

# THE SECRET GARDEN



Frances Hodgson Burnett

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY JILL MULLER

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES ROBINSON

GEORGE STADE

CONSULTING EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



**BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS**  
NEW YORK

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## FROM THE PAGES OF THE SECRET GARDEN

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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.

(page 7)

It had not been the custom that Mistress Mary should do anything but stand and allow herself to be dressed like a doll, but before she was ready for breakfast she began to suspect that her life at Misselthwaite Manor would end by teaching her a number of things quite new to her.

(page 27)

“Would you make friends with me?” she said to the robin just as if she was speaking to a person.  
“Would you?”

(page 36)

“I am the first person who has spoken in here for ten years.”

(page 65)

Mary was an odd, determined little person, and now she had something interesting to be determined about, she was very much absorbed, indeed. She worked and dug and pulled up weeds steadily, only becoming more pleased with her work every hour instead of tiring of it.

(page 73)

As she came closer to him she noticed that there was a clean fresh scent of heather and grass and leaves about him, almost as if he were made of them. She liked it very much and when she looked into his funny face with the red cheeks and round blue eyes she forgot that she had felt shy.

(page 80)

“I am like this always, ill and having to lie down. My father won't let people talk me over either. The servants are not allowed to speak about me. If I live I may be a hunchback, but I shan't live.”

(page 102)

“I don't think I ever really wanted to see anything before, but I want to see that garden. I want the key dug up. I want the door unlocked.”

(page 105)

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“No lad could get well as thought them sort o’ things.”

(page 127)

“He’s having one of those tantrums the nurse calls hysterics. How awful it sounds.”

(page 136)

“Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!”

(page 164)

She was saying it to Colin because she wanted to make Magic and keep him on his feet looking like that. She could not bear that he should give in before Ben Weatherstaff. He did not give in. She was uplifted by a sudden feeling that he looked quite beautiful in spite of his thinness.

(page 175)

They always called it Magic and indeed it seemed like it in the months that followed—the wonderful months—the radiant months—the amazing ones. Oh! the things which happened in that garden! If you have never had a garden you cannot understand, and if you have had a garden you will know that it would take a whole book to describe all that came to pass there.

(page 180)

One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts—just mere thoughts—are as powerful as electric batteries—as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body.

(page 214)

By his side with his head up in the air and his eyes full of laughter walked as strongly and steadily as any boy in Yorkshire—Master Colin!

(page 227)

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# FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

Imagine children's books as popular as the Harry Potter series is today, and you have some idea of the iconic status Frances Hodgson Burnett earned from her writing more than a century ago. Frances was born in Manchester, England, in 1849. Her prosperous father owned a home-furnishings business supported by customers made wealthy through the Manchester textile industry. But when her father died in 1853 and then cotton imports ceased when the American Civil War began, Frances's family became almost penniless. To survive, her mother moved her five children to rural Tennessee in 1865.

A naturally gifted storyteller, Frances charmed family and friends with her keen imagination. In spite of little formal schooling, she read avidly, and it was not long before she realized she might aid her struggling family by selling stories to popular ladies' magazines. She sent her work to *Godey's Lady's Book*, and in 1868 *Godey's* published two stories for \$35—the first of what would be a lifelong stream of handsome paychecks. When her mother died in 1870, Frances was the family's chief supporter, a role she would play throughout much of her life. Indeed, when she married a Tennessee doctor, Swan Burnett, in 1873, it was she who paid their way to Europe so Swan could study medicine.

Within a few years, Frances gave birth to two boys, Lionel and Vivian, and released her first major works, including the critically acclaimed *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877). The conclusion of *Lass*, in which her characters leave the working-class oppression of the coal-mining culture of Lancashire for a peaceful garden in Kent, introduces an abiding theme for Burnett: the healing power of gardens. Noted by critics as an up-and-coming author, Burnett was also a prominent hostess in Washington, D.C. She was popular and charming, but the numerous roles she played—prolific writer, the family's main breadwinner, mother, wife, and society hostess—were overwhelming at times, as she revealed in her 1883 novel *Through One Administration*. Yet Burnett loved to work and travel, and she spent considerable time away from her husband and sons. In 1879, shuttling between the United States and Europe, she published a more serious work of fiction, *Haworth's*, which was followed by her first published writing for children, in the magazine *St. Nicholas*.

Burnett wrote more than fifty novels during her life, but it was the publication of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in 1886 that determined the course of her future works and her place in literary history as a writer of children's fiction. Although the book received an ambivalent critical response, it was a phenomenon in America and Europe, selling out printing after printing and earning Burnett enormous fame and fortune. After the dissolution of her first and second marriages and the 1890 death of her eldest son, Lionel, Burnett wrote the classic for which she is most remembered, *The Secret Garden* (1911). Its central theme—that the mind can heal the body—reflected Burnett's own struggles with illness and despair. But regardless of the sadness she endured in reality, Burnett was determined to create only happy endings for her characters.

She remained prolific throughout and after World War I, although her Victorian style had become outdated in the eyes of many critics. Surrounded by her family and many friends, Burnett discarded such criticism, writing the successful works *T. Tembarom* (1913) and *The Lost Prince* (1915), doing charity work, and tending the luxurious gardens at her homes on Long Island and Bermuda. Frances Hodgson Burnett died of heart failure in Plandome (Long Island), New York, on October 29, 1924.

# THE WORLD OF FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT AND THE SECRET GARDEN

- 1849** Frances Hodgson Burnett is born on November 24 in Manchester , England. Her father, Edwin, owns a home-furnishings shop whose profits provide a good life for his growing family . Henry David Thoreau publishes “Resistance to Civil Government ,” the original title of “Civil Disobedience.”
- 1850** Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter appears.
- 1851** Herman Melville publishes Moby-Dick.
- 1853** When Edwin dies, Frances’s mother, Eliza, runs her husband’s company to support their five children.
- 1855** Eliza and the children move to Islington Square, a bleak area bordering the industrial section of Manchester. Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass is published.
- 1859** Charles Darwin’s Origin of Species and Charles Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities are published.
- 1861** The American Civil War begins. Dickens’s Great Expectations is published.
- 1863** President Abraham Lincoln, through the Emancipation Proclamation , abolishes slavery in America.
- 1865** After struggling for many years to preserve the family business , Eliza moves with her children to her brother’s log cabin in New Market, Tennessee. Young Frances falls in love with Tennessee’s backcountry. When not exploring the natural world, she reads and writes stories, testing them on her friends and family. She takes a job teaching school, for which she is paid in food. Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland is published.
- 1868** In the wake of the Civil War, the family has barely enough money to make ends meet. Frances discovers her love of writing and attempts to help by selling her stories. Godey’s Lady’s Book, a popular women’s magazine, publishes “Miss Carruthers’ Engagement” and “Hearts and Diamonds,” launching Frances’s literary career; she will write more than fifty books and numerous dramatizations of her fiction. Louisa May Alcott publishes Little Women.
- 1869** The family moves to a small house in Knoxville, Tennessee.
- 1870** Eliza Hodgson dies. Frances continues to support the family by publishing stories.
- 1871** A British Act of Parliament legalizes labor unions.

- A story, "Surly Tim's Troubles," is published by Scribner's Monthly, which will issue more of Frances's writing than any other magazine. A young local doctor, Swan Burnett, falls in love with Frances. When he proposes marriage, she somewhat apprehensively accepts, fearing he'll be devastated if she refuses. Her feelings about marriage remain ambivalent. George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is published.
- 1872
- A first full-length work, *Dolly*, is serialized in Peterson's magazine. Swan and Frances marry in Tennessee and honeymoon in New York, where Frances also meets with publishers.
- 1873
- A son, Lionel, is born. Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* is published anonymously.
- 1874
- Burnett enters into a lucrative writing contract that permits the family to live in Paris while her husband studies medicine. In addition to raising Lionel, Frances writes full-time. She is remarkably productive, but the experience exhausts her. Despite the fact that Congress passes a Civil Rights Act banning discrimination in places of public accommodation, the first law enforcing segregation on trains is passed in Tennessee, and segregation laws multiply throughout the South.
- 1875
- A second son, Vivian, is born in France. The family returns to Tennessee, where Frances raises the children and writes, while Swan moves to Washington, D.C., to begin his eye-and-ear medical practice. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* appears. Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone.
- 1876
- The family joins Swan in the capital. Frances enters a period of intense work, creativity, and output. Her fame and earnings steadily increase, making her the breadwinner of the family. Burnett's first novel, about Lancashire mining culture, *That Lass o' Lowrie's*, is published, as is *Surly Tim, and Other Stories*. Henry James's *The American* is published. Queen Victoria is proclaimed empress of India.
- 1877
- Haworth's* is published. In order to protect its copyright and royalties in England, Frances travels to Canada to fulfill the legal requirement of standing on the soil of a British dominion on the day of the British publication. Burnett forges friendships with contemporary writers Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Louisa May Alcott.
- 1879
- Louisiana* is published.
- 1880
- A Fair Barbarian* is published. *Esmerelda*, a play written with actor/dramatist William Gillette, is produced in New York. President James Garfield takes office, and Frances, Swan and the boys socialize at the White House.
- 1881
- Burnett publishes the novel *Through One Administration*, a revealing reflection of her Washington, D.C., social life and her unhappy marriage. Critics compare her writing to that of Henry James for its portrayal of contradictions in human nature. Constantly traveling on work-related business, Frances is often on the verge of nervous exhaustion. Although she does not reveal her problems, her marriage begins to suffer. The Supreme Court overturns the Civil Rights Act.
- 1883

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- 1884** Burnett begins traveling more frequently to Britain and Europe , spending long periods away from her family. Her relationship with Swan begins to dissolve; she is torn between being a good mother and living independently of her children and husband. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* appears.
- 1885** *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is serialized in the magazine *St. Nicholas*. Its tale of a young American boy who discovers he is an English lord causes a literary sensation akin to that of today's *Harry Potter* books. Mothers begin having their sons wear long curly hair and velvet suits to look like Fauntleroy. Frances dresses her own son Vivian, the inspiration for the character, in dandyish garb. She falls ill and receives treatment from a mind healer in Boston.
- 1886** *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is published in book form and becomes a runaway best-seller in America and Europe. Burnett grows wealthy from the sales of her books and indulges a passion for decorating houses and creating exquisite gardens.
- 1887** *A Woman's Will* is published, as is the story "Sara Crewe." Burnett informally separates from Swan, taking her sons on a tour of Europe. Their itinerary includes a stay in London for Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebration.
- 1888** Frances's stage adaptation of *Fauntleroy* opens in London three months after she learns of an unauthorized dramatization there. In a feat believed to be impossible at the time, she successfully sues under the Copyright Act of 1842, earning the gratitude of fellow authors. George Eastman patents the rollfilm camera.
- 1889** *The Pretty Sister of José* is published. Frances is involved in a traffic accident and incurs a concussion that further weakens her already fragile health.
- 1890** *Little Saint Elizabeth and Other Stories* is published. After months of seeking a cure for her eldest son, Lionel, Frances is devastated when he dies of tuberculosis. Perhaps in response to her son's illness and death, Frances becomes active in children's charities , to which she donates generous sums of money.
- 1891** Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is published.
- 1892** *Children I Have Known* is published. The first successful gaspowered automobile made in the United States is built by Charles and Frank Duryea, bicycle designers and toolmakers, at Chicopee, Massachusetts.
- 1893** A memoir, *The One I Knew Best of All: A Memory of the Mind of a Child*, is published.
- 1894** *Piccino and Other Stories* is published.
- 1895** *Two Little Pilgrims' Progress* is published.
- 1896** *A Lady of Quality* is published.

**1897** Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is published.

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**1898** After many years of alienation, Frances and Swan divorce. She moves into Maytham Hall, in Kent, with her son Vivian, a Harvard graduate in journalism. She conducts an unhappy affair with an abusive English doctor, Stephen Townsend. He wants to be a stage actor, and Frances arranges roles for him in the stage adaptations of her novels.

**1899** *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim* is published.

**1900** Frances marries Townsend, reportedly under coercion: He had threatened to publicly reveal that she let him kiss her after

knowing him for two weeks. Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* published.

**1901** *The Making of a Marchioness* is published. Queen Victoria dies.

**1902** Ongoing struggles with her abusive husband lead Frances to seek a separation. She continues working to exhaustion and is hospitalized.

**1905** *A Little Princess* is published.

**1909** Burnett moves to a house she has built in Plandome (Long Island), New York.

**1911** Her greatest work, *The Secret Garden*, is published. Its underlying themes regarding the power of the mind over the body reflect Burnett's growing interest in Christian Science.

**1913** *T. Tembarom* is published.

**1914** Frances begins spending more time at her home in Bermuda, where she grows more than a hundred varieties of roses in her gardens. James Joyce's *Dubliners* is published. World War I begins.

**1915** *The Lost Prince* is published.

**1917** T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* is published.

**1920** Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is published.

**1922** *The Head of the House of Coombe* is published. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Joyce's *Ulysses* are published. The appearance of modernist works causes some critics to find Burnett's writing antiquated by comparison.

**1924** Burnett dies of heart failure in Plandome on October 29.

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# INTRODUCTION

Near the end of her life, looking back over six prolific decades in which she had published fifty-two books and written and produced thirteen plays, Frances Hodgson Burnett told her son Vivian, “With the best that was in me I have tried to write some happiness into the world” (Burnett, *The Secret Garden*, p. 410; see “For Further Reading”). *The Secret Garden*, Burnett’s novel about a pair of lonely children who are healed physically and psychologically by cultivating an abandoned garden, has brought happiness to child readers, and more than a few adults, for nearly a hundred years. Praised by writer and critic Alison Lurie as “one of the most original and brilliant children’s books of the twentieth century,” *The Secret Garden* has never been out of print since its publication in 1911. The novel has been filmed several times, notably in 1949 and 1993; has been serialized by the BBC (1952, 1960, and 1975) and by Viacom in 1987; and has been made into a Tony Award-winning musical by Marsha Norman and Lucy Simon, in 1991.

Although it was popular from the outset, *The Secret Garden* was not immediately recognized as Frances Hodgson Burnett’s most outstanding literary achievement. A typical review in *The Bookman* while noting that the story contained “a deep vein of symbolism,” dismissed it as “an exceedingly pretty tale” (Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, p. 263; see “For Further Reading”). In Burnett’s lifetime *The Secret Garden* was eclipsed by her earlier children’s novel, the hugely successful *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. Published in 1886, *Little Lord Fauntleroy* was a late-Victorian Harry Potter. The story of a poor New York boy who faces a happy reversal of fortune when he is discovered to be the heir to an English earldom was a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic and gave rise to a profitable industry of toys, statues, chocolates, playing cards, songs, and dramatizations. Mothers rushed to dress their sons in lace collars, wide-brimmed hats, and velvet breeches modeled on those worn by the author’s son Vivian (to his lifelong embarrassment) in the illustrations for *Fauntleroy*. Vivian’s outfit in turn, had been copied from the attire of Burnett’s friend Oscar Wilde. Meanwhile, Frances Hodgson Burnett won further publicity for herself and her work by successfully suing E. V. Seebohm, writer of an unauthorized London dramatization of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, for violation of the Copyright Act of 1842. Her legal victory paved the way for other authors to control and profit from stage adaptations of their writings and was celebrated at a banquet given by the Society of British Authors. Among the one hundred and fifty guests were George Meredith, William Rossetti, Edmund Gosse, and Oscar Wilde. Burnett was now a literary celebrity. Her own dramatization replaced Seebohm’s play on the London stage, opening in May 1888 to an audience that included members of the British royal family. The play transferred successfully to New York and toured for years; at one time forty theater companies were performing it simultaneously in Britain and the United States.

*Little Lord Fauntleroy* has not aged well. To many modern readers the angelic, self-sacrificing, and androgynous hero, Cedric Fauntleroy (played by female actors in both Seebohm’s and Burnett’s dramatizations, and by Mary Pickford in a 1921 film version), who calls his mother “Dearest” and persuades his crusty and tradition-bound British uncle, the Earl of Dorincourt, to give more charity to the peasants on his estate, appears comically alien and unrealistic. From Burnett’s prodigious output of fiction and nonfiction for children and adults, only *The Secret Garden* continues to be widely read and appreciated in the twenty-first century. What makes this late novel stand out from Burnett’s other work as an acknowledged classic? When the author’s representations of children in *Fauntleroy* and

such other one-time best-sellers as *The Little Princess* are often dismissed as outdated and unconvincing, what accounts for the continuing appeal of *Mary Lennox* and *Colin Craven*?

*The Secret Garden* and *Little Lord Fauntleroy* share surface similarities. In both novels the main character arrives in England from another country and sees English customs through an outsider's eyes. In both cases there is a mansion to be explored and a difficult uncle to tame. Both Cedric and Mary repair broken relationships and restore harmony to their surroundings. *Fauntleroy's* rags-to-riches plot is a familiar one in Burnett's fiction, influenced perhaps by her childhood love of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, and also by her own experience of early poverty and loss, followed by a hard-won restoration of fortune. *The Secret Garden* differs from *Fauntleroy* and most other Burnett novels in that the main characters already possess adequate material wealth. The riches they lack and eventually recover are physical, emotional, and spiritual. Written toward the end of her life, *The Secret Garden* reflects Frances Hodgson Burnett's recognition that wealth and worldly success are not enough and echoes her own search for spiritual healing. While Burnett employs some tried-and-tested successful elements from her earlier fiction, such as the use of regional dialect and a Gothic setting, she also shows a new willingness to explore painful emotions and to present child heroes whose behavior is often unlovable. For once her relentless drive to "write some happiness into the world" does not inhibit her from creating convincing characters or compel her to resolve all the tensions in her narrative.

The greater psychological realism of *The Secret Garden* may stem from Burnett's personal suffering in the years following *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. As Vivian Burnett told a Knoxville audience shortly after his mother's death, Frances Hodgson Burnett's life contained "many sorrows that the world does not know about" (Gerzina, p. xvi). While her early life is a story of adversity overcome by remarkable energy and achievement, her middle years were a period of loss, disappointment, and spiritual searching. During these years, her writing, at first little more than a means of providing imaginative consolation and financial relief for her family in a time of poverty, became an almost evangelical effort to create order and spread joy in an increasingly perplexing world. As she counseled in her 1900 children's book, *The Land of the Blue Flower*, "If you fill your mind with a beautiful thought, there will be no room in it for an ugly one."

Frances Hodgson Burnett was born in Manchester, England, in 1849. Her father, Edwin Hodgson, kept a home-furnishings store, and the family lived in moderate affluence until his death in 1853. Burnett's mother, Eliza, tried to keep the family business afloat through the 1850s, but times grew increasingly hard as Manchester, the center of the world's cotton textile industry, fell into a recession caused by the outbreak of the American Civil War and its disastrous effect on the southern cotton trade. By 1865 Eliza Hodgson was forced to close the store and emigrate with her five children to Nashville, Tennessee, where her brother had a dry goods business. The family lived in a log cabin and were supported by the earnings of Burnett's two brothers, who went to work for their uncle. Having long entertained her sisters and schoolmates with the improbable adventures of a red-headed heroine, Edith Somerville, Frances decided to try her hand at writing for a living. Raising money for paper and stamps by gathering and selling wild grapes, she wrote her first stories, romances set in aristocratic English parlors, and sold two pieces to the magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* in June 1868. Soon she was writing five or six stories per month and publishing in prestigious periodicals such as *Harper's*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Scribner's Monthly*.

Burnett's early stories already contained some key features of her later fiction, including the contrasting points of view of British and American characters and the use of dialect, both the



Lancashire dialect she had grown up with in Manchester and the dialect of her neighbors in Tennessee. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was a sudden surge of interest in regional variations in speech just as these regional peculiarities were first coming under threat as the American population became more mobile. Two of Burnett's favorite authors published novels making strong use of dialect speech: Charles Dickens, in *Hard Times* (1854), and Charlotte Brontë, in *Shirley* (1849). Burnett's first novel, *That Lass o' Lowrie's* (1877), has as its heroine a coal miner's daughter who speaks broad Lancashire. Burnett's skilled ear for dialect is in evidence more than thirty years later, in *The Secret Garden*, in the Yorkshire speech of Dickon Sowerby, admired and imitated by Mary Lennox and taught to Colin Craven as a language of initiates that cut, at least temporarily, across class barriers.

By the time Frances wrote *That Lass o' Lowrie's* she was married to her childhood friend from Knoxville, Swan Burnett, and the mother of two sons, Lionel and Vivian. Unusually for the time, she continued to write after her marriage; indeed, it was her income that allowed Swan, a physician, to pursue extra training in Europe. Her career gave her a degree of independence that was then uncommon for a married woman and that, from the first, was a source of much gossip. After the family settled in Washington, D.C., Frances made frequent trips to England, often leaving her husband and children behind. In the course of her lifetime she would cross the Atlantic thirty-three times, an extraordinary tally for a period before air travel; her many trips gave rise, as she confessed in an 1893 speech to the London Vagabonds' Club, to "a general indefiniteness as to whether I am an Englishwoman or an American" (*Romantick Lady*, p. 266). Meanwhile, she was becoming acquainted with some of America's leading literary figures, including Emerson and Louisa M. Alcott, in addition to meeting Oscar Wilde, Alfred Tennyson, and Henry James in London. In the decade following *That Lass* she wrote a string of novels and stories, published on both sides of the Atlantic, culminating in the life-changing success of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

After *Fauntleroy*, darker elements creep into the narrative of Burnett's life. Her gushing protestations of affection for her children were accompanied by astonishing neglect. Leaving her oldest son, Lionel, with his father, she took Vivian to England, where she rented a country cottage, named Dorincourt after the family estate in Fauntleroy, and pursued an increasingly ardent and public relationship with Stephen Townsend, who was ten years her junior and a physician with dreams of a stage career. This reckless interlude came to an end when Lionel was diagnosed with tuberculosis, then the leading cause of death in America. Burnett returned Vivian to Washington and took fifteen-year-old Lionel on an increasingly frenzied and fruitless tour of European specialists. Despite her mother's showers of gifts, tears, and endearments, and Townsend's attentive care, Lionel died on December 7, 1890, in Paris. In her passion of grief Frances covered the walls of her hotel rooms with pictures of Lionel and wrote letters and journals to her dead son. She did not return to the equally heart-broken Vivian and Swan in Washington for more than a year.

In her mature years, Frances Hodgson Burnett was sometimes a subject of ridicule and caricature, mocked for her efforts to squeeze her increasingly stout figure into girlish ruffles, ribbons, and décolletage, her nickname, "Fluffy," and her penchant for younger men. Her long-troubled marriage finally ended in 1898, and in the same year she moved to England to take up residence at Maytham Hall, a mansion in rural Kent. There she played the lady of the manor, engaging in charity work, attending services at the local church, visiting Henry James in nearby Rye (James called her the "Princess of Maytham"), and cultivating her garden. She wrote each day in a walled rose garden accompanied by a friendly robin and, one year, a pair of orphan lambs who followed her about and slept on her knee as she sang to them. Burnett appeared to have found contentment and happiness

Then, seemingly on an impulse, she married Stephen Townsend in Genoa, Italy. Afterward she would claim that he had blackmailed her into marriage, threatening to publicize her earlier adulteries, and that his motives were wholly mercenary. By 1902 the marriage was over: It had lasted less than two years. The breakup left her in a state of mental and physical collapse. Writing and the garden at Maytham were her solace. When Maytham's owner put the house up for sale, Burnett must have felt like an exile from Eden.

By the time she started work on *The Secret Garden*, Burnett was back in the United States, living with her sister Edith at Plandome, the house on Long Island that would remain her American home until her death in 1924. The passion for gardening that she had discovered at Maytham persisted for the rest of her life. In her last, posthumously published book, *In the Garden*, she wrote, "I love it all. I love to dig. I love to kneel down in the grass at the edge of a flowerbed and pull out the weeds fiercely and throw them into a heap by my side. I love to fight with those who can spring up again almost in a night and taunt me. I tear them up by the roots again and again" (p. 20).

For Frances Hodgson Burnett, as for her creation Mary Lennox, gardening was a consolation for disappointment and loss, a means of imposing order, an enactment of hope: "As long as one has a garden one has a future, and if one has a future one is alive" (*In the Garden*, p. 30).

Writing, like weeding, was a defense against painful memories. In *The Secret Garden*, Burnett recreates and immortalizes her beloved garden at Maytham, complete with its friendly robin, and uses it as a setting in which to revisit and repair some of her own life's sorrows and dislocations. A pet lamb reappears in the company of Dickon the "animal charmer" (p. 122) and is bottle-fed by the spoiled invalid, Colin, who thereby initiates the process of his emotional and physical recovery through contact with the natural world. Colin shares his pallid face and luminous "agate-grey" (p. 10) eyes with Burnett's son, Lionel. Unlike the unfortunate Lionel, however, he leaves behind his cough and wheelchair to greet his father, in the final chapter, as a perfectly healthy child. Colin's cousin Mary, orphaned in India, must learn, like the young Frances Hodgson, to adapt to a new country and unfamiliar customs. Unlike Frances, who shuttled back and forth across the Atlantic through most of her life and dreamed of a permanent home at Maytham, Mary puts down roots in her rose garden at Misselthwaite Manor. The characters in *The Secret Garden* enact a fantasy of healing and integration in which a dying boy recovers and a lonely girl discovers her true home. In Burnett's fairy tale the children owe their triumph not to a golden goose or a fairy godmother but to a new kind of magic derived from nature, healthy exercise, and positive thinking, all sources of comfort to Frances herself in later life.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), William James, brother of Burnett's friend Henry, describes a new and uniquely American contribution to religious thought and practice that he called "the religion of healthy-mindedness." The basis of the movement, also known as the "new thought" was a belief in the power of the human mind and the ability of faith to influence events in the physical world. Attributing the rise of this philosophy to the "extremely practical turn of character of the American people," James observes:

The leaders in this faith have had an intuitive belief in the all-saving power of healthy-minded attitudes as such, in the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, and trust, and a correlative contempt for doubt, fear, worry, and all nervously precautionary states of mind (p. 88).

Noting that practitioners claim remarkable effects on their physical health, he records that "one hears of ... people who repeat to themselves, 'Youth, health, vigor!' when dressing in the morning, as the

motto for the day” (p. 88). This late-nineteenth-century meld of religion and therapy, with roots in the writings of, among others, Swedenborg and Emerson, found expression in a range of spiritual and self-help movements from Christian Science to Norman Vincent Peale’s 1952 classic *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Christian Science, a sect founded in 1866 by Mary Baker Eddy, claimed that physical illness was illusory and could be cured by right mental attitudes and a true understanding of the scriptures. Among those who were profoundly affected by the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy were Frances Hodgson Burnett and her son Vivian. Unlike her son, Frances never formally embraced Christian Science, but, as Vivian Burnett observed in *The Romantick Lady*, his 1927 biography of his mother, “her method of thought, consciously or unconsciously, was influenced importantly by what she learned from Christian Science” (p. 376). Although we may question Vivian’s specific claim that *The Secret Garden* “is generally credited with being a Christian Science book” (p. 377), the novel is certainly a devout testament of the Jamesian “religion of healthy-mindedness.”

Frances Hodgson Burnett first encountered the new theories of “metaphysical” healing in 1885 when her friend Louisa M. Alcott, author of *Little Women*, persuaded her to seek treatment for nervous exhaustion from Mrs. Newman, a leading practitioner of the so-called Boston Mind Cure. Burnett was so impressed by Newman that she stayed in Boston for a month under her care. Later in her life, after the best European doctors proved unable to cure her son Lionel of tuberculosis, she turned increasingly to alternative healers. Two failed marriages to physicians did little to restore her faith in conventional medicine. Her low opinion of the medical profession is expressed in *The Secret Garden* in her unsympathetic portrayal of Colin’s uncle, Dr. Craven, who is unable to cure, or even correctly diagnose, his nephew’s largely psychosomatic illness and indeed secretly hopes for the boy’s death. It is Mary Lennox who brings about Colin’s cure by introducing him to the healing power of the secret garden.

In a 1909 *New York Times* interview Burnett described her belief in a divine energy that could be channeled by the human mind:

We are today mysteriously conscious of this strange magic in the air that we will call the beautiful thought. It has so revitalized and stirred our souls that there has been in its most recent evolution a magnetic force that seems to me must almost stir the dead in their graves (Gerzina, p. 259).

*The Secret Garden* depicts this “beautiful thought” at work in the cure of Colin Craven. Until he encounters his cousin Mary, Colin is a victim of the power of negative thinking. He has spent his whole life surrounded by people who resent his very existence, blaming him for his mother’s death at childbirth and expecting him to become a hunchback like his father. The pessimistic atmosphere around him provokes an imaginary illness so overwhelming that he is actually unable to walk. Colin’s recovery begins when his cousin refuses to accept his negative beliefs, introducing him to the magic of the secret garden and encouraging him to have faith that, like the flowers in the garden, he too can grow and flourish. Burnett is so determined to propagate her belief in the power of thought to change reality that at one point, near the end of the novel, she even interrupts the narrative to address young readers directly with her explanation of the relationship between mind and body:

One of the new things people began to find out in the last century was that thoughts—just mere thoughts—are as powerful as electric batteries—as good for one as sunlight is, or as bad for one as poison. To let a sad thought or a bad one get into your mind is as dangerous as letting a scarlet fever germ get into your body (p. 229).

For Burnett, the source of healing thought is a God who is always present in the world and cannot be

defined by any one set of religious teachings. By the time she wrote *The Secret Garden* she had largely abandoned the Anglican Christianity in which she was raised. In addition to her interest in Christian Science, she had studied Hindu scripture and dabbled in theosophy, an occult philosophy drawn from both Eastern and Western traditions, first expounded by Madame Helene Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) and extremely fashionable in the first decades of the twentieth century. Burnett's diverse spiritual interests are reflected in *The Secret Garden*. Although Dickon Sowerby celebrates the power of the garden by singing the doxology, a Christian hymn of praise, the children also perform healing rituals inspired by Indian "fakirs and devotees" (p. 184), and Colin recites a mantra similar to those recorded by William James in his description of "the religion of healthy-mindedness" :

Every morning and evening and as often in the daytime as I can remember I am going to say, "Magic is in me! Magic is making me well! I am going to be as strong as Dickon, as strong as Dickon!" And you must all do it, too. That is my experiment (p. 185).

The "magic" that brings about Colin's cure is not specifically linked to Christianity; indeed it has a very pagan association with the seasons and cycles of nature. The divinity in the garden is nurturant and creative, not a lawgiver but a "Joy Maker" (p. 212), having as its priestesses the novel's two positive maternal figures, Colin's dead mother, Lilies, and Dickon's mother, Susan Sowerby. It was Lilies Craven who originally cultivated the secret garden, filling it with the roses and other flowers she loved. Her death in childbirth following a fall in the garden caused her distraught husband to lock up the place and bury the key. Yet, as Susan Sowerby assures Colin, the spirit of Lilies Craven continues to reside in the garden, overseeing her son's cure: "Thy own mother's in this 'ere very garden, I do believe. She couldna' keep out of it" (p. 213). Sowerby herself does not appear in the novel until very near the end, but she is constantly helping the children from behind the scenes. In a letter to the English publisher of *The Secret Garden*, William Heinemann, Burnett describes Susan Sowerby as "a moorland cottage woman who is a sort of Madonna" and the novel's "chief figure" (Gerzina, p. 262). It is Sowerby who gives voice, in Yorkshire dialect, to Burnett's view of God:

I warrant they call it a different name i' France and a different one i' Germany. Th' same thing as seeds th' seeds swellin' an' th' sun shinin' made thee a well lad an' it's th' Good Thing. It isn't like us poor fools as think it matters if us is called out of our names. Th' Big Good Thing doesn't stop to worry about bless thee. It goes on makin' worlds by th' million—worlds like us (p. 212).

Burnett uses the uneducated but wise Susan Sowerby as a mouthpiece not only for her religious vision of a God who transcends creeds and sects, but also for her ideas about child-rearing. It is Susan Sowerby who sends Mary Lennox a skipping rope and persuades the girl's uncle, the misanthropic Archibald Craven, not to hire a governess but to allow his niece "fresh air and freedom and running about" (p. 95). As the mother of twelve children, she recognizes the importance of physical exercise and the role of unstructured play in developing body and mind. Although her opinions are represented as timeless country wisdom, Susan Sowerby is actually expressing ideas that were progressive and still quite controversial when *The Secret Garden* was first published.

During the Victorian age, upper-class children had been expected to behave like miniature adults. Little girls were dressed in tight and confining clothes and trained in domestic virtues and such accomplishments as sewing and playing the piano. Outdoor exercise was viewed as tomboyish and undignified, likely to build unfeminine muscles and bring an unwelcome tan to fashionably pale complexions. It was not until the late nineteenth-century that the kindergarten movement, based on the writings of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852), began to challenge these restrictive child-rearing practices.

Froebel's organic theory of child development employed horticultural metaphors to argue that boys and girls, like gardens, require space, clean air, and brightness in order to flourish; and the young children learn best in an environment in which nature is celebrated but controlled.

Froebel was inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy of childhood, expressed in *Émile* (1762), and like Rousseau he looked back nostalgically to an idealized agrarian past when people lived in harmony with nature. Burnett, an admirer of Froebel and a supporter of charities that tried to bring his educational methods to inner-city children, also had a romanticized view of the old-fashioned rural poor that finds expression in her creation of the Sowerby family in *The Secret Garden*. Though the Sowerbys are poor, they are presented as invariably cheerful, healthy, and content with their lot. They appear to accept their lower-class position and yet, unlike the downtrodden and obsequious colonial servants of Mary's early experience, they have no hesitation in speaking their minds to those of higher rank. Susan Sowerby's simple country life gives her an instinctive understanding of the needs of children. Her son Dickon, who spends his days outside on the Yorkshire moors, is attuned to the seasons, wise in the ways of animals and birds, self-reliant, resourceful, and honest. He and his siblings are naturally possessed of the qualities that Froebel and Rousseau sought to instill in children. Colin Craven and Mary Lennox, on the other hand, are "a hard, little, unloving girl and a sickly boy" (p. 117) who must overcome the psychological damage inflicted by their over-civilized, unhappy upper-class families and learn to be more like Dickon.

At once spoiled and neglected, their parents dead, absent or indifferent, both Colin and Mary have grown up without siblings or friends, attended by servants who indulge their every whim but do not love them, and deprived of opportunities to exercise their bodies or their minds. Both children have been hidden in confined, airless places. Mary, raised in the heat and languor of colonial India and abandoned after her parents' death from cholera, is described as "the child no one ever saw" (p. 11). Colin, rejected by his father and believed to be a hopeless invalid, never leaves his bedroom at Misselthwaite Manor. Neither child has experienced the fresh air and freedom of the Yorkshire moors and until they meet Dickon they are entirely alienated from nature and fearful of the outdoors. Mary dismisses the moor as "an endless, dull, purplish sea" (p. 23) and Colin protests, "I hate fresh air and don't want to go out" (p. 103).

In contrast to the measured and stilted language of Mary and Colin when we first meet them, Dickon's dialect speech is a breathless tumble of active verbs: "Th' world's all fair begun again this mornin', it has. An' it's workin' an' hummin' an' scratchin' an' pipin' an' nest-buildin' an' breathin' out scents" (p. 124). His words imitating the fertility and profusion of nature, he is a conduit of vital energy. It is Dickon who buys Mary her first packet of seeds and teaches her how to cultivate the secret garden. Mary, in turn, arouses Colin's interest in the outside world by telling him about Dickon and the garden. She encourages her cousin to begin the process of healing by emulating Dickon's love of the moorland air:

That's fresh air.... Lie on your back and draw in long breaths of it. That's what Dickon does when he's lying on the moor. He says he feels it in his veins and it makes him strong and he feels he could live forever and ever. Breathe it and breathe it (p. 152).

Colin, who never wants to meet anyone because of self-consciousness about his supposed handicap, is first won over by Dickon's tame animals, a fox, a crow, two squirrels, and a newborn lamb; and then by Dickon himself: "I would never have let him come to see me if he had not been an animal charmer—which is a boy charmer, too, because a boy is an animal" (p. 184).

As Mary and Colin recover, they become more and more like Dickon, even to the extent of imitating his Yorkshire speech and consuming Susan Sowerby's pails of fresh milk and cottage buns rather than the food at Misselthwaite Manor. The children gain happiness and vigor as they grow to share Dickon's understanding of nature. Their progress can be measured in their changing attitudes toward the moor. From her initial impression of the land around Misselthwaite as bleak and empty, Mary learns that:

Thousands of lovely things grow on it and there are thousands of little creatures all busy building nests and making holes and burrows and chipping or singing or squeaking to each other. They are so busy and having such fun under the earth or in the trees or heather. It's their world (p. 115).

The moor is Dickon's world too, out of bounds to Mary and Colin, who never actually play there. Burnett knows that her upper-class hero and heroine cannot participate directly in the primitive pastoral life represented by the Sowerbys. Instead, following Froebel's theory of child development, she allows them to grow up in the natural yet controlled space of the garden. As Dickon observes, the secret garden is not all "clipped an' spick an' span" (p. 87); there is plenty of room for "runnin' wild an' swingin' an' catchin' hold of each other" (p. 87). But nature's exuberance is disciplined by weeding and pruning, and contained within walls. Colin and Mary learn about planting and "nest buildin'" (p. 126) as a prelude to healthy adult sexuality, but they must also be trained in restraint and decorum in order to take their places in upper-class society.

In view of her progressive ideas about education and her openness to alternative medicine and new forms of spirituality, Burnett is surprisingly conservative in her representation of social class. Like the moorland breezes that carry the scent of gorse and heather into the secret garden, Dickon is an ambassador from a simpler, less civilized, and more openly sensual world. His unselfconscious friendliness seems at first to transcend class boundaries. As Mr. Roach, the head gardener, observes, "He'd be at home in Buckingham Palace or at the bottom of a coal mine" (p. 159). But it is only in the enchanted space of the garden that Colin and Mary can meet with Dickon in full equality, and even there, through references to the invalid boy as a king or rajah, we are subtly reminded of Colin's future position as the owner of Misselthwaite Manor and Dickon's employer. As the novel progresses, it is Colin who increasingly becomes the main focus of both Mary's and the narrator's attention. The true product of the industrial age, Colin goes beyond Dickon's simple acceptance of the magic healing power of nature, thinking instead of ways to harness and employ it: "I am sure there is Magic in everything, only we have not sense enough to get hold of it and make it do things for us—like electricity and horses and steam" (p. 184). Unlike Dickon, who lives in a timeless present, he plans his future as a scientist and athlete in the world beyond Misselthwaite. In the final chapter, Colin, followed by Mary, runs out of the garden and into his father's arms, leaving Dickon behind.

One of the most striking features of *The Secret Garden*, and one that lies at the heart of its lasting appeal, is the extraordinary contrast between the psychological realism of the development of the two central characters and the fairy-tale setting in which they appear. While Mary and Colin are convincing and recognizable portraits of spoiled and troubled children, the characters that surround them appear to be drawn from nineteenth-century romance and fantasy. Dickon is a highly idealized figure, at once both a "common moor boy, in patched clothes and with a funny face and a rough, rusty red head" (p. 80) and a "Yorkshire angel" (p. 146), a version of Pan or the Green Man, complete with his pipe and animal familiars. As much as the roses and the robin, he is a part of the magic of the secret garden. Similarly, his mother, Susan Sowerby, is both an overworked peasant woman and a Pre-Raphaelite Madonna:

With the ivy behind her, the sunlight drifting through the trees and dappling her long blue cloak, and her nice fresh face smiling across the greenery she was rather like a softly colored illustration in one of Colin's books (p. 210).

Other minor characters, such as Mrs. Medlock, the sour and secretive housekeeper, and Colin's father, the misanthropic Archibald Craven, would be at home in the Gothic stories of Edgar Allan Poe. The Craven's family home, Misselthwaite Manor, is furnished with all the requisites of Gothic gloom: tapestry-covered walls, suits of armor, family portraits, hidden corridors, and deserted chambers.

In atmosphere and setting, *The Secret Garden* owes much to the Victorian romantic novels that Burnett devoured as a child. In particular, the novel has an obvious debt to the writings of the Brontë sisters: Burnett's friend Ella Hepworth Dixon described it "a sort of children's *Jane Eyre*" (Gerzina, 262). The secrecy surrounding Colin Craven and his mysterious screams in the night is reminiscent of Bertha Rochester; Archibald Craven is a sexless version of the morose and brooding Edward Rochester; and the plain-featured and fearless orphan Mary Lennox has much in common with *Jane Eyre* herself. Elements from *Wuthering Heights* are also present, though heavily sweetened and domesticated. Burnett frequently refers to the Yorkshire wind as "wuthering," and in Dickon she creates a benign equivalent of the wild, moorland child Heathcliff. By naming a minor character, the local athlete Bob Haworth, after the Yorkshire village in which the sisters were born, Burnett acknowledges and even signals *The Secret Garden's* many echoes of the Brontës.

The novel's Gothic background only serves to emphasize the contrasting realism of the central characters. Colin and Mary stand out from their nineteenth-century setting as two very modern children whose experiences can resonate with and offer reassurance to contemporary readers. Their unattractive but convincing tantrums and selfishness set them apart from the child heroes of Victorian novels, including Burnett's own Cedric Fautleroy. While Victorian victims and orphans are typically restored to fortune through the intervention of adult benefactors, the recovery of Colin and Mary, though aided by Susan Sowerby, is brought about by their encounter with another child, Dickon, and their discovery of the magic of the secret garden. Victorian novels for the young promote passivity and obedience, but *The Secret Garden* assures its readers that even the most unhappy and damaged children can learn to form healthy friendships and create beauty and order in their lives.

The early chapters of the novel, which was originally titled *Mistress Mary*, trace the emotional growth of Mary Lennox with the precision of a psychological case study. While her self-absorption and lack of sensitivity to others is plausibly explained by parental neglect coupled with spoiling by her Indian servants, we also learn, in the very first chapter, that Mary is attracted to gardens and gardening—a sign that she is capable of appreciating nature and therefore, in Burnett's terms, of redemption. "She pretended that she was making a flower-bed, and she stuck big scarlet hibiscus blossoms in little heaps of earth" (p. 8). After her arrival at Misselthwaite, Mary's first positive attachment is to a robin. Like many disturbed children, she finds it easier to relate to animals than to other humans. When she meets Ben Weatherstaff, the lonely and ill-tempered gardener, Mary forms her first friendship and begins to learn about herself by seeing her own characteristics mirrored in others. As Weatherstaff points out, "Tha' an' me are a good bit alike.... 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" (p. 35). It is Weatherstaff who provokes Mary's curiosity about the hidden garden. Just as the old gardener's grumpiness offers her a mirror of her outward behavior, so the neglected and uncultivated garden reflects the child's inner life:

It was because it had been shut up so long that she wanted to see it. It seemed as if it must be different from other places and that something strange must have happened to it during ten years (p. 57).

With her discovery of the secret garden, Mary is no longer a powerless outsider. From being a secret herself, the child nobody knew, she has become the possessor of a secret: Knowledge of the garden is hers to bestow or to withhold. Unlike any of the previous relationships in her life, her new friendship with Dickon is based not on the dependency of a child on an adult, nor on the tyranny of a spoiled child to a servant, but on a shared secret and a common passion. Cultivating the secret garden with Dickon, Mary loses her contrariness and grows in the self-knowledge and self-confidence that make it possible for her to form other positive relationships. As she later confesses to Colin, "I should have detested you if I had seen you before I saw the robin and Dickon" (p. 146).

Mary's meeting with her cousin Colin marks the culmination of her emotional development in the novel. Colin is the last in the series of mirrors by which she learns about herself. Like Mary, Colin is rejected and hidden, starved of the company of other children and accustomed to ordering servants around. Although Mary refuses to tolerate his tantrums, she understands his isolation and powerlessness and for the first time in her life feels empathy for and desire to help another person. When Mary introduces Colin to Dickon and the secret garden, her own cure is complete, and Colin's healing begins.

In the final chapters of *The Secret Garden*, Burnett's attention shifts from Mary to Colin. Mary assumes a supportive and nurturing role as her cousin develops from a self-pitying invalid into the robust and self-possessed young heir of Misselthwaite. Some feminist critics have seen Colin's displacement of Mary from the center of the narrative as an indicator of Burnett's espousal of traditional gender roles. Danielle E. Price, for example, complains that "Mary is forgotten in what becomes a story of father and son, and we remember, if we had ever forgotten, who owns and who works on all the gardens on the estate" (p. 11). An alternative explanation for the story's change of focus is that Burnett, who often embarked on a novel without knowing exactly where the plot would lead, became increasingly emotionally involved with Colin as she used the character to invent a happy outcome for the sufferings of her son Lionel.

It is Burnett's intense involvement and identification with the experiences of her two protagonists that lifts her writing above the formulaic quality of much of her other work and accounts for *The Secret Garden's* extraordinary emotional power. Child readers respond instinctively to the author's evident personal investment in the novel, and they relate to the psychological authenticity of the two main characters. Readers of all ages appreciate Burnett's success in writing "some happiness into the world" without compromising emotional truth. Like all human joy, the triumphant conclusion of *The Secret Garden* is shadowed by loss. As Colin and Mary come running out of the garden, we know they are leaving childhood behind. They cannot linger in Eden. The garden has completed its work of healing and renewal, and the children are now ready to grow up. Yet, as we have known all along, the secret garden is as much a symbolic as a physical space. Though Colin and Mary no longer play there, it remains for them, as for Burnett herself, and for generations of readers, a lasting imaginative refuge—a garden of the heart.

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