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# **'To See Ourselves as Others See Us': The Imaging of Children in a Selection of Scottish Children's Historical Fiction**

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## **Abstract**

*British children's literature has an extensive and influential canon, in which historical fiction figures prominently. Scottish authors have contributed significantly to historical fiction for children, but the 'popular' image of Scottish children and their representation still appears marginal and stereotypical. This essay adopts a thematic approach to the narration of childhood, history and nation in Scottish children's literature and challenges the marginal place of Scottish children in literature. The roles of the child as survivor, catalyst, victim and role model are probed in relation to key historical events in which children are involved. Some texts presenting a more rounded and recognisable image of the Scottish child are highlighted and discussed.*

## **Historical Fiction & the Representation of Scottish Children**

At a recent schools' conference, the Association of Scottish Literary Studies invited a number of prominent Scots, including Carnegie Medal winning children's author Theresa Breslin, to relate their own 'reading histories' and comment on their experiences. Breslin, an avid reader as a child, and subsequently a librarian by profession, commented that she never 'saw' or 'heard' herself in the fiction she read while at school. British children's literature has an extensive, well respected and influential canon, but the distinctive Scottish 'voice' seems strangely absent. Scottish authors have contributed centrally to the canon, particularly in the field of historical fiction. Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, Naomi Mitchison, Mollie Hunter and Breslin herself have contributed significantly to the genre, yet the image of Scottish children and their representation in children's fiction could still appear stereotypical and marginal, a word I am interpreting as referring to the general invisibility of children in the historical sector.

The reviewing of a representative selection of Scottish children's historical fiction published from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day highlights the fact that fictional settings from the Dark Ages to World War II are used creatively by a range of authors whose historical

understanding is shaped by the prevailing sensibilities of their time. These novels comprise those that have been termed 'historic fiction': whose purpose and character is to 'reveal history and the true character of historic figures' (Reed, 1994), as well as 'historical fiction' which does not include historic characters but whose purpose is to bring history to life. Central in all of these texts is the image of children affected by the political and social climate of their time setting, and the complex relationships between the actual conditions of life as lived by the individuals in the context of the historical events and characters which affected them.

In probing the relationship between images of childhood and the narrative patterns of Scottish children's historical fiction, this essay adopts a thematic approach to its focus on the narration of childhood, history and nation in Scottish children's literature, with specific attention to the images of Scottish children presented in a range of historical fiction texts all relating to the early modern period in Scottish history: specifically the years between 1715 and 1752. This period is one of intense social, political and economic change, encompassing the first and second Jacobite rebellions and the emotional and economic 'fallout' from them; texts portray child characters interacting with, and affected by, significant historical events of lasting importance to Scotland. The recurring themes in this literature of the child – as survivor, confidante, catalyst, innovator, victim and role model – are explored in relation to the key historical events in which children are involved. The approach interrogates particular texts in which a rounded and recognisable image of the Scottish child, neither marginal to major historical forces and events, nor stereotypical of the widely recognized image, is presented. The essay also examines continuity and change in the portrayal of Scottish children, a portrayal driven by the complex processes of cultural development, conflict and reproduction of specific images of Scottish childhood. The texts selected for discussion are not the only, or even the most commonly valued, texts, but they are representative of a spectrum. Discharging this task successfully should demonstrate that the interaction between the child protagonists and large-scale historical forces need not call forth from writers stereotypical portrayals of children rooted in partial or distorted images, but can in fact present an opportunity to explore more realistic views of more accurately situated Scottish childhood in authentic and historical contexts.

It may seem strange to select historical fiction as the focus for a study on the image of Scottish children in fiction, but a survey of the Scottish

children's literature canon reveals a significant corpus of work in the historical fiction genre; indeed, one of Scotland's most famous authors, Sir Walter Scott is considered to be the 'father' of the European historical novel. Peter Hollindale has also commented that 'the historical novel is one of Scotland's established forms and glories' (1977: 110).

In a study undertaken by the Scottish Executive (the devolved Scottish equivalent of the British Cabinet), researchers found that, overall, Scotland had 'a very positive and distinctive image. However, awareness and knowledge of Scotland [was] usually related to images and icons rooted in the past' (Scottish Executive, 2004). International opinion, expressed in the same research, confirms that Scotland is seen as an interesting country with an identifiable people and authentic traditions but it is not necessarily regarded as a 'place to do business' in global terms. The question might then be asked, whether a similar outdated image is evident in Scottish children's literature, and whether the plethora of historical fiction for children produced by Scottish authors or set in Scotland extends or compounds the problem. Has Scottish historical fiction for children relied on a stockpile of stereotypical images, marginal to the major influences of historical change? Even Mollie Hunter, a leading exponent of the historical novel for children, has described this writing tradition as offering, 'a view of Scotland as some kind of 'Brigadoon' seen through a tartan mist' (quoted in Clyde, 1979). An alternative explanation might be that this tradition has created an imaginative space for experimenting with alternative varieties of childhood. Perhaps the mixture of fiction set in the past but written by contemporary authors for contemporary audiences offers the twenty-first century child reader a more rounded and realistic image of Scottish children and a more accurate depiction of their relationships with the past.

### **The Purpose of Historical Fiction**

It has been hotly debated whether the purpose of authors of historical fiction is to teach history or to tell a story: in either case, particularly for children, the verisimilitude of historical contexts matters; as Sheila Egoff (1975) comments of fiction for children:

Events must be more closely winnowed and sifted; character more clearly delineated, but without condescension or oversimplification. The [young reader] must be moved quickly into the consciousness of another time and her imagination stirred to it.

Accuracy is particularly important now when the study of history in schools has changed so radically. Authors can no longer depend on their audience's knowledge of their own country's history, or even of its most famous historical references and battles. In a survey carried out in 1999 in Scottish schools, pupils conveyed little sense that they felt Scottish history really mattered, whilst their ignorance of events, people and circumstances in Scotland's past was profound. 37% of pupils who responded thought that Scotland had become part of the United Kingdom because the English forces had conquered it; 28% thought it was the result of a referendum; and only 24% opted for the correct answer that the Scots parliament voted for the union with England, in 1707. (Woods, 1999)

### **Novels about the Jacobite Period**

In view of such contemporary attitudes to history, it is of interest why many children's authors select the same historical context and setting for their novels out of all those available, that of the Jacobite rebellions. There are in fact few records of children's experience during this period, particularly the second rebellion in 1745 and the career of Bonnie Prince Charlie (1688-1760). Key Scottish historical events are rarely seen from a child's perspective other than in fictional form. This gap in the accounts in historical text books gives writers the freedom to *imagine* a childhood consonant with the historical realities the writer is endeavouring to reconstruct.

The historical setting under discussion is both romantic and well known: Bonnie Prince Charlie is an iconic figure in Scotland's history. Much of Scotland's internationally known folk music finds its subject matter in that period. The Union of the Crowns had taken place after Queen Elizabeth I's death in 1603, when James the VI of Scotland and I of England, the son of Mary Queen of Scots, assumed the throne. The Union of Parliaments took place, at least nominally, in 1707. Between the two dates, the ruling Stuart dynasty experienced a series of convulsions culminating in its expulsion from the British throne, its exile to France and a prolonged period of attempted restoration. The defeat of Prince Charles Edward Stuart at Culloden and his subsequent exile to France in 1746 signalled the end of the attempts to restore the Stuart dynasty to the throne.

In fiction about this period, readers are invited to see the events of the 1745 Rebellion re-told through the eyes of various novelists with their own changing views of history, and to consider the impact of these

historical events on the lives of the young protagonists. These novels include themes such as a young Scots lad being rewarded for clever and courageous service to an English Special Investigations Officer of the Customs Service (Hunter, 1971) and children being forced to flee their homes, some with families and some alone, to seek safety in places as far from Scotland as America (as Robbie does in Michael Morpurgo's *The Last Wolf*, 2002). Other children's novels which take the Jacobite Rebellions as their backdrop include Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886), Griselda Gifford's *The Story of Randal* (1968), Iona McGregor's *An Edinburgh Reel* (1968), Frances Mary Hendry's *Quest for a Kelpie* (1986) and *The '45 Rising: The Diary of Euphemia Grant, Scotland 1745-1746* (2001), and Kirsty White's *Over the Sea to Skye* (1997). Their publication dates cover a wide time span, but all are set in Scotland some time between 1715 and 1752. All these novels offer a view of childhood that was certainly not current at the time of the depicted events and, as we shall see, this may tell us more about the view of childhood at the time of publication of the novels than at the time of their setting.

Writers have complete freedom to *imagine* the kind of Scottish childhood that may have existed before records began, but they are also subject to the difficulties of not necessarily being able to present an authentic and accurate account of Scottish childhood. Thus they are free to let their imaginations roam, basing their portrayal on general knowledge of childhood in the past, but also subject to accusations of depicting child protagonists anachronistically, out of step with their settings. It is striking when reviewing these texts, how regularly themes emerge which lie at the heart of issues of identity and marginalisation. Authors of novels with the historical setting in question frequently require the contemporary reader to focus on issues of language, gender and oral action, and through these, to explore the struggles of children to establish their central place in the unfolding events.

In Scotland, the period of childhood in the pre-modern era, as elsewhere in the world, was much shorter than in modern times. Education was not yet universal, though John Knox's idea of two hundred years earlier, a school in every parish, was well on its way to being fulfilled – but only for boys. The childhood experienced in the subsistence, agrarian society of the Highlands of Scotland would also have been substantially different from that experienced in the more industrial lowlands, which in turn would be more like that experienced by their English counterparts. Not even the language would have been the same. Gaelic, Scots and

English would have been used. English did not become the standard language of education until the Education Act of 1872, although there had been an attempt as far back as 1695 to set up English schools in the Highlands to 'root out the Gaelic language.' The image of the Scottish child, red-haired, tartan-clad, poor and perhaps aggressive, was only true of some children for some of the time. Indeed the Disarming Act of 1746, passed following the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden (the last battle fought in mainland Britain) *outlawed* the wearing of Highland dress (tartan) and forbade Highlanders having weapons or bagpipes (regarded as instruments of war because Highlanders never went into battle without a piper) unless they were serving in Highland regiments in the regular army (Woosnam-Savage, 1995). The kilt-wearing, tartan-clad image, still recognized today, is a manufactured one, engineered by Sir Walter Scott in 1822 when he acted as pageant master for King George IV, who became the first reigning monarch to visit Scotland for two hundred years; the practice was adopted more generally only after the king himself appeared wearing tartan.

The notion of childhood itself as a distinct condition, not an apprenticeship' for adulthood, only began to emerge *after* the period in which the novels under discussion are set. Scottish children's historical fiction presents images of children and childhood that *purport* to reflect or characterize genuine historical contexts. Consequently perhaps, the accuracy and coherence of the image of childhood presented in these texts should be questioned further.

### **Stevenson's *Kidnapped***

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, first published in serial form in the children's magazine *Young Folks* between May and July 1886, was the last novel he published before he left Scotland for good. *Kidnapped* is both an historical novel, and a psychological text probing, or perhaps essentialising, the differences between Lowland and Highland mentality and sensibility. From its beautifully simple opening, describing in the first person the young hero's departure from his father's house for the last time, through its cumulative series of adventures involving young David Balfour with the Highlander Alan Breck and so to the history of the Highlands just after the defeat of the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745, the story moves with assurance and perfectly controlled changes of tone. The tragic atmosphere of the mid-eighteenth century Highlands is expressed, but this tragedy never enters fully into the fabric of the novel; rather it is subordinated to the line of adventure, the changing fortunes of the hero and his relationship with his fellow fugitive. The moral problem

is real and, as always in Stevenson, far from simple. The problem of the innocent man tried in his enemy's court and the linked problem of the duty of the innocently involved bystander in such a situation is searchingly presented. So also is the combination of stuffiness and courage and charm in the character of Alan Breck.

None of this interferes with the rapid flow of the narrative. The confident handling of the first person narrative, a marker of Scots storytelling, enables the author clearly to identify his hero and to show his temptations and weaknesses without the reader losing admiration for David. The narrative does not fall into the trap of being over-protective of either young people or heritage. Sometimes the formula of boy heroes surrounded by adults, observing rather than taking an active role, can become didactic. In Stevenson's writing there is little chance of that. His fiction, up to the publication of *Catriona* – the sequel to *Kidnapped* – in 1893, includes no strongly developed female personae. Thus *Kidnapped*, despite its appeal for adults as a 'romance' was written primarily as a boys' adventure tale, with consequent gendered focus.

The 16 year old hero David Balfour, 'Mr. Betwixt and Between', is at the upper end of the child spectrum, as are many of the child protagonists in the featured texts. In modern publishing parlance they might be described as 'young adults' (children aged between 11 and 16), but certainly, within our modern literary understanding, they are still children. The adolescent characters here and in the other featured novels are often rendered powerless, not only by their youth, but by gender, race or class: they are frequently victimised by greed, hatred or persecution. Nevertheless they often manage to triumph in the face of overwhelming odds.

When David Balfour begins his adventures, his principles are those of a good kirk-going, Whig, Lowland Scot, with strong ideas about loyalty to King George, the sin of deserting the Royalist Army and the inherent wrong of card-playing. His encounters with the Jacobite Alan Breck challenge much of his value system. Throughout the novel David comes to understand the complexity and breadth of the moral life facing a young person, and his engagement with Alan also allows him to work towards resolving the dilemmas as a participant rather than an observer. Good historical fiction *should* give readers a sense of different and contrasting value systems and an appreciation of diverse cultures. Part of this story of childhood reflects the process of maturation as well as the loss of



certainty and the understanding that life does not always allow people clear-cut solutions or courses of action.

The language used to present these images of Scottish childhood is also critical. Language can be central to the experience of marginalisation, perhaps doubly so for children as the least empowered of language users. In historical novels, a narrator whose voice relies too heavily on outdated language, however historically correct, is sure to lose the reader. On the other hand it has been argued that a narrator's vocabulary, like the dialogue for all characters in historical fiction, should be restricted to language in use at the time of the story. (Brown, 1998) For writers depicting Scottish children there is the added dilemma that, at the time in question, there were three languages in common use in Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English. Stevenson wanted to make his novel decidedly Scots in style. James Henderson, editor of *Young Folks* at the time, warned him against too much broad Scots for a young audience, but Stevenson felt that the Scots language was vital to his book: *Kidnapped* stands almost alone at that point as a children's story that makes serious use of Scots. Other contemporary Scottish children's writers of the time, such as George MacDonald, William Black and S R Crockett, are much more circumspect. But for Stevenson and other Scottish writers after him, it was unreasonable to portray Scottish characters without reflecting their language use accurately. The language used by David's uncle, Ebenezer, offers a good example of how language can both situate and exemplify characters:

'Davie, my man,' said he, 'ye've come to the right bit when ye came to your Uncle Ebenezer. I've a great notion of the family, and I mean to do the right thing by you; but while I'm taking a bit to think to mysel' of what's the best thing to put you to – whether the law, or the meenistry, or maybe the army, whilk is what boys are fondest of – I wouldnae like the Balfours to be humbled before a when Hieland Campbells, and I'll ask you to keep your tongue within your teeth. Nae letters; nae messages; no kind of word to onybody; or else – there's my door.' (1986: 22)

### **Tackling the Linguistic Dilemma**

The dilemma about how to convey linguistic usage has been tackled in various ways in this group of novels. There is the use of modern Standard English throughout *Over the Sea to Sky* and *The Story of Ranauld*, while in Frances Mary Hendry's novels *Quest for a Kelpie* and *The '45 Rising* the narration is in Standard English with Scots only being

used in the dialogue. Mollie Hunter's preferred technique in *The Lothian Run* is to rearrange the words to give the rhythm of the Scots tongue without the use of dialect. In Scotland it has long been widely accepted that Scottish literature exists in a variety of languages, and not just in the three most often used: Scots, Gaelic and English. For example, in the introduction to the *Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* (2006), the authors, Brown, Manning and Pittock, argue that in considering the Scottish Literature of the medieval period, the linguistic net must be widened to include material written in Norse and Welsh (2006:5). Interestingly, however, the varied techniques used in the examples of historical children's fiction cited here appear to have had little impact on the image of the Scottish child conveyed to readers: as a character with a thick, unintelligible brogue or accent. Ironically, the more widespread the use of Standard English by Scottish authors, the more they leave themselves open to charges of *lack* of distinctiveness in Scottish children's literature.

Publishers too seem on the horns of a dilemma. Full use of Scots would render the books unsellable and unintelligible in the wider market, perhaps even to most modern Scottish children. A similar argument has been raised with translated children's literature: there is an obvious need to translate one home language to another but doing so raises questions about whether the essential message of the text is altered in some way by this process. Similarly authors must make the decision whether or not to use what has been coined 'gadzookery' in historical fiction, and must consider whether the use of the modern idiom throughout radically alters the central psychology of the story. Geoffrey Trease, perhaps the first 'modern' writer of children's historical fiction, simply used modern, naturalistic and accessible dialogue but avoided using out of period slang. In the same way in Scottish fiction there has to be a decision by authors and publishers regarding the use of Scots language 'markers' throughout. If the use of Scots language were to disappear completely from the texts this practice would contribute significantly to the further marginalisation of the Scots language and reduce its regard outside and within Scotland itself, as well as, perhaps, leaving the authenticity of the novels themselves open to question.

A parallel, though not so vociferous, argument also rages in Scottish adult fiction, where there has long been debate regarding the language used in Scottish texts. This has not prevented James Kelman, for example, achieving global success despite the use of dialect and even profanity (Gifford, in ed. Brown et al., 2006:250). Perhaps the fact that

children's books are still seen as having a didactic purpose, even subliminally, means that the obsession with 'correct' language subsumes the concept of 'appropriate' language in Scottish children's fiction, and contributes to this blurred image of the contemporary Scottish child.

### **Childhood: Gender and Moral Issues**

A common focus on language, gender and moral dilemmas emerges almost unavoidably for these authors, so it is worth reviewing the main protagonists in the remainder of the named texts in terms of gender, political perspective or allegiance, and language to see if a common, static image of the Scottish child can be identified. It is equally possible to trace how that image changes according to the construction of childhood current at the time of publication or in terms of historical research. Revisionist evaluations of historical accounts are bound to impact on fictional narratives: revisionist history is, after all, still history, subject to normal standards of demonstrable historical evidence and sound reasoning.

*The Story of Ranald*, *The Lothian Run* and *The Last Wolf* all have male protagonists ranging in age from 9 to 15, while *Quest for a Kelpie*, *An Edinburgh Reel*, *Over the Sea to Skye* and *The '45 Rising* all have female protagonists ranging in age from 10 to 16. All these texts have been published within the last 40 years and the latter group in particular reflect the modern need to depict central female characters who play a key role in the lives of their communities as well as maintaining some autonomy over their own lives. Typically these novels portray intelligent, feisty heroines who know their own minds, disobey their male relatives with impunity, follow their hearts and become completely embroiled in the adventures of the Jacobite Rebellion and their male relatives' fortunes. These novels frequently end with the girls becoming the principal means of resolving the central tension or conflict depicted in the stories, through judicious use of common sense, intelligence, feminine wiles and intuition.

It might well be argued that such girls existed in the eighteenth century in Scotland, but it is highly unlikely that they would have been given such cultural latitude. It would be more authentic, and perhaps more credible, if their actions and beliefs reflected the values, attitudes, and behaviours of the period in which the novels are set rather than those of the current period. If however, the contemporary historical novel seeks to convey to modern readers the lives of ordinary people living in extraordinary times, it follows that the lives of women and girls must start to figure more prominently in the fiction than they do in historical accounts, especially

for a contemporary, global readership with a different attitude to the agency of women. In the featured texts the girls are often separated from their families – Jeannie Main in *Quest for a Queen* by going into service; Christine Murray in *An Edinburgh Reel* by her mother's death and her father's capture in the '45; Phemie Grant to separate her from the soldiers of the Redcoat Army for her own protection in *The '45*. The girls re-establish new lives in their new contexts, maintain friendships forbidden to them, conceal secrets and endure the unwanted effects of war. They do things that are probably historically authentic, but which cannot often be found in historical accounts. Modern authors can redress this balance in their fiction but, to some extent, the image of Scottish girlhood presented in these novels is most vulnerable to the criticism of transporting modern children to an historical setting.

The issue of the role of girls is most obviously exemplified in Kirsty White's *Over the Sea To Skye*. In this text, aimed at younger readers, the story opens with young Robby MacDonnell, 'bored and frustrated' and wishing 'he was old enough to go with the men and fight for Bonnie Prince Charlie' (p5). He comes upon a plaid, a rusty claymore and a couple of abandoned shields in the empty dungeon of his home. He and his younger brother Neil repair to a meadow and 'play' at being Prince Charlie fighting a Sassenach. Their sister Maggie, the central character, comes upon them and, initially, is amused by the sight of their play. This soon changes when she realises they are recreating recent battles. The play deteriorates into a scuffle with the 'weapons' being abandoned and a previously 'dead' Prince Charlie resurrects himself to 'kill' the Sassenach. When called upon to judge whether such an action is right, Maggie stops their play saying, 'Nothing's right about war Neil. No good comes from killing people' (p15). This is a very contemporary, moral and 'politically correct' viewpoint. In reality the children would have been much more intimately caught up in the survival of the family, with most of the men away fighting and would be highly unlikely to indulge in the brand of ethical pacifism described in the text. Some may well have shared this modern view about the morality of war but it is almost certain it would not have been expressed in quite this way.

After the defeat at Culloden, the English army surrounds Maggie's home in the search for Prince Charlie. Incredibly, Maggie is allowed to go out riding and in a further outrageous coincidence, she happens upon the Prince and some companions evading the Redcoats and attempting to get to Skye. Through a series of deceptions, Maggie leads the Prince along a route that allows him to get to Skye and gives him her clothes in

an effort to disguise him, after which she presumably 'hands him off' to Flora MacDonald and returns to her home in possession of his breeches and an abject apology to the Scots people from the Prince:

The Prince took Maggie's hand. 'Please,' he said, 'tell your people I'm sorry.'

Maggie thought of the men who'd lost their lives, and those who'd been injured. The prince's apology was no help to them, but they would not want him to die as well. (p55-56)

The attention to politically progressive ideas and the clear didactic intention of this book offers an image of Scottish childhood that is clearly twenty-first century and represents the way a modern Scottish child *might* have reacted had she found herself in the same situation. The description of the boys at play in itself undermines the accuracy of the image of childhood portrayed, contrasting as it does with the lived experience of real children in this period. Additionally, the very contemporary comic-style illustrations used in the text add to the mixed messages being presented. In particular the sub-plot of a group of elderly men who appear to support King George and thus manage to allay the Redcoats' suspicions and create a diversion to allow Maggie to act as a 'courier' and assist the Prince's escape is principally narrated through the illustrations. The men are portrayed comically and appear as an eighteenth century version of the World War II Home Guard imaged in the BBC television series *Dad's Army*. It is hard to accept high comedy in a situation where there is little likelihood of humour. However, the target audience of this book is the younger reader, and modern authors will be conscious of the sensitivities of their primary audience as well as those of parents and teachers selecting the text.

Children of the past were, however, not just contemporary children in odd clothing. They were people who saw the world differently; approached human relationships differently; people for whom war and work and play had meanings lost to a post-industrialised world. To wash these differences out of historical fiction is not only a denial of historical truth, but a failure of the imagination and understanding that should be as important to authors of the present as it is to the past. These fictionalised accounts sketch the authors' 'informed' speculation about the lives of children who would have been centrally involved in major events of their time

## Political Allegiances

In two of the key texts, *Over the Sea to Sky* and *An Edinburgh Reel*, the central characters are disillusioned Jacobite supporters, while in *The '45* and *Quest for a Queen* the characters are loyalists who almost inadvertently get caught up in the Rebellion. What this does for the modern reader is proclaim the historical truth that the Jacobite cause was not fully supported by all Scots, as well as the fact that there were many English Jacobites and Scottish Whigs. The children in these texts are forced to make difficult choices, sometimes in order to survive.

In *The Story of Ranald*, *The Last Wolf* and *The Lothian Run*, the protagonists are boys. Ranald and Robbie are Jacobite supporters while Sandy Maxwell (*The Lothian Run*) is a Whig. *The Story of Ranald* is based on a true account written by a nine year old boy; Gifford admits that his brief story is rather confused and that she has altered and simplified it considerably. Nevertheless she does reproduce in the book the actual letters received by Ranald from his father who is in captivity prior to his execution in London. The family had to flee their home, travel over great distances trying to save their cattle and as many belongings as they could because of the draconian measures taken against the Jacobites and their supporters after Culloden. Similarly in *The Last Wolf*, Robbie is also left alone after his foster father is killed at Culloden and he flees Scotland to America in an attempt to avoid the punishment of the Redcoats. Unlike some of the other protagonists, Robbie is not able to resolve the dilemma of having to survive in Scotland as the supporter of a defeated cause: his family structure has been completely destroyed and his home no longer exists. Like many other Scots of the past, for him the necessity for re-location becomes a moment of opportunity; this offers the reader a scenario that situates such characters within the Scots diaspora.

*The Lothian Run* is perhaps the most interesting of the novels in its depiction of the protagonist, Sandy Maxwell. The novel is concerned with darkness and disguise, and with questions of honour, as well as being about smuggling and political intrigue. An apprentice to a lawyer, Sandy, like his employer, is a Loyalist and he eagerly participates in attempting to thwart a Jacobite coup. This novel, more than any of the others, is most like a modern adventure/suspense novel. Sandy becomes a kind of junior 'James Bond' working undercover with the smugglers. He courts adventure, keeps secrets, acts as a catalyst for the central events of the story and really enjoys the elements of danger and lawlessness that he encounters; he is anything but marginal to the action. It could be argued

that here again we have a modern child transported into an historical setting, even though the events described could have been historical.

What is perhaps missing in this novel though is a sufficiently detailed explanation of the Jacobite and Hanoverian politics to give contemporary readers the necessary sense of urgency and sympathetic identification with characters who have suffered an enormous wrong. Like *Kidnapped*, this tale is about a young boy's search for his place in the world, but the subject matter of smuggling makes for some questionable moral choices for Sandy. Like so many Scots literary characters, Sandy is faced with a choice. He says early in the novel that he wants to 'be free to choose for myself what I want to do' (p.15). He faces two alternative futures. Should he remain uneducated, working on boats and smuggling for a living as his childhood acquaintances do? Or does he want to become knowledgeable and accomplished in many fields – languages, medicine, ciphers, navigation, riding, and many more – as he would need to be to become a Customs Officer like Deryck Gilmour; an extreme version of the 'lad o' pairs'<sup>2</sup> dilemma? By becoming directly responsible for the capture of the smugglers, even though they are childhood acquaintances, Sandy makes a conscious choice. Hunter here appears to advocate a kind of situational ethics: she believes in certain standards and values, enunciated in her essay *Talent is Not Enough* (Hunter, 1976). She believes that the world to be faced by an adolescent is more complex than could be imagined in the early years of childhood, up to, perhaps, the age of eight, and that right and wrong and good and evil are no longer absolutes. The child characters of Mollie Hunter's fiction might be cunning, ambitious or proud, but if they have compassion, if they can make caring contact with another, that, Hunter asserts, is 'all that ultimately matters' (Hunter, 1975:137). Love, courage and compassion are her only absolutes. The Scottish child characters in Hunter's books are far from the stereotypical, tartan-clad, two dimensional characters that sometimes seem to exist in sections of the public imagination.

Mollie Hunter has asked a question that is of central importance to the whole theme of this essay: 'How can one understand the present without a sense of the past on which it is based? How could I address my historical novels to those already lost in all the twists and guilts and deformations of the adult world?'(Hunter, 1975: 137) In her novels, Hunter offers the modern child reader a recognisable image of children with a sense of self and their place in history, interacting with the huge events of Scotland's past.

## Conclusion

In this essay I set out to explore one aspect of the image of Scottish children presented in children's fictional texts, in particular the image presented in historical novels. Typically, the strongest image of Scottish children held by some young readers may be narrow and often limited to the stereotypical: tartan-clad, linguistically challenged and aggressive, while some Scottish authors have been as guilty of perpetuating that image as anyone else. Exploration of the selected novels illustrates both the consistency and the distinctiveness of the portrayal of Scottish children in comparison to children of other nationalities, as portrayed in non-Scottish historical fiction set in a similar era. The best of the novels combine precise historical detail with credible characters and actions and succeed in making the reader care about the outcome of the story. Additionally, Scottish children are presented as vivid, distinctive characters, with authentic voices and behaviour; they display some recognisably Scottish traits but are not restricted, incomplete or marginal as a result. They provide an additional and significant perspective on key events now seen as vital not only to Scottish history but also to British history in general, in a manner that should be more valued than it currently seems to be. The events of Scottish history are critical for both Scotland and the United Kingdom and it is essential that the historical novels available to young readers reflect the full spectrum of British history in a way that allows all of them to see, hear and recognise themselves and their heritage in the stories.

Some of the texts discussed also help to identify the more challenging aspects of managing historical fiction and the constant struggle between the need to present historical events in an accurate manner that remains true to the facts and still allows young readers to access complex and distant events. Joan Aitken (1996) said that 'History can give us and our children a sense of context; it can show us where we belong in the pattern, what came before and how everything connects.' The Scottish childhoods depicted in these examples of children's fiction allow us to speculate on the continuity and discontinuity of the image of childhood and enable us to chart progress and, justly, to celebrate the Scottish child in children's fiction.

## Notes

1. The research presented in this paper is part of a PhD project on Scottish Identity and Literature.



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2. A poor boy whose fortunes are improved by the help of a patron and consequent education.

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