

Introduction

THERE IS A THREEFOLD rationale behind this investigation. Firstly, to reassess the current critical view which perceives the work of G. A. Henty and George MacDonald as oppositional, secondly to reevaluate the ideology in their work as it relates to the construction of the identity of the hero figure, and thirdly to indicate the continuing influence this figure has on contemporary children's literature. This third point can only be indicative since a thorough examination of influence would require a book of its own.

An investigation into the construct of the hero in the work of G. A. Henty (1832–1902) and George MacDonald (1824–1905), raises questions about the accepted critical position which views the work of these writers as oppositional. Henty and MacDonald wrote for both children and adults. The focus of this book is the construct of the hero in their writing for children within the context of the social, political, and religious conditions of the second half of the nineteenth century (1850–1900). Such an enterprise invites reflection of the current application of the hero figure construct to subsequent children's literature through to the twenty-first century. Although a thorough application would be the subject of another work, the relevance for contemporary children's literature cannot be ignored since the characteristics found in this figure are recognizable and constantly recur in contemporary fiction for children. A related area of study, and pertinent to contemporary education, would be to examine the implications of the reprinting programmes of the works of Henty and MacDonald. The rationale of contemporary American publishers is that their reprinting programmes are worthwhile because the values found in the work of these writers should be communicated to the present generation of children in the firm belief that those values are needed in the contemporary world.

The organization of this book aims to progress from the general to the particular beginning with an explanation of my method of approach

to the hero figure in the work of these two authors. Chapters 2 to 4 set the historical scene, gradually narrowing the focus onto the hero figure found in the analysis of specific texts in chapters 5 and 6. A discussion as to why this hero figure was so psychologically important in Western culture's perception of itself leads into the final chapter.

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