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## A Hundred Years of *The Secret Garden*

Frances Hodgson Burnett's Children's Classic  
Revisited

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Cover image: The illustration by Maria Louise Kirk shows the cover of the 1911 edition of "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. M. L. Kirk was a prolific illustrator, born in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, circa 1860. She studied art in Philadelphia, and died in the 1930s. Thanks to James Stack, University of Washington Libraries.

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Marion Gymnich and Imke Lichterfeld

### *The Secret Garden* Revisited

Although Frances Hodgson Burnett published numerous works for an adult readership, she is mainly remembered today for three novels written for children: *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911).<sup>1</sup> *The Secret Garden*, serialized from autumn 1910 to summer 1911 in monthly instalments in *The American Magazine*, has often been referred to as Burnett's best novel<sup>2</sup> – despite the fact that “for the first fifty years after its publication *The Secret Garden* was never as popular as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* or *A Little Princess*”.<sup>3</sup> Critics who consider *The Secret Garden* Burnett's masterpiece tend to emphasise in particular “the increasing depth and subtlety in the portrayal of her main child characters” and argue that “the work as a whole is richer than its predecessors in thematic development and symbolic resonance”.<sup>4</sup>

One of the crucial differences between her earlier novels and *The Secret Garden* is the strong focus on nature and its healing properties and the loving attention to both plants and animals, which turns the novel into a celebration of nature and its beauty. The description of the robin is certainly a particularly striking example of this tendency.<sup>5</sup> Due to the way nature is depicted in *The Secret Garden*, the novel has to be seen in the tradition of pastoral literature, and,

1 Today most readers are presumably not aware of the fact that Burnett was a prolific and enormously successful writer: “Burnett published more than fifty novels, most of them for adults, and wrote and produced thirteen plays. She was the highest-paid and best-known woman author of her time, and from the time she was eighteen and published a short story in *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* her work was never turned down by any publisher.” (GERZINA, Gretchen Holbrook. “Preface.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006 [1911]. ix–x, ix.)

2 Cf., for instance, BIXLER KOPPES, Phyllis. “Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett: A Generic Analysis of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*.” In: *Children's Literature* 7 (1978): 191–207, 191.

3 HUNT, Peter. *Children's Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. 211.

4 BIXLER KOPPES. “Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett.” 191.

5 On the depiction of the robin see also BURNETT, Frances Hodgson. “My Robin.” In: Frances Hodgson Burnett. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina. New York: Norton, 2006. 199–208.

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Angelika Zirker

### Redemptive Children in Frances Hodgson Burnett's Novels: *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*

The protagonists in Burnett's most famous novels for children, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) and *The Secret Garden* (1910–11),<sup>1</sup> share a few common traits, above all the fact that they arrive at a new place where eventually they act as redeeming figures on their surroundings because they are good and help others. This pattern applies to Cedric Erroll in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886), who crosses the Atlantic to live with his grandfather whom he 'saves' from his misanthropy; and it also applies to Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*, who comes to England from India because her parents died during a cholera epidemic. She differs from Cedric in that she first has to be 'saved' from her being a "cross" and "contrary"<sup>2</sup> child so that she can subsequently save her sickly cousin and the whole household of Misselthwaite Manor.<sup>3</sup>

1 The novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, together with a stage version published two years after the book, made Burnett famous and brought her "phenomenal popularity and financial success" (BIXLER, Phyllis. *Frances Hodgson Burnett*. Boston: Twayne, 1984. 50). *The Secret Garden* has variously been adapted to movie versions and is one of the most popular books even nowadays: in "The Big Read" (2003) it was number 51 among the 100 favourite books of the British. See THE BIG READ <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100\\_2.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/bigread/top100_2.shtml)> (accessed 4 May, 2011). – Bixler compares Burnett's novels to one another, on a generic basis; see BIXLER, Phyllis. "Tradition and the Individual Talent of Frances Hodgson Burnett: A Generic Analysis of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *A Little Princess*, and *The Secret Garden*." In: *Children's Literature: An International Journal* 7 (1978): 191–207.

2 Mary is, from the beginning of the novel, labelled as a 'cross' and as a 'contrary' child; cf. BURNETT, Frances Hodgson. *The Secret Garden*. Edited by Dennis Butts. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1910–11]. The term 'cross' appears, e.g., when she is first presented: "One frightfully hot morning, when she was about nine years old, she awakened feeling very cross" (*Secret Garden* 2). The children of the family she stays with after the death of her parents nickname her as "Miss Mary Quite Contrary" – thereby referring to the nursery rhyme – "by the second day" (*Secret Garden* 8–9) of her sojourn.

3 Yet another related pattern applies to Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* (1905), who returns to England from India to go to a boarding school, is shortly afterwards orphaned and poor but is still able and willing to help others, which rescues her from her miserable state. The focus of this paper will, however, be on *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*, not only because they are probably the most popular writings of Burnett, but also because they epitomize her

This difference in character between Cedric in the earlier *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and Mary in the later *The Secret Garden* might be described in terms of a change in the depiction of children from ideal to real, from sentimental to authentic and, hence, also in terms of a development in Burnett's writing that reflects a more general development in the portrayal of children in the nineteenth century (that would go on well into the twentieth). While Cedric shows strong resemblances with, e.g., *Oliver Twist* and also with Romantic notions of childhood,<sup>4</sup> Mary is akin to girls like Laura Graham in Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839), Jane Eyre in Charlotte Brontë's novel (1847),<sup>5</sup> and even Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) as well as Alice in Lewis Carroll's tales *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1872), who all are mischievous and at times even disobedient.<sup>6</sup>

If one considers *Little Lord Fauntleroy* as an early example of Burnett's writing and *The Secret Garden* as a later (and maybe even more accomplished) one, one gets the impression that, in the course of her life as a novelist, Burnett makes use of and varies the pattern of the redemptive child from ideal to authentic. While Cedric Erroll is a model child who behaves perfectly in every situation, Mary starts out as an anti-heroine who, however, eventually turns into a heroine, yet without becoming 'perfect' or ideal. Burnett seems to turn the attributes that are at the basis of Cedric's character into their opposite to create Mary. A few close readings of passages from these two novels shall serve to illustrate the change in style and tone that is linked to the change in presentation.

early and her late work and are therefore particularly apt to illustrate a change in her presentation of children.

- 4 Oliver is presented as incorruptible (see below). As to Romantic notions of childhood, these were in particular based on Wordsworth's idealized and nostalgic conceptions of childhood, as, e.g., in his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood"; see also CARPENTER, Humphrey. *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985. 8; and ČERNÝ, Lothar. "Autor-Intention und dichterische Phantasie." In: *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 224,1 (1987): 286–303, 293.
- 5 Analogies between the character of Jane Eyre and Mary Lennox have been noted in passing by JAMES, Susan E. "Wuthering Heights for Children: Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*." In: *Connotations* 10,1 (2000/2001): 59–76; and TYLER, Lisa. "Brontë and Burnett: A Response to Susan E. James." In: *Connotations* 12,1 (2002/2003): 61–66; as well as by KEYSER, Elisabeth Lennox. "'Quite Contrary': Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*." In: *Children's Literature: Annual of the MLA Division on Children's Literature and Children's Literature Association* 11 (1983): 1–13.
- 6 They are not so by ill-will but mostly also because they are neglected or given too much freedom. Laura, for instance, is often simply thoughtless, e.g. when she and her brother invite all kinds of children to a tea-party without telling their own grandmother, so that there is no food (cf. chapter 2, "The Grand Feast" of *Holiday House*). Jane Eyre, for instance, is an orphan and has never been loved. Alice is designed against the grain of an idealized childhood (cf. my book on Carroll's *Alice* books). And Maggie Tulliver has a rebellious spirit that is, however, not based on a bad character.

## I. Beginnings and Introductions

Both children are introduced in the first chapter of the novel. In the case of Cedric Erroll, the reader is first introduced to him after the death of his father when he is trying to comfort his grief-stricken mother. The background story is told first: how his father married an American woman that the old Earl, the boy's grandfather, would not agree to, and how he was subsequently told never to return to England and settled in New York. Then follows a rather long characterisation of the little boy, a perfect child despite the circumstances of his birth and family life so far:

Though he was born in so quiet and cheap a little home, it seemed as if there never had been a *more fortunate baby*. In the first place he was *always well*, and so he never gave anyone trouble; in the second place he had so *sweet a temper and ways so charming* that he was a *pleasure* to everyone; and in the third place he was so *beautiful* to look at that he was quite a picture. Instead of being a bald-headed baby, he started in life with a quantity of *soft, fine, gold-coloured hair*, which curled up at the ends, and went into loose rings by the time he was six months old; he had *big brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face*; he had so strong a back and splendid sturdy legs that at nine months he learned suddenly to walk; his *manners* were so good for a baby, that it was *delightful* to make his acquaintance. He seemed to feel that *everyone was his friend*, and when anyone spoke to him, when he was in his carriage in the street, he would give the stranger one *sweet serious look* with the brown eyes, and then follow in with a *lovely, friendly smile*; and the consequence was, that there was not a person in the neighbourhood of the quiet street where he lived – even to the grocery-man at the corner, who was considered the crossiest creature alive – who was not pleased to see him, and speak to him. And every month of his life he grew handsomer and more interesting. [...] His greatest *charm* was his *cheerful, fearless, quaint little way of making friends* with people. I think it arose from his having a very *confiding* nature, and a *kind little heart that sympathized* with everyone, and wished to make everyone as comfortable as he liked to be himself. [...] He had never heard an unkind or uncourteous word spoken at home; he had always been loved and caressed and treated tenderly, and so *his childish soul was full of kindness and innocent warm feeling*.<sup>7</sup>

This is the description of a child that is thoroughly happy and good: he is not only good-looking but also never ill, pleasing, friendly, warm-hearted, cheerful – almost too good to be true. Cedric Erroll is described by the narrator in positive terms only. He is an innately good child who grows up in a loving family who care very much for him. His looks confirm and go hand in hand with his inner goodness: "He is a friend of the whole world because he considers everyone in the world his friend."<sup>8</sup> When the New York housemaid thinks that "[i]t's like a

7 BURNETT, Frances Hodgson. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. London: Puffin, 1994 [1886]. 6–7 (my emphasis).

8 BIXLER, Phyllis. "Idealization of the Child and Childhood in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little*

young lord he looks" (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 10), she states a kind of nobility that does not only show on the outside but also corresponds to an inner quality. He is a child very much in the tradition of both Romantic poetry and also of formulaic stories:<sup>9</sup> uncorrupted and pleasant, representing an ideal state of human existence, he never does anything to trouble his relations – neither intentionally nor by mistake<sup>10</sup> – and he is eventually rewarded for his good behaviour by inheriting a large fortune which enables him to help others.

Things are quite different with Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden*. She is introduced in the very first paragraph of the story as follows:

When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the *most disagreeable-looking child* ever seen. It was true, too. She had a *little thin face* and a *little thin body, thin light hair* and a *sour expression*. Her *hair was yellow*, and her *face was yellow* because she had *always been ill* in one way or another. Her father had held a position under the English Government and had always been busy and ill himself, and her mother had been a great beauty who cared only to go to parties and amuse herself with gay people. She *had not wanted a little girl at all*, and when Mary was born she handed her over to the care of an Ayah, who was made to understand that if she wished to please the Mem Sahib she must keep the child out of sight as much as possible. So when she was a *sickly, fretful, ugly little baby* she was kept out of the way, and when she became a *sickly, fretful, toddling thing* she was kept out of the way also. She never remembered seeing familiarly anything but the dark faces of her Ayah and the other native servants, and as they always obeyed her and gave her her own way in everything, because the Mem Sahib would be angry if she was disturbed by her crying, by the time she was six years old she was as *tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived*. (*Secret Garden* 1–2; emphasis AZ)

*Lord Fauntleroy* and Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*." In: Selma K. Richardson (ed.). *Research about Nineteenth-Century Children and Books: Portrait Studies*. Urbana: Graduate School of Lib. Science, University of Illinois, 1980. 85–96, 89. Cf. also AVERY, Gillian. *Childhood's Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children's Fiction, 1770–1950*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975. 152: "Innocence and a loving, trustful manner are the key attributes of the late Victorian and the Edwardian ideal child. And prettiness had become of great importance."

9 Cf. BIXLER, Phyllis. "The Oral Formulaic Training of a Popular Fiction Writer: Frances Hodgson Burnett." In: *Journal of Popular Culture* 15,4 (1982): 42–43.

10 Because of this kind of characterisation, Cedric has been regarded as a 'sissy' by several critics, e.g. WILSON, Anna. "Little Lord Fauntleroy: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation." In: *American Literary History* 8,2 (1996): 234–38; RICHARDSON, Alan. "Reluctant Lords and Lame Princes: Engendering the Male Child in Nineteenth-Century Juvenile Fiction." In: *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and Children's Literature Association* 21 (1993): 4–11. Yet Cedric also shows traits and behaviour that are typical of a boy. He is strong, plays with other boys and wins races, plays "soldiers" (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 12) and sticks to the 'male' role of protecting his mother; see also on this aspect WHITE, Robert L. "Little Lord Fauntleroy as Hero." In: Ray B. Browne and Larry Landrum (eds.). *Challenges in American Culture*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1970. 211.

And, a little later, the narrator adds that: "She was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for any one" (*Secret Garden* 5). She is what Mary Stolzenbach calls an "interior orphan"<sup>11</sup> who has never been loved and is not able to love in return. While Cedric is introduced and characterised in positive terms, the opposite is the case for Mary: she neither has beautiful looks nor a nice temper, and she is unwanted as her parents are too busy with their position in the government and in society to seriously care for her.<sup>12</sup>

The difference in presentation between Cedric and Mary becomes even more obvious when the two passages in question, the first introductions of the children, are juxtaposed and compared with each other, as in the following chart:

Cedric	Mary
a [...] fortunate baby	a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby
always well	had always been ill
sweet a temper, charming	Fretful
beautiful to look at	most disagreeable-looking child
soft, fine, gold-coloured hair	her hair was yellow
big brown eyes and long eyelashes and a darling little face	her face was yellow
a pleasure to everyone; sweet serious look [...] and [...] a lovely, friendly smile; cheerful, fearless, quaint little way of making friends	little thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair and a sour expression
a very confiding nature, and a kind little heart that sympathized with everyone	She was not an affectionate child and had never cared much for any one
his childish soul was full of kindness and innocent warm feeling	as tyrannical and selfish a little pig as ever lived

11 STOLZENBACH, Mary. "Braid Yorkshire: The Language of Myth? An Appreciation of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett." In: *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams and the Genres of Myth and Fantasy Studies* 20,4 (78) (1995): 25–29, 25. This existence as an "interior orphan" is described as follows: "Mary's parents lived on a lavish scale, and she was indulged by the ayah and the other servants, but she was an interior orphan, only to become one in fact as well. How well Burnett painted the loneliness of the child in India, combined with the hot, inhospitable strangeness of her environment, climatically revealed in the cholera attack when all die around her – no one thinks of her, they never have! – and she is left all alone. [...] Mary has been forgotten all her life, and it happens again." (STOLZENBACH. "Braid Yorkshire." 25)

12 FOSTER and SIMMONS comment on this as follows: "Marginalized, forgotten, refusing to confirm to the romantic archetypes of either femininity or childishness, she forms a complex study of a problem child. While at one level her moral deficiencies are reminiscent of the naughty children of Victorian tract literature, they are presented here more as a natural consequence of her abandonment and ill-treatment. The victim of systematic neglect by her parents, Mary is depicted as withdrawn, sulky and bad-tempered." FOSTER, Shirley and Judy SIMMONS. "Frances Hodgson Burnett: *The Secret Garden*." In: Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (ed.). *The Secret Garden: A Norton Critical Edition*. New York: Norton, 2006. 324–41, 331.

This juxtaposition of a few characteristics from the texts illustrates that Burnett in her presentation of Mary actually draws on contrasts with Cedric: she turns the positive character traits which she uses to portray Cedric into their opposites to describe the character of Mary. In some cases – a fortunate baby vs. a sickly, fretful, ugly little baby; always well vs. had always been ill; beautiful to look at vs. most disagreeable-looking child – the contrasts are almost verbatim or founded on a variation of the same concepts in the negative. In this respect, Burnett's novels are indeed formulaic as she makes use of standard characteristics from other children's books – either in a positive or a negative way.

Despite this rather negative introduction of Mary, the narrator does not blame the child but emphasises that it is really the fault of the parents, who never took care of their child and did not really want her, and that this is the reason why Mary has developed into such a miserable creature. Still, Burnett makes sure to portray her still as a child: early in the story she is shown to be playing in the garden and pretending “that she was making a flower-bed” (*Secret Garden* 2). Pretend-play is characteristic of children – one of the prime examples is Lewis Carroll's Alice, who always pretends all kinds of different things.<sup>13</sup> However, Mary is not a happy child – and she is not being loved. The difference between the stories is therefore also grounded on a difference between the respective parents: while the narrator stresses the loving relationship between Cedric and his parents – “He had never heard an unkind or uncourteous word spoken at home; he had always been loved” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 7) –, the relationship between Mary and her parents is virtually non-existent and based on alienation rather than love. Cedric is taken care of, and his parents are very fond of him, while Mary is neglected by her mother, who prefers to go to parties, and by her father, who is busy and ill. After the cholera epidemic, for instance, nobody at first realizes that there must be a child somewhere about the house, and Mary is found quite coincidentally and then sent away to live with people she has never met in her life.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Alice's “Let's pretend” in the first chapter of *Through the Looking Glass*; CARROLL, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Edited by Roger Lancelyn Green; illustrated by John Tenniel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1971]. 126. See also FEIN, Greta G. “Pretend Play in Childhood: An Integrative Review.” In: *Child's Development* 52 (1981): 1095–1118; and FEIN, Greta G. “Pretend Play: Creativity and Consciousness.” In: Dietmar Görlitz and Joachim F. Wohlwill (eds.). *Curiosity, Imagination, and Play: On the Development of Spontaneous Cognitive and Motivational Processes*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987. 281–304.

## II. Changes

It is well known that Mary changes after having spent some time at Misselthwaite Manor in Yorkshire – she is transformed both with regard to her appearance and to her attitude and behaviour. On her uncle's estate she does not have to pretend to play in the garden but finds a garden that belongs to her alone and where she grows happier and healthier every day.<sup>14</sup> But Mary does not only change herself, she also brings a change over the whole household of her uncle's manor: she discovers Colin and helps him get well, and this results in her uncle's return home at the end of the novel and his reconciliation with his only son.

Cedric, on the other hand, does not change: there is no need for him to alter his constitution or his behaviour. He is already good at the beginning, and whatever happens to him, he stays so. Yet, despite the overall and overarching differences in character and attitude between Cedric and Mary, there is also an interesting parallel between the two: they both have a healthy and a healing effect on their surroundings that are in need of such good and restorative influence.

Although things are in a graver condition in Misselthwaite Manor – where rooms have been locked since the death of Lilia Craven, Colin's mother, and where everything is governed by grief – also Dorincourt Castle is not in the happiest of states, although a few changes are perceptible already soon after Cedric's appearance on the scene:

Lord Dorincourt had occasion to wear his grim smile many a time as the days passed by. Indeed, as his acquaintance with his grandson progressed, he wore the smile so often that there were moments when it almost lost its grimness. There is no denying that before Lord Fauntleroy had appeared on the scene the old man had been growing very tired of his loneliness and his gout and his seventy-years. After so long a life of excitement and amusement, it was not agreeable to sit alone even in the most splendid room, with one foot on a gout-stool, and with no other diversion than flying into a rage, and shouting at a frightened footman who hated the sight of him. [...]

He hated the long nights and days, and he grew more and more savage and irritable. (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 140)

Until the arrival of Cedric, Dorincourt Castle was mostly determined by its owner's bad moods and grimness that were caused by his loneliness and his gout. It is quite telling with regard to the old Lord's character that he sought

<sup>14</sup> For the first time in her life, Mary experiences friendship. Martha Sowerby is the first person to approach her on a friendly basis: “the way in which Martha reacts to and affects Mary resembles the way in which Mary later reacts to and affects Colin.” KEYSER. “‘Quite Contrary.’” 4. But it is Dickon in particular who evokes her interest and whom she befriends: “she began to feel a slight interest in Dickon, and as she had never before been interested in any one but herself, it was the dawning of a healthy sentiment” (*Secret Garden* 31; my emphasis).

“diversion” in flying into a rage and shouting at his servants. But his attitude changes – he even learns to smile again. Cedric wins over people with his kindness, which is already highlighted in his introduction at the beginning of the novel: even the grocery-man, who is known as “the crossest creature alive”, is “pleased to see him, and speak to him”. He has the same effect on his grandfather:

And then Fauntleroy came; and when the Earl saw the lad, fortunately for the little fellow, the secret pride of the grandfather was gratified at the outset. If Cedric had been a less handsome little fellow the old man might have taken so strong a dislike to the boy that he would not have given himself the chance to see his grandson's finer qualities. But he chose to think that Cedric's beauty and fearless spirit were the results of Dorincourt blood and a credit to the Dorincourt rank. And then when he heard the lad talk, and saw what a well-bred little fellow he was, notwithstanding his boyish ignorance of all that his new position meant, the Earl liked his grandson more, and actually began to find himself rather entertained. (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 140)

The words “And then Fauntleroy came” mark the change that his arrival causes. He helps his grandfather lose his “savage and irritable” behaviour merely by being himself. Although it is mostly old Dorincourt's pride that is being gratified, he is able to show some affection for the little boy and finds pleasure in him – thereby ignoring that the boy's mother might have had her share in his good behaviour and attributing it solely to his heritage.<sup>15</sup> He watches his grandson when he learns to ride and is “so pleased that he [...] almost forg[ets] his gout” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 141). Cedric's good looks and his being well-bred help him in gaining his grandfather's good opinion. He makes the old man forget his ailments: Lord Dorincourt feels better because of the boy's companionship. It is Cedric's inner nobility that is important.

At the same time, he is not spoilt<sup>16</sup> nor does he take advantage of his privileged position with the old Lord but rather makes use of it for altruistic motives. His inner nobility shows very directly when he helps a poor lame boy by allowing him to ride his pony and by getting crutches for him. His grandfather is “entertained” by the story and not angry at all, as his groom Wilkins expected; and in fact, this little incident contributes to their “becoming more intimate every

<sup>15</sup> Cedric's qualities have clearly been moulded by his mother, and it is this nurture that Mary – and also Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess* – lacks. See also Silver on this aspect. SILVER, Anna Krugovoy. “Domesticating Brontë's Moors: Motherhood in *The Secret Garden*.” In: *The Lion and the Unicorn* 21,2 (1997): 193–203.

<sup>16</sup> The narrator explicitly comments on this: “Apparently he was to have everything he wanted, and to do everything he wished to do. And though this would certainly not have been a very wise plan to pursue with all small boys, his young lordship bore it amazingly well. Perhaps, notwithstanding his sweet nature, he might have been somewhat spoiled by it, if it had not been for the hours he spent with his mother at Court Lodge.” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 146) Again the mother's positive influence is emphasized (cf. n15).

day” as it helps “Fauntleroy's faith in his lordship's benevolence and virtue increase[...]” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 146).<sup>17</sup>

When Cedric's inheritance is in danger – a woman claims to have been married to the Earl's older son and have a boy with him who is slightly older than Cedric – the Earl realizes how much he loves Cedric and to what great extent he has got used to having him around:

‘If anyone had told me I could be fond of a child,’ he said, his harsh voice low and unsteady, ‘I should not have believed him. I always detested children – my own more than the rest. I am fond of this one; he is fond of me’ (with a bitter smile). ‘I am not popular; I never was. But he is fond of me. He never was afraid of me – he always trusted me. He would have filled my place better than I have filled it. I know that. He would have been an honour to the name.’ (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 185)

These words are spoken while Lord Dorincourt is watching his grandson sleep. He has just come over his rage about the woman who claims the inheritance and he now regrets his impending loss. The change in his overall attitude is explicitly mentioned, as his rage is different from his usual rages: “this one had been worse than the rest because there had been something more than rage in it” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 185). The narrator is as yet vague as to what that “something more” might be and becomes only slightly more explicit when the lord continues to watch his grandson: “He bent down and stood a minute or so looking at the happy, sleeping face. His shaggy eyebrows were knitted fiercely, and yet *somehow he did not seem fierce at all*.” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 185; my emphasis) It is not spelt out here, but what becomes apparent is that the old man is sad and that he seems to genuinely love the boy and to care for him. This becomes particularly evident when, shortly afterwards, he even goes to visit his younger son's wife, whom he separated from Cedric to live in a different house. It is then that he admits that he is fond of Cedric: “He pleased me from the first. I am an old man, and was tired of my life. He has given me something to live for, I am proud of him.” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 211) Subsequently, he acknowledges his daughter-in-law for the first time because he recognizes that Cedric owes a great deal of his gentleness and kindness to his mother as well. In the end, the woman who claims to be the real heir's mother turns out to be an imposter, Cedric is re-installed as the true heir, and the story ends happily. The point of possibly losing his grandson, however, has definitely led to some sort of *anagnorisis* on behalf of the Earl and to a more healthy attitude.

<sup>17</sup> “It is Fauntleroy's unquestioning love and innocent belief in him that works upon the embittered old Earl [...]. His efforts change the old man from a gout-ridden roué [...] into a peaceable occupant of the parlor [sic] armchair whence he may fall under the influence of Dearest.” (WILSON. “*Little Lord Fauntleroy*: The Darling of Mothers and the Abomination of a Generation.” 240)

Mary's situation is quite different: she is not at all welcome at her uncle's house – during her journey to Misselthwaite, Mrs Medlock tells her: “You mustn't expect that there will be people to talk to you. You'll have to play about and look after yourself.” (*The Secret Garden* 17) Moreover, it is hard for her to make friends, and for the first time in her life she realizes that she is lonely and becomes much more aware of herself. When she meets the gardener Ben Weatherstaff, he tells her “the truth about herself in her life” (*Secret Garden* 40):

‘Tha' an' me are a good bit alike,’ he said. ‘We was wove out of th' same cloth. We're neither of us good-lookin' an' we're both of us as sour as we look. We've got the same nasty tempers, both of us. I'll warrant.’ (*Secret Garden* 40)

For the first time in her life, Mary starts to think about herself and is then able to make friends, first with a robin, next with Martha and Dickon, and, eventually, with her newly-discovered cousin Colin Craven, an invalid.

Here is another similarity with the story of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. In both stories, an invalid and miserable character is transformed into a healthy and happy one. In the case of Cedric and his grandfather, this transformation is based on the influence of the good character on the ‘bad’: the Earl changes for the better after he has lived with his grandson for a while and under his good influence. Cedric very much resembles *Oliver Twist*: he does not change for the worse even when exposed to his grandfather's grimness and misanthropy, but “the principle of Good surviv[es] through every adverse circumstance, and triumph[s] at last,” as Dickens put it in the Preface to the third edition of his novel.<sup>18</sup>

In the case of Mary and Colin, however, who are both “contrary” and rather selfish, the transformation is based on their similarity. This becomes particularly clear when Colin throws a tantrum during one night and Mary cannot sleep because of him:

As she listened to the sobbing screams she did not wonder that people were so frightened that they gave him his own way in everything rather than hear them. She put her hands over her ears and felt sick and shivering.  
[...] She hated them [the sobbing screams] so and was so terrified by them that suddenly they began to make her angry and she felt as if she should like to fly into a tantrum herself and frighten him as he was frightening her. She was not used to any one's tempers but her own. She took down her hands from her ears and sprang up and stamped her foot. (*Secret Garden* 177–78)

While Mary is listening to Colin's “sobbing screams”, she becomes so angry that she starts to feel like throwing a tantrum herself; she loses all self-control and

18 DICKENS, Charles. “The Author's Preface to the Third Edition.” In: Kathleen Tillotson (ed.); Stephen Gill (intr. and notes). *Oliver Twist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1841]. liii.

wants to cure him by his own means: she wants to frighten him as he frightens her. Subsequently, she runs to his room and starts to yell at him:

‘You stop!’ she almost shouted. ‘You stop! I hate you! Everybody hates you! I wish everybody would run out of the house and let you scream yourself to death! You will scream yourself to death in a minute, and I wish you would!’

A nice sympathetic child could neither have thought nor said such things, but it just happened that the shock of hearing them was the best possible thing for this hysterical boy whom no one had ever dared to restrain or contradict.

He had been lying on his face beating his pillow with his hands and he actually almost jumped around, he turned so quickly at the sound of the furious little voice. His face looked dreadful, white and red, and swollen, and he was gasping and choking; but savage little Mary did not care an atom.

‘If you scream another scream,’ she said, ‘I'll scream too – and I can scream louder than you can, and I'll frighten you, I'll frighten you!’ (*Secret Garden* 178–79)

It is exactly her contrariness and her naughty temper that is healthy for him – a nice child would never have achieved the same. The problem is that neither Colin nor Mary ever knew any “constraint” or contradiction, which led to their becoming “contrary” and “hysterical”.

As it turns out, Colin is sure that he has felt a lump on his back and will turn into a hunchback, like his father. When he explains this to Mary, she takes his fear seriously and is able to convince him of the truth, namely that he is not an invalid. Colin's healing is based on the ancient medical principle (resurfacing in our culture in homeopathy) of “similis similibus curantur”,<sup>19</sup> that like cures like. Mary and Colin see themselves as in a mirror: Colin only realises his bad behaviour when Mary acts just like him – and vice versa. Thus, they are both healed from their headstrong and contrary behaviour.<sup>20</sup> The happy ending of the

19 Cf. the following passage from *The Taming of the Shrew*: “And where two raging fires meet together, / They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.” SHAKESPEARE, William. *The Taming of the Shrew*. Edited by Brian Morris. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Thomson Learning, 2002 [1962]. 2.1.132–33. This principle of “similis similibus curantur” is also mentioned by Robert BURTON: “I would expell *clavum clavo*, comfort one sorrow with another, idleness with idleness [...] make an antidote out of that which was the prime cause of my disease”; BURTON, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling and Rhonda Blair; introduction by J.B. Bamforth. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989. 1: 7.22–25. Angus GOWLAND stresses this aspect in the introduction to his study *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 2. In *King John* this idea occurs as “and falsehood falsehood uses”; SHAKESPEARE, William. *King John*. Edited by E.A.J. Honigmann. The Arden Shakespeare. London: Thomson Learning, 2002 [1951]. 3.1.277.

20 On the healing process in *The Secret Garden* see also ADAMS, Gillian. “Secrets and Healing Magic in *The Secret Garden*.” In: Francelina Butler and Richard Rotert (eds.). *Triumphs of the Spirit in Children's Literature*. Hamden: Library Professional Publications, 1986. 42–53.

story is well-known, but it is remarkable that Burnett would base this on “an angry unsympathetic girl [who] insisted that he was not as ill as he thought he was” (*Secret Garden* 181) and that “he actually felt as if she might be speaking the truth” (*Secret Garden* 181) – instead of having a “nice sympathetic child” caress and indulge him.

### III. Endings

In both novels, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*, the happy ending is brought about by means of the redemptive force of children. In *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, the “Eighth Birthday” of the little earl is celebrated in the last chapter; and in *The Secret Garden*, the novel ends with the reconciliation of Colin and his father and the surprise of the whole household when they walk to the house together.

In the very last passage of each novel, however, the redemptive children are conspicuously absent. It almost seems as if their presence is no longer needed now that their redemptive task is accomplished. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* ends with a short passage on the future of Mr Hobbs, who moved to England in the course of the resolution of the affair about the impostor heir:

And that would be the end of my story; but I must add one curious piece of information, which is that Mr Hobbs became so fascinated with high life and was so reluctant to leave his young friend that he actually sold his corner store in New York, and settled in the English village of Erlesboro [...]. And about ten years after, when Dick who had finished his education and was going to visit his brother in California, asked the good grocer if he did not wish to return, he shook his head seriously. ‘Not to live there,’ he said. ‘I want to be near *him*, an’ sort o’ look after him. It’s a good enough country for them that’s young an’ stirrin’ – but there’s faults in it. There’s not an aunt-sister among’em – nor a earl!’ (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 237–38)

Mr Hobbs is so attached to Cedric that he does not want to leave him. But he adds an interesting piece of information: he prefers England to America, although he always had been prejudiced towards the old world, especially after reading a book about the English monarchy where he finds out about Queen Mary and the beheadings during her reign (cf. *Little Lord Fauntleroy* 195), and would have preferred Cedric to stay in America: “It was a pity to make an earl out of him.” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 191) His prejudices become even more obvious when he learns from Cedric that he will not be an earl after all: “It’s my opinion it’s all a put-up job o’ the British ‘ristycrats to rob him of his rights because he’s an American. They’ve had a spite agin us ever since the Revolution, an’ they’re takin’ it out on him.” (*Little Lord Fauntleroy* 200) He has his own conspiracy theory and is only reconciled with the country when he goes there himself and

finds out what life is like. But this life is, again, determined by Cedric’s presence, whose role therefore goes even further than described so far as he has consequently become the symbol of a possible understanding between Britain and America and of an attempt to reconcile the two nations instead of reinforcing cultural stereotypes and clichés.<sup>21</sup>

In *The Secret Garden*, the ending focuses on Colin and his father: Archibald Craven returns to his estate to find his son healthy and running in the garden. Colin being at the centre and Mary fading out towards the end has been regarded as an “antifeminist narrative shift”.<sup>22</sup> “Colin, in the final episode of the novel, leaves the garden behind and returns to the real power centre, the house, which he is to inherit as master. Mary, the prime mover of his recovery, is significantly absent from the closing tableau”.<sup>23</sup> But the reading of her being left out at the end is not necessarily and exclusively negative. The concluding tableau emphasises that the healing of the whole estate has been accomplished – through Mary’s agency.

But Mary is not the only redemptive child in *The Secret Garden*, and there is indeed a child in the novel who is, very much like Cedric, thoroughly good and even idealised: Dickon Sowerby.<sup>24</sup> It is his influence that helps Mary develop into a happy and healthy girl in the first place, and she is then able to help her cousin Colin. But Dickon is not the central character, and he appears only after Mary has already started to change for the better; yet he has a central role in the overall development of the novel.

21 Cf. WHITE, Robert L. “Little Lord Fauntleroy as Hero.” In: Ray B. Browne and Larry Landrum (eds.). *Challenges in American Culture*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1970. 209–16, 210. – In a similar manner, the old Earl learns to appreciate and respect his daughter-in-law despite her being American.

22 WILKIE, Christine. “Digging Up *The Secret Garden*: Noble Innocents of Little Savages?” In: Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (ed.). *The Secret Garden: A Norton Critical Edition*. New York: Norton, 2006. 314–24, 322. See also BIXLER, Phyllis. “Gardens, Houses, and Nurturant Power in *The Secret Garden*.” In: James Holt McGavran (ed.). *Romanticism and Children’s Literature in Nineteenth-Century England*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1991. 208–25; FOSTER and SIMMONS. “Frances Hodgson Burnett: *The Secret Garden*.” 340; KEYSER. “‘Quite Contrary’.”; and PAUL, Lissa. “Enigma Variations: What Feminist Theory Knows about Children’s Literature.” In: Peter Hunt (ed.). *Children’s Literature: The Development of Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1990. 148–57.

23 FOSTER and SIMMONS. “Frances Hodgson Burnett: *The Secret Garden*.” 340.

24 The major difference between Cedric and Dickon lies in their social backgrounds: while Cedric grows up to be an earl, Dickon lives in a poor family with many children. Moreover, he completely lacks Cedric’s prettiness; his sister Martha states that “us never thought he was handsome” (*Secret Garden* 114). Dickon is also more mature: while Cedric’s behaviour often gives away his childish naivety, Dickon has a grown-up sense for all different kinds of matters, e.g., he knows immediately, by instinct, how to treat Colin when he first meets him. What they share is their innate goodness that has been influenced by their mothers.

Burnett put Mary at the centre of her story, and then Colin beside her. Both are not likeable at first but then are 'redeemed' from their being contrary and stubborn. The stylistic device of mirroring the two is one of the ways that makes the story of *The Secret Garden* more complex than the earlier *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. The children are now no longer depicted as ideal or as being entirely good, but as 'real' children, which does not mean that they are not good and redemptive but much more interesting, complex and likeable. One can also see that Burnett's focus shifted in her later story: it is no longer so much about an individual child but rather about a place and how it transforms this child – which is probably why she did not call the story "Mistress/Mary Mary quite Contrary", as planned originally,<sup>25</sup> while her earlier books were entitled as *Editha's Burglar*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *A Little Princess*, thus focussing very much on the central character. *The Secret Garden* really is about the magic of a particular place;<sup>26</sup> the children who act as redemptive forces within it are agents that are enabled to do so *through* the garden.

By modifying the portrayal of the children in her later novel, Burnett moved away from the imagery of the romantic child and from her earlier (more formulaic) presentation of idealized children. Thus, her story gains complexity, and, maybe, this is one of the reasons why we tend to still talk so much more about *The Secret Garden* than about any of her other books today.

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- 25 THWAITE, Ann. *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1849–1924*. Boston: David R. Godine, 1991 [1974]. 222. This title is found on the first page of the manuscript. She apparently found it not easy to decide for either 'Mary, Mary' or 'Mistress Mary' in the title. See also RECTOR, Gretchen V. "Digging in the Garden: The Manuscript of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett." In: Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (ed.). *The Secret Garden: A Norton Critical Edition*. New York: Norton, 2006. 186–99, 189.
- 26 For the concept of 'magic' in *The Secret Garden* see, e.g., ADAMS, "Secrets and Healing Magic"; BIXLER, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." 195; SMEDMAN, M. Sarah. "Springs of Hope: Recovery of Primordial Time in 'Mythic' Novels for Young Readers." In: *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and Children's Literature Association* 16 (1988): 91–107, 97.

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Stefanie Krüger

## Life in the Domestic Realm – Male Identity in *The Secret Garden*

### I. Introduction

As one of the most popular all-time favourites of children's literature Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) has received a huge amount of criticism, has been adapted into various movies and thus, together with *A Little Princess* (1905) and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1885), constitutes some of the best and most impressive of children's literature from the Victorian and Edwardian periods. It is hardly surprising that much of the aforementioned criticism concentrates on themes like constructions of childhood, Victorian and Edwardian values, class ideology or the garden as a metaphor. Most criticism, however, focuses on the development and the psychology of the female protagonist, Mary Lennox, and her relationship to the garden or other characters in the novel – an understandable focus as Burnett's book was "written specifically for juvenile female readers", as Anrhea Trodd points out in her *Reader's Guide to Edwardian Literature*.<sup>1</sup> The idea of *The Secret Garden* as a novel for girls rather than boys – which I certainly agree with – has, on the one hand, indeed led to thorough analyses of Mary's character; on the other hand, other inhabitants of Misselthwaite Manor and even some of the main protagonists of the story have been widely neglected. Particularly the male characters of *The Secret Garden* have played a somewhat minor role, in the shadow of Mary and her fellow female characters – that is, the abundance of Burnett's larger-than-life mother figures. Research and criticism on the male protagonists is usually satisfied with Dickon's role as "a Pan figure"<sup>2</sup> (rarely indeed have critics so unanimously agreed on the interpretation of a character than in Dickon's case, as can be seen in the writings of Jane Darcy, Linda T. Parsons, Elizabeth Lennox Keyser, Danielle E. Price, and many others),

1 TRODD, Anrhea. *A Reader's Guide to Edwardian Literature*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. 10.

2 STOLZENBACH, Mary M. "Braid Yorkshire: The Language of Myth? An Appreciation of *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett." In: *Mythlore* 20,4 (1995): 25–29, 27.