders rather than within.[108]

Along with constructing these scenes around the British Museum such that they leave room for critique of empire, Nesbit crafts the Queen's response to London in a manner that allows this imperial ruler to point out problems with British society, most notably the position of the working classes. On a cab tour through different areas of London, the Queen remarks, "But how badly you keep your slaves. How wretched and

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[107] Admittedly, as different religions and nations held sway in Greece, the Parthenon did suffer damage. However, in their time spent in Britain, the Elgin Marbles have been subjected to the effects of pollution and damage in the name of cleaning, adding ammunition for those who in the present day continue to call for their return.

[108] Nesbit herself was very familiar with the British Museum, and engaged in "extensive" research there in order to ensure the historical accuracy of the cultures represented in the novel (Stabe 253).

poor and neglected they seem" (149). When the children attempt to convince her that the people she sees are not slaves but "working-people," the Queen responds, "Of course they're working. That's what slaves are. Don't you tell me. Do you suppose I don't know a slave's face when I see it? Why don't their masters see that they're better fed and better clothed?" (149). In maintaining her belief that these "working-people" are not only slaves but treated poorly even for slave status, the Queen voices a critique of the contemporary economic and social system in Britain and the way in which that system does not provide a sufficient wage for adequate food and clothing. When she questions the children why these "slaves" do not rise up against their masters, Cyril responds, "[Y]ou see they have votes—that makes them safe not to revolt. It makes all the difference" (150). The Queen, who has difficulty grasping the concept, ultimately concludes that the vote must be "a sort of plaything" (150). Nesbit's portrait of working-class oppression, wherein the vote becomes simply a ploy to maintain the status quo, drives home a pointed critique of government mismanagement and neglect in the imperial center.

Though not a particularly generous or loveable figure, the Queen nonetheless responds to the poverty she sees by wishing "that all these slaves may have their hands full of their favourite meat and drink" (150). An illustration by H.R. Millar for the 1906 edition visually showcases the poverty of men, women, and the children (213). In the foreground stands a man in a shaggy overcoat whose lined hands and face convey malnourishment. Four children gaze at the food in their arms with stunned amazement, while their bare feet and torn clothing testify to their hardships. In the background a woman, whose face and hands suggest age, labor, and starvation, stands in the open

doorway of a dark hovel. The visual representation of these figures provides a stark contrast to the well-dressed and smooth skinned characters that populate the other illustrations.

The novel repeatedly voices this negative judgment throughout many of the children's adventures, but this manifestation of the critique remains particularly significant in that it comes not from the perspective of the children but from an imperial ruler. This is not to suggest that we view the Queen of Babylon as a progressive figure in the text; on the contrary, her commentary indicates that she has no problem with slavery so long as the enslaved population receives food and clothing. Nonetheless, by putting these objections in the mouth of an imperial ruler, especially a Queen, the novel draws attention to the way in which Britain's government neglects the needs of the working-people and points out that imperial prosperity does not equal prosperity for all.

Additionally, Nesbit's choice to invoke the Queen of Babylon (as opposed to a monarch from Egypt or Atlantis) invokes a sense of similarity between past and present rather than the stark sense of difference the Queen's behavior at the British Museum suggests. According to Lynda Nead's study:

> London in the nineteenth century was imagined as a Victorian Babylon. Writers and journalists drew upon the image of the ancient city to invoke the wealth, splendor and refinement of the modern metropolis. Like Babylon, London was the center of a global commerce that was subjugating the rest of the world; it was the seat of an empire that was defining contemporary history. But Babylon was a paradoxical image for the nineteenth-century city. It not only represented the most magnificent imperial city of the ancient world, but also conjured up images of the mystical Babylon of the Apocalypse. (3)

By invoking the Babylon of the past and bringing that past to meet the present in the Queen's London visit, Nesbit literally brings the metaphor of London as Babylon home.

Though British identification with empires of past, such as Rome or in this case Babylon, provides justification for demonstrations of imperial might, such identification also has a double edge in that it necessarily brings with it the narrative of imperial demise. Critic Mavis Reimer acknowledges the way in which this paradox plays into Nesbit's trilogy, writing, "If Nesbit appears at one level to be an enthusiastic agent of the empire-builders, at another level she seems to be meditating on the inevitable end of empire, a topic that also preoccupied many of her contemporaries" (48). In bringing together ancient Babylon and its modern-day namesake, the novel does not highlight the glories of London; instead, it makes an ambivalent comparison that implicitly calls to mind the eventual end of empire.

In reading the British Museum as at least a possible sight of ambivalence, if not outright critique, we must acknowledge that the children's project to recover the lost half of the amulet from another space and time in order to bring it into the present and achieve their hearts' desire appears to engage in the same imperial logic as that of the museum. However, the novel's overall trajectory interrupts such a tidy reading when, in the end, the children use the amulet not to realize their own desires but that of the eccentric scholar who accompanies them on several adventures. The power of the amulet allows the scholar to fuse with an Egyptian priest from the past named Rekh-marā. While this mystical communion, a willing communion on both sides, does benefit the scholar immensely in that he can now write with a personal conviction and knowledge of the past, it also removes the children from full participation in the imperial trajectory of bringing this artifact to the domestic space of England for their own benefit.[109]

[109] Reimer argues that the relationship between the children, the scholar, and the amulet places the children in the role of imperial agent. While I agree that the children do play a pivotal role in the

Though the children pursue their hearts' desire by tracking the amulet across time and space, they end up realizing this desire without any magical intervention at all. Nurse provides them a telegram that announces both parents will return shortly and makes reference to a previous letter. This in turn causes Jane to realize that they had received letters—letters that remained unopened due to their mutual preoccupation with the amulet adventures—which would have notified them of the happy reunion much sooner. Even as the novel seems to set up the pursuit of the amulet in a manner that justifies the children's quest and endorses the imperial logic that underlies it, the novel's conclusion undermines the necessity of the quest and its ability to offer the children fulfillment. Indeed, had the children focused on home rather than empire, they would have realized their parents were returning shortly and that they had no need to pursue the amulet at all.

Though I argue that the book fails to complete its own imperial logic—indeed, I suggest that it intentionally short-circuits the children's relationship to empire in the end—we must nonetheless consider how the book's allowance for and limitations of child agency demonstrate that a willing identification with imperial might can offer the children a source of power. The children travel through both time and space and find themselves in a variety of imperial civilizations and, as a result of their quest, find that they must interact with high-ranking adults in these civilizations, including kings and queens as well as religious leaders. While the children's position in their own time and place reveals them to be, as Reimer notes, "powerless and debilitated," their travels offer

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transaction that takes places between the scholar and the priest (with the end result that he gains knowledge of empire), I find that this turn destabilizes the children's direct relation to empire in that it separates the novel's happy conclusion from these imperial pursuits and perhaps implicitly questions their validity and efficacy.

them a unique position to assume power by framing their identities in imperial terms (51). As outsiders to the places they visit, the children have the opportunity to craft their own identities by the language they use to describe themselves and their mission. Following in the tradition of conquerors and imperialists, the children engage in the identity play that occurs when two cultures collide. In these moments, the children not only introduce themselves, they also link their identities to that of the British Empire in an attempt gain agency—an agency that does not fully reflect their position as children in their present historical moment. However, because of the way in which the narrative positions its imagined child readers as experienced readers capable of interpretive work, the novel simultaneously pictures child agency via empire and also encourages its readers to question the viability of such an identity.

An example of the way in which the children voice their identities in imperial terms occurs when they travel to ancient Egypt. Initially, they find themselves surrounded by native people and feel a bit threatened by their exposure. Anthea prompts Cyril to speak for the group and the words he employs demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between empire, identity, and power:

> [W]e come from the world where the sun never sets. And peace with honour is what we want. We are the great Anglo-Saxon or conquering race. Not that we want to conquer *you*, [. . .]. We only want to look at your houses and your – well, at all you've got here, and then we shall return to our own place, and tell of all that we have seen that your name may be famed. (62)

Cyril's statements act as a collage of imperial sentiments, most likely gleaned from all of the reading that Nesbit's narrator suggests the children engage in. The notion of coming "from the world where the sun never sets" directly invokes the idea of Britain's empire, as it is only by colonizing various territories around the globe that the tiny British isles

and its inhabitants can make such a claim. Similarly, Cyril's second statement, wherein he voices the desire for "peace with honour," parrots the words of Prime Minister Disraeli who used this phrase to describe the outcome of the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In this historical moment, the "honour" of which Disraeli speaks was in fact an added possession to the British Empire—Cyprus. The third statement most directly asserts an aggressive imperial identity by linking the children to the "Anglo-Saxon or conquering race." However, as the words that follow reveal, even the child speaker senses that this language of conquering may suggest more power and aggression than he intends to communicate. As a result, he immediately clarifies by saying, "Not that we want to conquer *you*." The emphasis on "you," found in the original text, conveys that the children do not intend to engage in the behavior of conquerors toward these specific people; however, the statement still retains the connection between their identity and these Anglo-Saxons and thus remains an imperial threat. In this moment, Cyril aligns himself and his siblings with a notion of imperial identity in order to convey their power to the Egyptians they encounter, even as that power does not directly correspond to that found in their lived identities in the present.

Cyril echoes this assumption of imperial identity throughout the text, demonstrating the extent to which he and the children perceive the efficacy of this speech. Having found moderate success with his declaration of imperial might when they traveled to Egypt, Cyril employs the same phrase when demanding to meet with the Babylonian king: "'We come from very far,' said Cyril mechanically. 'From the Empire where the sun never sets, and we want to see your King'" (100). Cyril provides a more concise version of his introduction in this speech and, in so doing, utilizes the explicit

language of "Empire" rather than the vague term "world" from the previous encounter. Though both this address to the Babylonians and that to the Egyptians bring together the children's attempts at agency in these strange times and places with imperial identity, the narrative description of the second speech undermines these declarations as authentic statements of identity. The narrative terms the way in which Cyril gives this speech "mechanical," and with this description it destabilizes the connection between the language in which Cyril figures their identity and an organic, authentic sense of self.

With this move, the narrative exemplifies one of the key characteristics of children's literature Peter Nodelman identifies in *The Hidden Adult* when the text sets up a clear disparity between the child protagonist and adult narrative voice. While such a move might be interpreted as emphasizing adult-child hierarchy, I read Nesbit's narrative decision to frame Cyril's imperial invocations as an invitation to the child reader to think and decide for him or herself how to interpret this moment. The disjunction between Cyril's claims and the narrative description surrounding them creates a contradiction without a heavy-handed conclusion on the narrator's part, such that the imagined child reader must fill in the gap. On this reading we see that even as these moments demonstrate the way in which the narrative figures the children's attempts at agency in imperial terms, they also contain fissures that suggest that the narrative does not wholly endorse the statements, or at the very least, portrays this identity as forged in utilitarian rather than productive terms.[110]

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[110] Though I focus specifically on the statements Cyril voices on behalf of the group, other scholars have noted the way in which female characters also craft a sense of agency in connection to imperial discourse. In an analysis of the relationship between Anthea's assumption of a maternal role and the representation of primitive peoples in the text, Michelle Smith writes, "While Nesbit may favorably contrast past civilizations with contemporary England, the Psammead books nevertheless ascribe a child-like lack of development or immaturity to several groups of 'native' people that the children interact with. Therefore Anthea is situated (in *The Story of the Amulet* in particular) as uniquely able to placate

The tension created by the narrator's descriptive framing of Cyril's imperial rhetoric reflects the extent to which the narrative imagines its child reader as capable and discerning. According to Gloria G. Fromm, "[T]he children in [Nesbit's] stories—all of them great readers themselves—are often shown under the influence of the characters in the books they read, imitating their behavior as though at one and the same time they endorsed it and yet were playing a sophisticated game, as though indeed fiction and reality were so scrambled that neither could exist without the other" (59). Indeed, Nesbit both portrays her child characters as voracious and interpretive readers and also invites her child readership to grasp these same skills through her narrator's commentary throughout the trilogy. In these moments the narrator references an outside text such as Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* or simply an author such as Rudyard Kipling in order to deepen the reader's understanding of a particular place, person, or event. Though the narrator invokes these other texts, she often refrains from fully explicating these outside sources for the reader; instead, the narrator's commentary assumes that the child reader has familiarity with these outside texts and possesses the capability to make imaginative connections between texts such that further narrative discussion is not necessary.

For example, in the second book in the trilogy titled *The Phoenix and the Carpet*, the children travel to India on the magic carpet in the hopes of finding some items to sell at their school bazaar. The children are able to identify the place to which the carpet has brought them because of their reading experience: "They knew [the town] was Indian at once, by the shape of the domes and roofs; and besides a man went by on an elephant,

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infantilized native peoples because of her abilities to care for and guide children younger than herself" (304).

and two English soldiers went along the road, talking like in Mr. Kipling's books—so after that no one could have any doubts as to where they were" (96). Here, the novel represents the children's familiarity with Kipling's writings as an important source of knowledge when they find themselves in a strange place. Though the narrator describes aspects of the people and clothing the children encounter, she refrains from including other details, writing, "I am not going to describe the ranee's palace, because I really have never seen the palace of a ranee, and Mr. Kipling has. So you can read about it in his books. But I know exactly what happened there" (97). The narrator assumes that the child reader possesses the capability not only to read Kipling's works and glean from them knowledge of India, but also to then imaginatively engage with those descriptions when reading other texts, such as *The Phoenix and the Carpet*.

More recently, scholars of children's literature have read Nesbit's portrait of her child reader-characters as an example of the connection between literacy and power she imagines in her novels. In *Artful Dodgers* Marah Gubar claims that Nesbit "portray[s] young people as deeply enmeshed in a social, cultural, and literary scene that influences but does not entirely constrain them" (129). In distinguishing between influence and constraint and placing the children's relationship between these two poles, Gubar helpfully offers the means to consider child agency while also acknowledging its limitations. Furthermore, Gubar writes, "[C]hildren should function like the discriminating editors who often turn up as characters in books: rather than simply accepting everything they receive from the culture at large, they should criticize, edit, rewrite, even reject the endless submissions pouring in from all quarters" (130). Anita Moss makes a similar point in her study of Nesbit's writing and its relationship to

Romantic conceptions of the child when she argues, "The most significant way that Nesbit's child characters liberate themselves from static myths of childhood is by seizing control of their own stories to become makers and creators" (245). Whether viewing the child as a liberated creator or seeing the child's power in the more contingent terms of editor and text, both Gubar and Moss demonstrate the ripeness of Nesbit's novels for considering the portrait of child agency they offer. Given the view of child readership Nesbit constructs in her writing, moments such as the description of Cyril's statement of imperial might open up the possibility for the implied child reader to resist the child protagonists' assertions. Rather than being forced to identify with the child characters, the experienced child reader imagined by Nesbit's novel exists in the space between the voice of the adult narrator and that of the child character such that he or she can discern a different relationship to story and to empire than that voiced by the text.

In exploring the representation of empire offered in Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* and the connections made between imperial identity and agency for the child characters, we can trace the novel's ambivalent stance on the subject of imperial rule. On the one hand, the novel repeatedly draws attention to the plight of the working-class and even places this critique in the mouth of the Queen of Babylon, all of which undermines any simple statements regarding the glory and supremacy of the British Empire. On the other hand, the novel places declarations of imperial might in the mouth of its child characters, suggesting that such declarations do indeed hold weight. While Nesbit's novel makes apparent the difficulty of writing about the past in a cultural context steeped in images and rhetoric of empire, her presentation of imperialism does not fully implicate her in this imperial project. Instead, the novel offers a complex interplay of imperial

ideology and imperial critique that suggests, if nothing else, the fraught position empire held in British culture at the opening of the twentieth century. Additionally, the children's appropriation of imperial language in conjunction with their attempts to fashion an identity beyond that of children, who in their own time and place are mostly without power, reveals important connections between the thematics of children's fantasy literature and the logic and discourse of empire.[111] It is as though for Nesbit to imagine the children possessing any agency, they must ventriloquize the logic of empire; for in order to have a fantasy where the children are empowered that power must be appropriated from the most current acknowledged source. Thus, even if Nesbit herself had doubts about imperialism, her novel demonstrates recognition of the value of imperial settings in granting her child characters a sense of power as well as adventure.

History as Fantasy and the Child Reader

In both novels, Kipling and Nesbit imagine the space between the child characters and the narrative of history as a space of potential power for the child voice. Because these conversations between past and present occur through magical means, these novels may appear a world away from a history textbook. And yet, attention to the larger historical context of changing education with an emphasis on historical readers makes clear the likelihood that the intended readership of these novels, whether adult or child, likely gained an education, and perhaps even the basic skills of literacy, by reading history. The scholarship of Stephen Heathorn and J.S. Bratton suggests that we follow the thread of history from history textbook to leisure reading to identity. Thus, even as I

[111] While I do not mean to suggest that all fantasy literature for children must draw on imperial sources, I do find this an important strand in writing for children at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Additionally, Nesbit's position as a foundational writer in this genre makes the way in which she constructs the fantasies significant for the literature that follows.

suggest we read both novels as ambivalent engagements with imperial ideology, I also acknowledge that many texts for children were published and purchased with the explicit aim to cultivate a particular kind of national subject, including history readers and historical fiction.

In reading Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* with attention to its presentation of empire and child voices, we find the figure of the child providing a means to question imperial history and also a vision of possible, if contingent, agency for the child. Similarly, in Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet* we encounter child characters who voice an imperial identity in an attempt to gain power balanced against moments of imperial critique and a vision of the child as reader that embraces an active rather than passive model of readership. Strikingly, both novels remind us that narratives of history, whether dressed up in the fictional trappings of Puck or presented in the factual dress of a history reader, are not neutral. As critical work on these novels and similar works for children from the nineteenth century onward reveals, the past represented is always shaped by the anxieties and wishes of the present. In some ways, then, these fantasies can be read as offering a more honest rendition of "history." Where historical readers present history as fact and in so doing obfuscate the "magical" adult figures who mediate the child's experience of history and its lessons, both *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *The Story of the Amulet* implicitly acknowledge history as mediated in their appropriations of magic. With the inclusion of dialogue between children of the present and figures from the past, these novels suggest that understanding history is an active rather than passive process and that historical narratives can and should be questioned.

CONCLUSION

Do you remember a book from your childhood that deeply influenced you? Chances are you, dear reader, can answer that question with a resounding yes. For me, one of the defining reading experiences of my childhood came from my yearlong love affair with the Nancy Drew series when I was ten years old. Though my adult-reader self would now find much to critique in the series, particularly the older books (numbered 1-50) that were my favorites, my child-reader self found that they spoke to my immediate life experiences in a number of productive ways. Reading was, for me, a formative experience in which my life shaped my reading of the text and my reading of the text shaped my life.

When I pose this same question to my students, they often answer with a single name—*Harry Potter*. Despite the fears expressed by some critics that child readers would turn to the "dark arts" of spell-casting, my students did not need to find the mysterious Platform 9 ¾ in order to hold this text in such high esteem. Indeed, many students reported that their reading of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (as well as the books that followed in the series) inspired a desire for and enjoyment of reading. Renowned scholar of fairy tales Maria Tatar argues that total identification with a story world is not the defining experience for most readers: "Readers may empathize with characters and still not necessarily live through them or identify with them. When children dress up as favorite characters it is rarely because they want to surrender their own identities but because that character has specific traits they want to imitate or because they share values with them" (19). In arguing that children do not necessarily have to "surrender their own identities," Tatar views imaginative engagement with

literature as a dynamic rather than totalizing experience for the child. That an encounter with a British work of fantasy literature for children could spark such a dynamic and formative experience in its then child readers perhaps does not come as much of a surprise, given the way in which its forbearers, such as Carroll's *Alice* books, continue to linger in popular imagination. However, the example of my students' experiences reading *Harry Potter* also makes a simple, if convincing case, that reading can and does influence reading. That is to say, an encounter between a reader and a fantastical story world may just reach beyond the boundaries of the book itself.

As the field of children's literature continues to grow more established as an important area of literary study, I hope other scholars will continue to look for new frameworks that press beyond the adult/child binary that structured much of the field's founding criticism. While this project makes the case that the conventions of fantasy literature are uniquely poised to foster the potentiality of the child voice, projects considering the way in which other genres of children's texts, such as poetry or adventure novels, would provide another avenue to move beyond binary thinking in our approach to reading children's literature.

Because I see my project as in conversation with both Victorian studies and children's literature studies, I hope that more scholars of Victorian literature will take seriously the connections between "adult" literature and that aimed at a childhood audience. As I demonstrate throughout the dissertation, we can more fully appreciate the nuances and significance of children's literature when we see it as part of the larger historical and cultural conversation of its time—rather than placing it in a literary ghetto fenced in by our own assumptions regarding the insignificance and apartness of

childhood. Indeed, I believe that a study considering the dynamic between adult and child voices in Victorian children's literature put alongside those same dynamics in more canonical novels would be another point of illuminating study.

My project also speaks beyond the realm of literary criticism in what it suggests concerning the intersections between the assumptions we make about children's reading and the way we educate them. While I did not realize it at the outset of this project, questions of education take focus in three out of the four chapters. Indeed, as these chapters make clear, pioneering texts of the fantasy genre both responded to and were shaped by significant shifts in educational philosophy, legislation, and practice. Though my study focuses on British texts and concludes in the year 1906, it nonetheless speaks across time to present trends, concerns, and debates regarding children's reading and education. Just as Sarah Fielding's governess shows deep concern for her young readers' ability to negotiate an expanding print market, a host of parents, teachers, and librarians often hotly debate what books children should read today. Recent changes to the American educational system—changes that emphasize standardized testing as a measure of success for children and teachers alike—parallel the emphasis on rote memorization and examination undertaken by the British government in the mid-nineteenth century. And the discussion of historical facts and fantastical/historical fiction addressed in the final chapter of this dissertation speaks to the 2010 debate over Texas' social studies curriculum, where the "factual" nature of historical narratives depended entirely on which political party could most influence school curriculum guidelines and corresponding textbook publication. While the efficacy of such comparisons is limited by the large temporal and geographic gaps between British education across the nineteenth century

and the challenges facing educational policy makers in contemporary America, these comparisons nonetheless suggest the endurance and importance of thinking critically about the ways in which the assumptions we make about children's reading influence how that reading and its potential manifest in both school and leisure settings.

In Marah Gubar's recent keynote address at the University of Iowa's Craft Critique Culture Conference, she discussed what she terms the "looping effect" whereby the way in which we discuss and represent children's voices in both critical and creative works actually changes the possibilities offered to children in real life ("Creative Voice"). For example, Gubar hypothesizes that should experts on literature and education declare that children under twelve years of age cannot understand poetry, such a declaration could motivate schools to alter their curriculums such that children under twelve do not have access to poetry in the classroom. As a result, children under the age of twelve would lose the opportunity to learn about poetry from a young age, and their lack of learning would confirm the idea that children could not understand poetry before age twelve. This example might seem extreme; however, we do not have to look far—perhaps just to the current trends in education discussed above—to find examples of the way in which ideas about childhood can and do construct the very circumstances that they seem only to discuss and describe.

If the "looping effect" can shape childhood as it is understood and experienced in negative ways, then it should also be possible to leverage the possibilities of looping in the opposite direction. Indeed, it is my hope that this dissertation participates in this positive work of recasting the terms in which we discuss the child voice and the potentials of children's reading. Rather than assuming children are voiceless and then

noting the ways in which books written for children confirm this assumption, this project notes the different narrative layers that make space for child voices to enter into the work of creating and interpreting narrative in surprising ways. In doing so, it provides one more loop in the ongoing critical conversation, a loop that allows for the possibility of the fictional child voice to speak and in that speaking to take an active role in defining the child reader's understanding of self and world.

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