

The Language of Flowers: Magic as Activism in Edith Nesbit's *The Wonderful Garden*  
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In his ode to “The Writing of Edith Nesbit” in *The New York Review of Books*, Gore Vidal writes “though a reading of E. Nesbit is hardly going to change the pattern of a nation, there is some evidence that the child who reads her will never be quite the same again, and that is probably a good thing.” Mrs. Nesbit has been responsible for some of the most radical advances in the genre, but she has also been influential in her role as one of the founders of the Fabian Society, a British socialist organisation whose purpose is to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist effort in democracies, rather than by revolutionary overthrow. The Fabians stressed individual and personal transformation as the basis for societal transformation. Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (1906) is her most famous novel laying out some of the fundamental edicts of the Fabians' gentle radicalism. Her lesser known novel *The Wonderful Garden* (1911), beautifully explains how perfectly ordinary children can become social activists, agents of change. Through her own blend of realism and magic, the children, known as The Three C's, (A possible reference to the Three C's of David Livingstone: Christianity, Commerce and Civilization) Caroline, Charlotte and Charles use books and flowers they believe produce magic to propels the adults in the novel to do the right thing. Nesbit proposes that children, be it through games or magic or botany, can direct positive social change.